

# **SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS' DISCOURSE ON STEROIDS - ROLE MODELS OR CAUTIONARY TALES?**

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Steroidien käyttö on lisääntynyt runsaasti kehonrakennuksen ulkopuolella ja sosiaalisen median rooli tiedonvälityksessä on korostunut, mikä antaa vaikuttajille merkittävän vaikutusvallan. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, miten fitness-vaikuttajat käsittelevät steroideja. Tutkimus pyrki ymmärtämään steroideihin liittyvien diskurssien vaikutuksia ja tarjoamaan uuden näkökulman terveysviestintään.</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin analysoimalla kahdeksaa YouTube-videota, jotka olivat peräisin viideltä fitness-vaikuttajalta. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnettiin diskurssianalyysin ja laadullisen sisällönanalyysin yhdistelmää. Analyysi sisälsi genrepiirteiden sekä ideologisten positioiden tarkastelua aineistosta yleisimmin nousseiden teemojen kontekstissa.</p> <p>Videoiden sisältö luokiteltiin pääasiallisesti opetukselliseksi. Vaikuttajat opettivat katsojia sekä tieteellisen tiedon että anekdoottien avulla. He rakensivat auktoriteettiaan esittelemällä edistynyttä urheilusaavutuksiaan sekä akateemisia saavutuksiaan. Kohdeyleisö koostui pääasiassa henkilöistä jotka ovat satunnaisesti mukana fitneksessä. Analyysissä havaittiin myös miespainotteisuus, mikä voi johtua sukupuolittuneista käsityksistä fitness-alalla.</p> <p>Keskeisiksi teemoiksi nousivat "vastuullisen steroidien käytön ehdot", "naturaali vs. tehostettu harjoittelu", "steroidien haittavaikutukset" sekä "steroidien käytön ohjeistus ja eettiset näkökohdat". Vaikuttajat ilmaisivat vaihtelevia ja toisinaan ristiriitaisia ideologioita kantoja näiden teemojen sisällä. Ennakkoehdot vastuulliselle steroidien käytölle olivat usein subjektiivisia. Luonnollisen vs. tehostetun harjoittelun kehystäminen vaihteli suuresti; jotkut vaikuttajat vähätelivät luonnollisen harjoittelun potentiaalia, kun taas toiset korostivat sitä. Steroidien käytön läpinäkyvyyttä korostettiin voimakkaasti. Steroidit kehystettiin vaarallisiksi, mutta erittäin tehokkaiksi, ja psykologiset sivuvaikutukset mainittiin usein toissijaisina.</p> <p>Steroideja käsittelevä sisältö YouTubessa saattaa tahattomasti normalisoida ja edistää steroidien käyttöä. Tarvitaan lisää tutkimustietoa katsojien käyttäytymisen ja vaikuttajien viestinnän sekä henkilöbrändin välisten yhteyksien selvittämiseksi. Tämän lisäksi esimerkiksi algoritmien vaikutusta terveysviestintään sosiaalisen median alustoilla tulee tutkia.</p>	
Asiasanat Steroidit, Sosiaalinen media, Vaikuttajat, Diskurssianalyysi	
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION .....	1
2	FITNESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE .....	4
3	DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
4	METHODOLOGY .....	14
	4.1 Aims .....	14
	4.2 Data .....	14
	4.2.1 YouTube as a platform.....	14
	4.2.2 The videos chosen for examination .....	15
	4.3 Methods .....	19
5	RESULTS .....	22
	5.1 Educational genre .....	22
	5.1.1 Influencers as authorities .....	23
	5.1.2 Science-based approach to educating.....	26
	5.1.3 Educating through anecdotal accounts .....	28
	5.1.4 Target audience.....	31
	5.2 Ideology .....	34
	5.2.1 Conditionality of responsible steroid use .....	35
	5.2.2 Natural vs. Enhanced Training.....	41
	5.2.3 Steroid downsides .....	44
	5.2.4 Ethical Considerations: Transparency & guidance .....	48
6	DISCUSSION.....	55
	SOURCES.....	61

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Steroids, known for their performance-enhancing benefits and associated health risks, have garnered substantial attention, especially in the realms of sports and bodybuilding. After the inception of steroid use within the sporting world in the 1950's, steroids have received a plethora of media coverage, often focusing on sporting events such as the Olympics and condemning these substances (Payne, 1975, p. 83). Despite steroids entering mainstream consciousness through various high-profile scandals, the use of these substances was primarily associated with high-level bodybuilding instead of recreational fitness-enthusiasts for decades (Sjögvist, 2008, p. 1972). Towards the late 1900's, the use of steroids started to spill-over from the competitive bodybuilding and athletic world into the use of recreational bodybuilders (Kijratanakoson, 2020, p. 341). However, the use of steroids remained relatively uncommon outside of bodybuilding in the general fitness domain.

The rapid development of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of information dissemination and helped accelerate the rise of fitness into an increasingly mainstream phenomenon. In recent times, digital platforms have started to be seen as even more impactful than traditional media because of their convergence, interactivity, and widespread presence. Their capacity to disseminate diverse content across multiple devices simultaneously has become pivotal in shaping public discussions and impacting societal perspectives (Kijratanakoson, 2020, p. 340). Hence, the influence of social media fitness influencers has become increasingly pronounced, with platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok commonly portraying idealized physiques, often showcasing muscular and well-defined bodies. As a result, the fascination towards steroids has been growing outside

of the professional sports and bodybuilding scene as fitness content continues to gain popularity on these social media platforms (Hilkens et al., 2021, p. 2).

The growth of these platforms has facilitated the rise of a new breed of influencers who not only showcase their physical prowess but also offer advice, recommendations, and insights into various aspects of the fitness lifestyle, including nutrition, workout routines, and supplementation. In recent times, social media influencers have been found to evoke greater levels of trust and imitation from audiences compared to traditional celebrities (Jin et al., 2019, p. 576). Consequently, these influencers hold significant sway over the perceptions and behaviors of large audiences (Hudders et al., 2021, p. 333). Their endorsements, opinions and portrayals of steroid use can, therefore, potentially shape attitudes towards these substances, influencing individuals' decisions regarding their own use or avoidance of steroids, as well as their understanding of the associated risks and benefits. Exploring the discourses surrounding steroids within the domain of fitness influencers on YouTube offers a lens through which to analyze the thematic patterns and framing strategies employed by these influencers, which sheds light on the portrayal of steroid use within the context of fitness culture at large.

The concerning surge in steroid use, especially among young individuals, raises alarms about their effects on public health on larger scale. The central presence of social media not only amplifies the visibility of steroid use but also facilitates an increased accessibility through online platforms (Cox, Gibbs, & Turnock, 2023, p. 1). Based on findings from the 2019 Australian National Drug Strategy Household Survey, there was a nearly threefold increase in the misuse of anabolic steroids for non-medical purposes over the 18-year period from 2001 to 2019 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020, p. 47). This highlights the evolving dynamics of substance abuse in the digital age and emphasizes potential implications for both physical and mental well-being. Furthermore, a 2021 study looking at the prevalence of steroid abuse and its impact on mental health found out that 1,6% of the population have used anabolic steroids and categorized it as a public health threat (Gestsdottir, 2021, p. 555). Thus, exploring discussions related to steroids on social media is crucial for gaining understanding of the complexities of this issue.

The discourse surrounding steroids and their use has been explored in research. However, a notable gap exists in the literature regarding the understanding of these

phenomena within the context of social media influencer discourse. This thesis aims to bridge this gap and provide an understanding of how the discourse on steroids is shaped and disseminated in the digital era. Analyzing the discourse on steroid use on YouTube presents a valuable new perspective on emerging trends, particularly in light of the fast-evolving and unpredictable nature of online communication and the influence of user-generated content, as emphasized by previous research (Hilkens et al., 2021, p. 10). Understanding how social media influencers engage with the subject of steroids is of great importance, as this comprehension offers insights into the various techniques employed in discussions related to this issue. Moreover, it highlights the potential impact of influencer discourse on public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors concerning steroid use. Ultimately, this exploration contributes to our knowledge of the evolving dynamics of health communication, as influencers increasingly emerge as sources of health-related information.

The primary research question driving this study was "how do social media influencers contribute to the discourses surrounding steroids?". The question is motivated by the lack of comprehensive investigation into the role of social media influencers in shaping discussions about steroids. The following complementary research question assisted this investigation: "what types of ideologies are present in the influencers' content?". The second research question assists in uncovering the ideologies perpetrated by the influencers when engaging with the topic. It recognizes the potential power influencers' beliefs and thoughts have on their audience, particularly in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards steroids, given the contentious nature of the subject matter.

This thesis proceeds with an initial exploration of the intersection between fitness culture, steroids and social media discourse in the background literature section. Following this, discourse analysis is presented as the chosen theoretical framework. Subsequently, the methodology section details the aims, data collection process, and analytical approach employed. The results are then presented, divided into two main categories: genre and ideology. Finally, the implications of the findings, limitations of this study, and avenues for future research are discussed.

## 2 FITNESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE

This chapter presents a review of background literature, focusing on the intersection of fitness culture, steroid discourse, and social media, emphasizing the role of social media influencers in shaping discussions surrounding steroids. While studies have explored body image issues and steroid use in the context of social media, the specific discourse choices surrounding steroids within the realm of social media influencers remain largely unstudied. Addressing this gap is crucial for gaining insight into the type of communication individuals are exposed to regarding steroids, facilitating the combat against misinformation and enhancing understanding of prevalent beliefs.

The terms fitness and social media influencer hold distinct significance within the context of this study. Fitness encompasses the broader conceptual framework within which discussions of health, exercise, and body composition take place, while the concept of social media influencers denotes the individuals who actively shape these discussions in digital spaces. By delineating separate definitions for these phenomena, this section aims to provide clarity and nuance in understanding the dynamics at play within the realm of fitness discourse on social media platforms.

In scholarly discourse, the concept of fitness often encompasses a spectrum of well-being, which has resulted in a myriad of different definitions for the term (Pate, 2012, p. 176). For example, Caspersen et al. (1985, p. 126) define fitness as “a set of attributes that people have or achieve that relates to the ability to perform physical activity”. Within this expansive framework, fitness can be seen as manifesting through various dimensions, including cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, flexibility, and overall physical

resilience. Some have extended the notion of fitness even further beyond the confines of bodily capabilities, intertwining with aspects of mental fortitude and emotional equilibrium (Darling et al., 1948, p. 175). However, within the scope of this thesis, a deliberate focus is directed towards a specific facet of fitness: the manipulation of body composition through resistance training and dietary modifications. This emphasis is driven by the acknowledgment that alterations in body composition represent a significant locus of interest, particularly in light of the influence exerted by performance-enhancing substances. The term fitness is utilized instead of bodybuilding in this thesis to encompass a broader focus beyond the specific goals of leanness and muscular proportions associated with the sport of bodybuilding.

A social media influencer can be defined as an individual who has acquired a large network of followers within a specific niche or multiple niches through social media platforms (Jin et al., 2019, p. 569). These individuals cultivate a close connection with their audience by sharing aspects of their personal lives and serve as third-party endorsers who shape audience attitudes through various social media channels such as blogs, tweets, and other platforms. They are trusted individuals, recognized as authoritative sources by their audience and other social media users. In the realm of social media, influencers wield significant influence through a combination of reach and impact. Reach refers to the extent of an influencer's audience or following, which serves as the foundation for their ability to disseminate messages and shape discourse within their niche. Consequently, a large and diverse audience amplifies the influencer's impact, allowing them to reach individuals across various demographics and geographic locations (Hudders et al., 2021, p. 333).

The topic of social media's influence on body image, and steroid usage has been a subject of past research. A study by Hilkens et al. (2021) explored the prevalence of steroid use among young male gym users in the Netherlands. Using a cross-sectional design and incorporating randomized response techniques, the study investigated the association between image-centric social media engagement and the use of steroids. While the association between body image and steroid use wasn't found, image-centric social media use correlated with steroid use among young male gym users. Additionally, the study emphasized the pivotal role of social media in accessing information on training and supplementation, with 32% identifying social media as their primary information source



(Hilkens et al., 2021, p. 10). Similarly, Frison, Vandebosch, and Eggermont (2013) explored the relationship between media exposure and the intent to use steroids among adolescent boys in Flemish Belgium. They discovered that exposure to fitness media significantly correlated with the intent to use steroids, with fitness media showing the strongest association. Specifically, boys exposed to fitness media were more likely to consider using steroids. Furthermore, previous literature by O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011) as well as Fardouly and Vartanian (2016) underscores the broader impact of social media on youth, emphasizing both the positive aspects, such as enhanced communication and access to health information, and the risks, including increased body image concerns and substance abuse. The insights gained from these studies are relevant to this thesis, as they shed light on the connections between social media and steroids.

Alongside the exploration of the connections between social media, body image dissatisfaction, and steroid discourse, a 2023 study delved into the tangible ways in which social media serves as a facilitator of steroid use (Cox, Gibbs, & Turnock, 2023). This investigation provides insights into the emerging phenomenon of anabolic androgenic steroid markets facilitated by social media platforms, specifically Instagram and TikTok. Using digital ethnography, the study uncovered the marketing tactics and distribution methods used by suppliers on these platforms. The results highlighted two categories of suppliers involved in the public sale and advertisement of steroids: direct suppliers and influencers. Moreover, the study illuminates various marketing techniques utilized, such as showcasing images of products, flash-sales, and discount codes. These findings underscore how social media platforms have heightened the accessibility of steroids and highlight the urgent necessity to comprehend the role of social media influencers in shaping discussions and perceptions about steroid use.

Furthermore, the landscape of health and fitness discourse on social media has been explored in previous research, uncovering themes such as authenticity and mental health. An investigation by Grande (2019) examined the construction of authenticity among three male Instagram fitness bloggers. The study unveiled that physical activity was often perceived as essential for success, with prevalent discourse offering practical advice on achieving fitness goals efficiently. Authenticity in this specific realm was cultivated through the visual portrayal of fit and healthy bodies, alongside informative fitness content and

engagement with prevalent discourses. The study emphasized the influence of individual factors, including habitus and external cultural capital, such as professional background or lifestyle interests, in shaping the discourses present within the fitness community. While the study's small sample size and its focus on a specific platform may limit generalizability, it serves as a foundational exploration of authenticity construction within the fitness community on social media and illuminates how influencers navigate discussions on steroids and body image as well as construct authority, making it valuable for this thesis.

Previous research has delved into the ideological underpinnings surrounding steroids. In 1991, a paper by Blackwell (1991) illuminated the discourse surrounding steroids by examining media reactions to steroid scandals during the 1988 Olympic Games. This study delved into the public discourse surrounding Ben Johnson, a Canadian sprinter whose 1988 Olympic gold medal in the 100-meter event was revoked due to a positive urine test, revealing a discourse distorted by the ideological constructs of the Olympic Games. The ensuing national inquiry on athletes' use of performance-enhancing drugs shifted blame onto athletes from outside of the US, the economics of sport, unscrupulous coaches, and unethical doctors, framing the discussion around demonizing illicit drug use. This historical analysis provides insight into how ideological frameworks shape public perceptions.

Additionally, Kijratanakoson (2020) conducted a study examining the discursive reactions to steroids within digital media. Employing corpus-assisted discourse analysis, the study delved into the ways in which digital media discuss steroid use. The data for the study was gathered by collecting a corpus of 100 online articles from 2014 to 2019 by searching keywords on Google, Yahoo, and Bing. The study uncovered five key discursive strategies – nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and mitigation/intensification – employed in the contestation of steroid use in digital media. Notably, the discourse portrayed steroids in an overwhelmingly negative light, emphasizing their adverse effects on physical, mental, and professional well-being. Additionally, the main findings indicate that media often depict steroid users as the “outgroup,” utilizing various negative lexical items to undermine any possible benefits. This aligns with the broader thematic focus of this thesis on the ideological perspectives surrounding steroid use within influencer discourse.

### **3 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts a comprehensive theoretical approach by integrating discourse analysis with qualitative content analysis. Given the multimodal nature of communication in this context, which involves both verbal and visual elements, this methodological fusion is particularly suited. By leveraging discourse analysis's capacity to uncover latent meanings alongside qualitative content analysis's focus on manifest meanings, it becomes possible to gain insights into the thematic content, language use, power dynamics, and ideological underpinnings inherent in influencer discourse illuminating the relationship between language, visuals, and social influence in shaping perceptions towards steroid use on YouTube (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 151). This chapter focuses on outlining the theoretical framework of discourse analysis as well as the concepts that were crucial for this thesis. Qualitative content analysis is discussed in further detail in the following methodology section.

Discourse analysis can be defined as the examination of language as it is employed in real-life contexts (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 1). Conceptually, discourse analysis is grounded in the understanding that language serves not only to express thoughts about the world but also actively participates in shaping it. In discourse analysis, the focus isn't on treating language as an abstract system or a rigid set of rules for conveying ideas. Instead, it centers on how individuals utilize their knowledge of language, drawn from past experiences of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, to engage in various actions within society: sharing information, conveying emotions, creating art, among other functions (Johnstone, 2018, xvii). Thus, utterances derive their full meaning and intended impact only when

situated within the broader context in which they occur (Coulthard, 2002, p. 79). By focusing on the connections between language, power dynamics, and societal norms, discourse analysis allows researchers to dissect factors that would otherwise go overlooked. Understanding how language is employed not only to convey information but also to shape perceptions and attitudes towards steroids is essential in deciphering the strategies utilized by influencers to influence their audience. Therefore, discourse analysis emerges as a valuable tool for uncovering the mechanisms at play within influencer discourse on steroids as it ultimately contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of language in shaping online health-related conversations.

Discourse analysis encompasses two main dimensions: "big D discourse," which refers to broader systems of meaning and ideology within a society, and "little d discourse," which focuses on the specific instances of language use and their functions (Gee, 2011, p. 34). "Big D discourse" involves examining overarching patterns, ideologies, and power structures that shape language use, while "little d discourse" zooms in on the details of language, including lexical, grammatical, and semantic features (Pietikäinen, 2019, chapter 1.3). This study aims to engage with both levels of discourse, analyzing both the overarching systems that serve as a backdrop and the specific instances of language use. By examining the language used by influencers in their content, we aim to uncover patterns in communication that contribute to the construction of broader concepts such as ideologies, genres and frames (Griffin, 2013, p. 93). Additionally, analyzing the overarching systems offers insights into the factors that shape and constrain the discourse, enriching the understanding of how language operates within larger social contexts.

Furthermore, discourse analysis acknowledges the relationship between style and content. Style, often viewed as the manner in which language is employed, is essential for shaping the meaning and interpretation of the aforementioned linguistic elements and patterns. It facilitates the transition between different types of content, altering underlying meanings. While linguists such as Kachru (1992, pp. 340-341) have historically stressed style's link to linguistic form, scholars like Wood (2008) consider nonverbal elements a part of style, recognizing the fusion of verbal and visual in communication. This shift is crucial for analyzing video content on social media, where gestures, facial expressions, and editing techniques add layers to stylistic identity alongside textual features. Additionally, function

plays a central role in discourse analysis, encompassing the actions or purposes behind language use. Functions span linguistic, pragmatic, and social domains, each serving distinct communicative roles. The relationship between content and function underscores the complexity of discourse, where particular units may assume different functions based on context. Furthermore, discourse analysis emphasizes the structural organization of discourse elements, viewing them in relation to their combinations and arrangements. Structure, whether sequential or hierarchical, actively shapes the organization and interpretation of discourse (Wood, 2000, p. 8).

Moreover, discourse analysis provides an understanding of the power dynamics intrinsic to influencer discourse. Through this methodological lens, the study highlights how social media influencers strategically position themselves in relation to their audience and navigate assertions of authority and expertise within the discourse surrounding steroid usage (Johnstone, 2018, p. xxi). By scrutinizing the distribution of discursive power and the construction of ideologies within influencer discourse, it is possible to delve deeper into the mechanisms through which these individuals wield influence and shape the discourse surrounding steroid usage. This examination encompasses not only the explicit assertions of authority but also the subtler strategies employed by influencers to assert their credibility and sway over their audience.

The concept of ideology is integral to understanding the discourse surrounding steroid use. Drawing upon the insights provided by Blommaert (2005, pp. 158–159), ideology is recognized as a fundamental component of discourse, shaping the frames disseminated by influencers. It refers to a set of beliefs, values, and norms that shape individuals' understanding of the world and influence how people perceive reality, interpret information, and communicate through language. Language plays a crucial role in perpetuating and expressing ideologies, as words and symbols carry underlying meanings shaped by cultural norms and values (Gee, 2015, pp. 28–29). Within the discourse on steroid usage, ideologies manifest in various forms, including ethical positions regarding the use of steroids and the conditioning factors associated with their usage. Ideological positions within this context may encompass perspectives such as the glorification of steroid use as a means to achieve physical perfection or the condemnation of such practices as unethical. Moreover, ideologies are not merely individual beliefs but are embedded within broader

social and political systems, influencing the norms, values, and power structures within society. Influencers, through their discourse, contribute to the normalization and naturalization of particular ideological frameworks surrounding steroid use, thus exerting significant influence over their audiences.

Additionally, discourse analysis delves into the situational contexts surrounding influencer discourse on steroids, which encompass a multitude of factors including the personal background of the speaker, as well as the platform of choice (Song, 2010, p. 877). The personal background of the speaker, such as their personal relationships to steroids, can significantly influence their discourse on steroids. This personal aspect provides valuable insights into the speaker's motivations, biases, and credibility, all of which can impact how their discourse on steroids is perceived and interpreted by their audience. Furthermore, the personal branding and positioning that is done via the influencers' social media, in this case YouTube, is in a central role when it comes to influencing the audience.

Moreover, cultural contexts play a pivotal role in shaping influencer discourse on steroids. This includes the legal landscape surrounding steroid use, which varies across different countries and jurisdictions. Legal regulations and restrictions regarding steroids can influence the language choices employed by influencers when discussing the topic. Furthermore, values, as the foundation for our goals and aspirations, inherently underlie discussions surrounding health promotion, harm prevention, and adherence to ethical considerations related to health outcomes and beauty standards (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 176). Societal values such as health and beauty, can be seen as constituting the cornerstones for influencer discourse on steroids. Lastly, societal taboos surrounding steroid usage may impact how steroids are framed and discussed in influencer discourse. As mentioned in the previous section, steroids are often stigmatized in many cultures, with negative connotations attached to their use.

Framing is a fundamental concept shaping the interpretation and reception of information within social media discourse. At its core, framing denotes the background knowledge activated by a particular concept, underscoring the contextual nature of meaning (Macgilchrist, 2007, p. 75). This activation of frame knowledge is essential for understanding the interpretations associated with words and concepts. It encompasses the cognitive and social processes through which individuals make sense of phenomena and

construct meaning within specific contexts (Gordon, 2015, pp. 325–326). Goffman's (1974) foundational work on frame analysis provides a perspective that encompasses social and situational constructs defining a situation and shaping participants' behaviors and interpretations. Frames, according to Goffman, are "definitions of a situation" established in interaction, influencing how individuals perceive and engage with discourse (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). Moreover, framing extends beyond linguistic elements to encompass the organization of information within a cohesive narrative (Lakoff, 2004, p. 3). Media analysis states that facts lack intrinsic meaning and only attain significance when embedded in a frame. This framing process selects certain elements for emphasis while relegating others, thus influencing the overall interpretation and reception of information within a discourse.

Genre analysis is a methodological approach within discourse analysis that seeks to understand how texts function within specific contexts, going beyond the mere identification of different genres in order to explain their rationale. It involves examining the content, format, as well as their broader socio-cultural and situational contexts (Bhatia, 1993, p. 22). Thus, understanding the identity and characteristics of the text's author is crucial in genre analysis. The author's background, expertise, and positionality influence the content, style, and tone of the text, shaping its genre expectations and reception by the audience. Additionally, considering the intended audience and the writer's assumptions about their knowledge, interests, and expectations is essential. Furthermore, genre analysis explores how the text positions the reader and constructs the relationship between writer and reader, whether it be authoritative, instructive, persuasive, or otherwise.

Moreover, analyzing the communicative goals of the text is central to genre analysis (Swales, 1993, p. 46). Whether the text aims to inform, entertain, persuade, or evoke a particular response, its purpose shapes its genre conventions, structure, and language choices. Furthermore, the tone of a text plays a significant role in genre analysis. The tone refers to the attitude or emotional expression of the text. Understanding how tone is employed helps in deciphering the text's communicative goals and its relationship with the audience. Finally, genre analysis investigates how texts are structured and organized, including their overall composition and linguistic features. This involves analyzing the textual moves or stages that the text progresses through, as well as the types of writing involved (Bhatia, 1993, p. 13). Ultimately, genre analysis can aid in uncovering the

communicative intentions of influencers and the expectations of their audience as well as enhances textual interpretation and informs effective communication practices within the realm of social media influencer discourse, contributing to a deeper understanding of the most crucial factors.

Lastly, in discussing the methods of discourse analysis, it is important to recognize that a clearly defined set of methods does not exist, and instead, the tools must be defined by the context. Drawing upon scholars like Wodak & Meyer (2016, pp. 14–15), the utilization of discourse analysis in the context of this thesis involved an integration of theory with the specifics of the chosen medium, subject matter and aims. The approach involved the selection and application of discourse analysis theory, tailored to fit the specific dataset and research objectives. As discussed in this section, particular emphasis was placed on theoretical concepts such as ideology, genre and framing, which were deemed particularly apt for examining the mechanisms at play in the discourse surrounding steroids on YouTube. Furthermore, qualitative content analysis was combined with discourse analysis as it enabled the identification of patterns and themes crucial for the analysis. The following section will focus on the methodological choices for this thesis, delving deeper into how the concepts discussed in this section were utilized when examining social media influencer discourse.



## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Aims**

This thesis analyzes the discourse surrounding steroid use among social media influencers on YouTube. Ultimately, this research aims to address the gap in understanding regarding social media influencers' discourse on steroids on YouTube, particularly in light of the rapid advancements in social media platforms, the increasing influence of social media personalities as sources of health and fitness information, and the growing recognition of steroid use as a public health concern. This study attempts to provide concrete insights into the ways in which social media influencers contribute to the discourses on steroids, as well as what types of ideologies are present in their content, offering findings that can inform both academic scholarship and public health policy initiatives.

### **4.2 Data**

#### **4.2.1 YouTube as a platform**

YouTube functions as a social media platform where users utilize their personal channels to share video content. Influencers on YouTube wield significant influence over vast audiences, shaping opinions and behaviors on large scale (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Users can subscribe to channels to receive notifications about new content, while YouTube's recommendation algorithm plays a pivotal role in suggesting videos based on a user's

viewing history, searches, likes, dislikes, and feedback (Google Support, 2023a). This algorithm aims to optimize user engagement and satisfaction by tailoring recommendations to individual preferences, thus fostering community formation around shared interests (Google Support, 2023b).

YouTube's affordances significantly influence the type and format of content shared on the platform. Unlike text or photo-focused platforms, YouTube's emphasis on video content enables users to share visually-rich health and fitness information in a long-form content format, facilitating the demonstration of various practices and techniques (Minseong, 2022, p. 2). This visual medium distinguishes YouTube from platforms like Instagram, creating a unique environment for content dissemination. Furthermore, the persuasive power of YouTube creators is influenced by factors such as social attractiveness, physical appearance, and attitude similarity. Creators who demonstrate social and physical attractiveness, coupled with attitudes similar to their audience, tend to be more persuasive. This persuasiveness is augmented by the platform's visual nature, where physical appearance plays a prominent role, particularly in fitness content. Moreover, it has been suggested that YouTube's recommendation algorithm, combined with attributes of channels and creators, can contribute to the formation of echo chambers, where users are exposed only to content aligning with their existing beliefs (Minseong, 2022, p. 4).

Lastly, it should be noted that an additional affordance of YouTube is its like/dislike function, which allows users to express their opinions on videos. However, as of 2021, only the likes are publicly displayed, while dislikes are hidden. It can be argued that this feature can shape the perception of content by viewers and influence their engagement and interaction with the videos. In essence, YouTube's affordances and constraints profoundly shape the dissemination and reception of content, particularly within the realm of health and fitness discourse, where visual representation and persuasive techniques play pivotal roles. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the impact of social media influencers on audience attitudes and behaviors.

#### **4.2.2 The videos chosen for examination**

The sample selected for this thesis comprises five prominent social media fitness influencers. This choice reflects a consideration of various factors aimed at balancing the depth of analysis with practical constraints inherent in data collection and the subsequent analysis. By focusing on five influencers, this study aims to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the content while maintaining manageability and analytical rigor. Each influencer contributed a selection of YouTube videos, totaling eight in number, as detailed in Table 1. Notably, one of these videos was classified as a "short", which are concise videos that are less than one minute in duration.

Table 1. Data

No.	Title	Channel	Length	Year
1	How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?	Renaissance Periodization	37:11	2021
2	Don't Use Steroids! But If You Do, Start With Orals Only	Renaissance Periodization	11:34	2022
3	Beginner Steroid Cycle    What to Take? Doses, Timing	Greg Doucette	22:03	2021
4	The Decision to Use Steroids   Anabolics Science Explained	Jeff Nippard	10:20	2017
5	Why I'm Open About My Steroid Use.	Noel Deyzel	1:26	2021
6	Why Transparency About Steroids Could Be a Problem.	Noel Deyzel	1:55	2021
7	One Cycle Won't Hurt.	Noel Deyzel	1:00	2023
8	My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You.	More Plates More Dates	12:53	2019
Total			1 h 38 min 22 sec	

*Dr. Mike Israetel*

Video number one provides a comprehensive examination of the potential muscle development achievable through the use of steroids, featuring Dr. Mike Israetel, a distinguished figure in the fields of sports science, academia, and competitive bodybuilding. This contribution is part of a broader series dedicated to exploring the topic of steroids. Video two, authored by the same influencer, presents his recommended protocol for initiating steroid use, advocating for oral administration over injectables as the preferred method.

*Greg Doucette*

In the third video, Dr. Greg Doucette, renowned for his expertise in kinesiology and his extensive experience as a bodybuilding judge and former competitor, offers his insights on the initiation of steroid use among novices. Delving into specifics such as substance dosages and proper syringe utilization, this video serves as a sequel to Doucette's prior discourse on the subject, where he revisits and expands upon his previous assertions.

*Jeff Nippard*

The fourth video, curated by Jeff Nippard, a prominent content creator and figure in the realm of competitive natural bodybuilding, addresses his own relationship with steroids and offers a scientific perspective on steroid use. Nippard not only shares his own stance but also conducts a critical review of existing scientific literature concerning the physiological and psychological impacts of steroids.

*Noel Deyzel*

The fifth video, Noel Deyzel, a prominent content creator and bodybuilder, explains the rationale behind advocating for transparency regarding steroid use. Deyzel addresses prevalent issues within the fitness industry, highlighting the exploitation of susceptible audiences through misinformation regarding steroids. Continuing with Deyzel's contributions, the sixth video examines the potential pitfalls of promoting honesty about steroid usage, cautioning against inadvertently glorifying or endorsing steroid use in the process. The seventh video selected for this study, also by Deyzel, is a YouTube Short that

delves into the adverse effects associated with a single cycle of steroid use, drawing from personal experiences to underscore the severity of these repercussions.

#### *More Plates More Dates*

Concluding the data set, the eighth video, presented by a content creator and recreational bodybuilder known as More Plates More Dates, offers insights into initiating steroid use, emphasizing personal anecdotes alongside reflections on the broader landscape of steroid-related information and guidance.

#### *Rationale for the videos*

The decision to include these particular videos was informed by several factors. Firstly, they emerged as top search results when using keywords such as "steroid advice", "steroid fitness" and "steroid cycle" on YouTube, indicating their relevance and visibility within the online fitness community. Additionally, these videos have amassed substantial viewership, with hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of views. This popularity points to their significance in shaping the discourses surrounding steroids in the fitness realm. Moreover, the selected videos explicitly discuss steroids within the context of fitness, addressing topics such as steroid guidance, and potential muscle growth. Thus, videos that discussed steroids from the viewpoint of other contexts such as chemistry and legislation were not included.

Videos or segments were selected for further transcription based on their alignment with the study's research aims, prioritizing discussions centered on steroids by social media influencers. Both qualitative and quantitative assessments were used to gauge relevance, considering factors like titles, thumbnails, and descriptions, as well as levels of engagement such as likes, shares, and comments. Ethical considerations were addressed by recognizing the roles of the chosen individuals as influencers and their status as celebrities, thus negating the need for anonymization in the selection process.

Furthermore, the geographic focus of this study centers on North American influencers. While including influencers from various regions could offer diverse perspectives, the decision to maintain this particular focus is driven by the significant influence wielded by these individuals. The chosen influencers boast substantial followings, ranging from several hundred thousand to millions of followers. This deliberate emphasis

on influencers with extensive reach acknowledges the potential impact of their content on shaping individual opinions and broader attitudes towards steroids within online communities. By concentrating on these influential voices, this study aims to examine various facets of steroid discourse in the digital age and its implications for public perceptions and health-related behaviors

### **4.3 Methods**

In combination with the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis (QCA) serves as a methodology for systematically analysing rich data that require interpretation to discern meaning. Unlike highly standardized methods which may necessitate minimal interpretation, QCA is particularly well-suited for delving into less obvious meanings inherent in textual and visual content (Schreier, 2012, Chapter 1). As social media influencers' discourse surrounding steroids on YouTube is predominantly presented through videos, QCA offers a comprehensive approach to uncovering the dimensions of this communication. Influencers' messages are embedded within a context shaped by societal norms, personal experiences, and cultural influences, necessitating a methodological framework capable of navigating this terrain of meaning construction. Furthermore, QCA's flexibility in analyzing various types of data, including transcripts and visual content, aligns well with the diverse materials encountered in studying social media discourse.

As mentioned previously, QCA serves as a suitable tool for systematically evaluating multimodal communication content in a qualitative manner, focusing not only on written but also verbal and visual elements. However, it is crucial to notice that, in the context of this thesis, the primary emphasis lies on the spoken content of influencers. While written and visual elements serve as supplementary components, the spoken discourse takes precedence due to the nature of the videos analyzed. Influencer videos typically center around verbal communication, where influencers directly address their audience, share information, and convey their opinions and beliefs regarding steroid use. Furthermore, one of the most significant benefits of QCA in the context of the framework for this thesis is its ability to identify recurring themes and key elements related to steroids in the influencers'

content. It assists in understanding the subtleties of discursive elements and provides insights into the qualitative aspects of language use (Elo et al., 2014, p. 1). Thus, QCA supports a nuanced exploration of linguistic features, framing, and information dissemination among different influencers, offering valuable insights into the discourse within the influencers' communication.

A central part of the chosen methodological approach involved a careful handling of the transcription process. Starting with the curation of relevant data, specific videos or segments featuring influencer discussions on steroid use were selected with a focus on relevance to the research aims. The analysis began with repeated viewings of the chosen videos to facilitate a thorough understanding of their content. In addition to viewing the videos in full, the process included viewing them multiple times with different foci, focusing initially on the verbal discourse by analyzing the sound only, and subsequently, on the non-verbal cues by examining the visual elements alone (Jewitt, 2016, p. 77). This approach was adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the influencers' messaging strategies, recognizing the significance of both verbal and non-verbal communication in conveying meaning and intent. Detailed notes were taken, encompassing factors such as structural attributes, thematic content, and the perceived intent behind the influencers' discourse. This process extended to an examination of essential features such as visual elements.

After the initial viewing, the analysis transitioned to a comprehensive examination of the notes. In line with the methodology of qualitative content analysis, this phase aimed to identify recurring themes and attributes within the chosen content. An interpretative analysis was then undertaken, considering the broader socio-cultural context and implications embedded in the influencers' discursive practices. The subsequent step involved focusing on segments of the chosen data for transcription based on insights gained from the analysis of the notes. The analysis centered on specific elements such as genre, ideology, framing, and linguistic choices within the influencers' content. This approach aimed to uncover how these aspects contribute to the discourse surrounding steroid use on social media. By examining the influencers' use of genre conventions, ideological positions, framing techniques, and linguistic strategies, the study sought to gain insights into the ways in which these elements shape and influence the discussion of steroids on YouTube.

In this thesis, the concept of theme aligns closely with Rimmon-Kenan's (1994) definition, wherein themes are construed as constructs derived from discontinuous elements within the text, rather than as inherent components along the text-continuum. This approach underscores the inductive nature of thematic analysis, emphasizing the systematic identification of recurring patterns and concepts within the discourse. By adopting an inductive approach, themes emerge organically from the data, allowing for a nuanced exploration of underlying meanings (Schreier, 2012, Chapter 2). By viewing themes as emergent from disparate textual fragments, this analytical framework embraces the inductive process, enabling a comprehensive analysis of themes and their effects on discourse. Furthermore, this approach ensures that themes are not imposed onto the data beforehand but are instead grounded in the empirical evidence. Given the relatively limited existing research on the topic of social media influencers' discourse surrounding steroids, employing an inductive approach was particularly advantageous, as it allowed for the organic emergence of themes from the data, enabling an exploration of this relatively uncharted territory.

Lastly, visual elements offer depth to the analysis by providing additional layers of insight into influencers' discursive practices. The decision to include visual elements is motivated by the recognition that discourse extends beyond words and encompasses multimodal forms of communication. Visual cues play a significant role in shaping perceptions and interpretations of the discourse surrounding steroids, offering valuable insights into the influencers' messaging strategies and the reception of their content by audiences. Furthermore, since this thesis deals with fitness, a practice that for many denotes a pursuit that focuses largely on one's appearance, factors such as how the author is visually portrayed constitute an important part of the analysis. However, it should be noted that while visual elements contribute to the depth of the analysis, the focus remains primarily on what is being said. The verbal content of the discourse is the central aspect under scrutiny, as it functions the primary means through which influencers convey their messages and shape public discourse on steroids. The analysis recognizes that while visual elements provide valuable contextual information, the core messages of the videos would function effectively as audio clips, underscoring the centrality of verbal discourse in conveying key messages.



## **5 RESULTS**

In this chapter, the findings are presented under two primary categories. The first section scrutinizes the construction of genre within the analyzed videos as well as explores how the influencers position themselves and their audience. Secondly, the chapter delves into ideology, dissecting the diverse ideological stances depicted by the influencers concerning prevalent themes surrounding the discourse on steroids. This organizational structure facilitates a comprehensive understanding of both the structural elements and underlying ideological frameworks shaping the discourse within the realm of social media influencers discussing steroids.

### **5.1 Educational genre**

The predominant overarching genre identified was educational. Consequently, an inherent power dynamic is established between the influencers, who wield expertise on the subject matter, and the audience, who often lack comparable knowledge. Within this encompassing educational genre, two common sub-genres or themes emerged: a scientific approach and anecdotal accounts. These genres are constructed through a blend of linguistic factors, vocabulary choices, and visual elements, each serving to articulate the influencers' positions as authorities in their respective fields. It should be noted that many of the videos blend elements from both sub-genres, illustrating the fluidity of genre in influencer content.

The educational genre is signaled in the titles as well as the purpose of the videos. For example, many of the names of the videos, such as “How Much Muscle Can You Grow From

Steroids?", "Don't Use Steroids! But If You Do, Start With Orals Only" and "Beginner Steroid Cycle || What to Take? Doses, Timing" signal that the subject of steroid use is approached from an informative point of view, addressing common questions and offering prescriptions on the use of steroids.

### 5.1.1 Influencers as authorities

#### *Credentials & labels*

One of the ways through which influencers present themselves as authorities is the use of credentials. A notable example of this phenomenon can be observed in video 1 "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?" by Renaissance Periodization.

Video 1: *"Hey folks Dr. Mike here from Renaissance Periodization."*

Introducing a video with the credential "doctor" can significantly influence the perceived authority of the speaker. When Dr. Israetel begins the video with this introduction, he immediately establishes himself as an expert, as the title carries connotations of high education, expertise and trustworthiness in society, leading viewers to place greater faith in the information. Moreover, the author's affiliation with Renaissance Periodization, a well-known organization specializing in resistance training and dieting methodologies, further reinforces his credibility by demonstrating cultural capital relevant to fitness (Grande, 2019, 40). By associating himself with this institution, Dr. Israetel adds another layer of authority to his statements.

However, it's essential to consider the contextual element that Dr. Israetel's doctorate is in exercise science, rather than pharmacology, medicine or other fields specifically related to steroids. While his expertise in exercise science is undoubtedly relevant to the discussion of performance enhancement, viewers should be mindful that his knowledge might not fully translate to the pharmacological aspects of steroid use.

A similar use of credentials can be found in video 3 "Beginner Steroid Cycle || What to Take? Doses, Timing" by Greg Doucette.

Video 3: *"Coach Greg, and today I am going to be reacting to an old video..."*

The utilization of the title "coach" at the outset of the video plays a central role in shaping the speaker's presentation of themselves as an authority on the subject of steroids. The use of this title frames the speaker with a sense of expertise and credibility within the context of fitness from the beginning of the video. By adopting this specific title, the speaker positions themselves as a knowledgeable individual capable of offering guidance and insights on matters related to fitness, nutrition, and steroid use. Furthermore, the title "coach" implicitly conveys a position of authority and leadership, as well as connotes teaching or educating, reinforcing the speaker's role as an influential figure capable of shaping discourse and opinions on the topic at hand. Moreover, an instance of an influencer using a label to establish credibility is found in video 4 "The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained" by Jeff Nippard.

Video 4: *"As a competitive natural bodybuilder, I am often met with 1 or 2 questions. Are you natural? And based on my answer, which is yes, why do you choose to stay natural?"*

In Nippard's statement, the inclusion of the terms "competitive" alongside "natural bodybuilder" adds depth to Nippard's authority on the subject of steroids. By identifying himself as a competitive natural bodybuilder, Nippard not only underscores his commitment to achieving physical excellence through natural means but also highlights his active participation in the sport of competitive bodybuilding. Moreover, his status as a competitive natural bodybuilder lends further credibility to his insights and opinions on steroid usage. As someone who competes at the highest level of natural bodybuilding, Nippard can speak from personal experience and expertise in achieving competitive success without using performance-enhancing drugs. It can be argued that this is particularly significant in the sport of competitive bodybuilding where steroid use is extremely prevalent (Steele et al., 2019, p. 233).

#### *Visual features of authority*

In the realm of genre analysis, it is crucial to acknowledge the visual aspects concerning the attributes of the speaker within YouTube videos. Visual representation of influencers as

muscular figures assumes a pivotal role in enhancing their perceived expertise and authority to provide advice on steroid usage.

In videos featuring influencers such as Jeff Nippard, Greg Doucette, Noel Deyzel, and More Plates More Dates, choices in attire, such as sporting sleeveless shirts, are employed to accentuate their advanced physiques. This selection serves to visually reinforce the influencer's authority on the subject matter. The display of muscularity not only aligns with the overarching theme of fitness and performance enhancement but also conveys a sense of expertise and firsthand experience with resistance training. Therefore, within the genre of YouTube videos, the visual portrayal of influencers as physically fit and muscular figures plays an instrumental role in establishing and reinforcing their authority within the discourse on steroids. Notably, in the videos featuring Noel Deyzel, lighting techniques are employed to further accentuate his physique. The use of lighting to highlight muscular definition enhances Deyzel's visual presence, framing him as an exemplar of high level physical fitness.

In contrast, the videos by Renaissance Periodization featuring Dr. Mike present a different visual approach to portraying authority. Dr. Mike is depicted wearing a T-shirt, with his arms resting on the desk, showcasing his forearms and upper arms in a close-up shot. This framing draws attention to Dr. Mike's musculature, albeit in a subtler manner compared to the sleeveless attire of other influencers. Nonetheless, the deliberate framing of Dr. Mike's physique in the video reinforces his authority on the topic of steroids, as it communicates his first-hand engagement with fitness,

Overall, the visual portrayal of influencers as muscular figures in these videos serves to construct authority by aligning them with the theme of fitness and strength. The showcasing of muscular physiques not only enhances the influencers' perceived expertise but also lends credibility to their advice on steroid usage. This is in line with the past research that recognizes physical activity as necessary for success on social media as a fitness influencer (Grande, 2019, p. 63). Thus, by visually positioning themselves as individuals who have achieved notable physical development, these influencers reinforce their authority within the discourse surrounding steroids in the fitness community.

### 5.1.2 Science-based approach to educating

In video 1 "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?" and video 2 "Don't Do Steroids! But If You Do, Start with Orals Only," Dr. Israetel employs a lecture format to convey information, utilizing visual and structural elements to construct authority within the genre. The presentation style, reminiscent of an educational lecture, is characterized by the presence of lecture slides displayed alongside the speaker, providing key points for elaboration. This format aligns with the genre of educational content, positioning the speaker as an authoritative source of knowledge on the topic of steroids.

The visual elements within the videos contribute to the construction of authority by reinforcing the association with Renaissance Periodization via placing the "RP" logo on the lecture slides. The inclusion of the term "periodization," a scientific concept grounded in decades of research and widely used in exercise science to optimize training regimens, underscores the theme of science that is prominent throughout the videos, enhancing the authority of the presenter and the organization. The speaker is seated behind a wooden table, presenting a professional and scholarly demeanor.

Structurally, the videos 1 and 2 exhibit a clear and organized format, enhancing their authoritative appeal. At the outset, a contents slide outlines the video's structure, dividing it into distinct sections. This structured approach facilitates comprehension as well as adds an air of academic rigor to the presentation. By delineating the content into discrete parts, the speaker demonstrates a systematic and thorough approach to the topic, reinforcing their authority as a knowledgeable presenter. Moreover, the use of lecture slides containing key points and information enhances the clarity and coherence of the presentation.

Similar scientific themes can be found in video 4 "The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained". The video, authored by Jeff Nippard, adopts a genre-convention reminiscent of a literature review conducted in video format, as implied by the title "science explained." While the video begins with Nippard rationalizing his personal choice to not use steroids, the majority of the video is spent offering science-based information on various facets regarding steroids and steroid use.

Video 4: *"It is worth noting that the effects of steroids can be tricky to research and it is not exactly ethically advisable to pin study subjects with dosages high enough to represent what bodybuilders*

*actually use. So while most of the low quality data has emerged from case studies and retrospective surveys, animal studies are enlightening, and it seems to me that controlled studies are more likely to underrepresent rather than over represent the true risks associated with steroid use."*

In this segment, Nippard transitions from personal reflection to a meta-commentary on the academic literature surrounding steroids, setting the stage for a deeper examination of scientific research. By acknowledging the complexities of researching steroids and the ethical limitations faced by researchers, Nippard establishes a critical framework for evaluating the quality of available data. Moreover, his recognition of how controlled studies may underestimate the risks associated with steroid use demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the limitations and biases within scientific literature. This intellectual engagement not only enhances the credibility of Nippard's discourse but also signals his ability to navigate and critically analyze academic research, bolstering his authority.

Throughout the video, research studies are prominently featured on screen, with certain segments occasionally highlighted to focus on points relevant to Nippard's discussion. This visual presentation not only lends a scholarly style to the video but also enhances the clarity and coherence of Nippard's arguments. By incorporating direct quotes from the research studies, Nippard effectively integrates scientific evidence into his narrative, increasing his authority on the topic.

Video 4: *"A 2014 paper published in Endocrine Reviews ... noted a fairly exhaustive list of maladies associated with steroid use with cardiovascular effects making the top of the severity list also citing, quote: "well recognized and probably seriously concerning evidence for testicular regulation, major mood disorders like mania, depression and dependence.""*

The format of citing the specific study and mentioning its publishing year aligns with academic conventions, emphasizing the reliance on scholarly sources and establishing credibility. The specificity of the publication and year enhance the perceived authority of the information presented. Moreover, the use of technical language such as "maladies" further reinforces the scientific style of the discourse. These terms convey a sense of precision and expertise, enhancing the speaker's credibility. Additionally, the inclusion of

phrases like "noted a fairly exhaustive list" and "well recognized and probably seriously concerning evidence" reflects a careful selection of language to convey the thoroughness and gravity of the research findings.

During this segment, the video displays the referenced study on the left side, with a red arrow pointing to the maladies being discussed, increasing their salience. This visual cue not only provides viewers with direct access to the source of information but also reinforces Nippard's transparency and accountability in presenting scholarly evidence. By explicitly indicating the origin of the information, Nippard further solidifies the scholarly tone of his discourse and fosters trust among his audience.

### **5.1.3 Educating through anecdotal accounts**

As evident in the data, influencers often rely on personal experiences to educate their audience. These videos adopt a style where influencers recount their personal journeys, detailing the effects, challenges, and insights gained from steroid use.

In video 8 "My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You." by More Plates More Dates, the emphasis is placed on personal encounters with steroid use and immersion within the associated culture. This is not only implied by the title, but in various sections of the video.

Video 8: *"This is something that I wish someone had told me when I was younger."*

*"The advice that is usually given is usually misguided."*

*"You have a lot of guys who are bald as hell because they just refuse to stop blasting."*

The first statement serves as a narrative device to establish a sense of personal reflection and hindsight. By framing the anecdote in this manner, the influencer creates a relatable narrative arc, inviting the audience to empathize with their journey and the lessons learned along the way. This linguistic choice underscores the educational aspect of the anecdotal genre, as the influencer imparts wisdom gained from their own experiences.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> quote from video 8 challenges conventional wisdom. Through this statement, the influencer frames themselves as a trusted source of alternative perspectives, drawing upon their own experiences to offer nuanced insights to their audience. This linguistic strategy reinforces the authority of the influencer within the anecdotal genre, as they provide a counter-narrative to prevailing norms and expectations. Furthermore, the use and repetition of “usually” serves not only to emphasize the commonality or frequency of the advice being given but also to qualify the assertion, acknowledging that while the advice may be prevalent, there are exceptions or instances where it may not hold true.

Finally, the 3<sup>rd</sup> excerpt functions as an observation regarding how the author perceives steroids are occasionally used. The blunt language employed not only underscores the influencer's authenticity and transparency but also serves as a cautionary tale for their audience. By highlighting the potential consequences of reckless steroid use, the influencer aims to educate and empower their viewers to make informed decisions regarding their own health and well-being. Similar to the previous quote, this frames the influencer as being more well-informed than some of the other figures in the fitness industry.

A comparable experiential and anecdotal focus can be found in videos 5, 6 and 7, “Why I’m open about my steroid use”, “Why transparency about steroids could be a problem” and “One cycle won’t hurt.”, authored by Greg Doucette.

Video 5: *“I had no sponsors at the time of making these videos, and people said to me “why would you make a video like that? You’re not gonna get any sponsors talking about your PED use.””*

Video 6: *“I’ve seen people promote steroid cycles for younger audiences on TikTok.”*

Video 7: *“I had to get surgery to get an abscess removed. And the same thing with my gynecomastia.”*

In the first quote Deyzel confronts the societal pressures and stigmas surrounding discussions of steroid use within the fitness industry. By sharing this anecdote, Deyzel sheds light on the challenges and criticisms faced by individuals who choose to be transparent about their experiences with performance-enhancing drugs. This admission challenges



prevailing norms within the industry and encourages critical reflection on the importance of transparency. Additionally, Deyzel positions himself as a leading advocate for openness in the context of steroid use on social media. Similarly, Deyzel's observation of TikTok being a platform for steroid promotion highlights the alarming prevalence of misinformation and irresponsible promotion of steroid usage among impressionable audiences. Through this anecdote, Deyzel underscores the ethical implications of endorsing steroid usage and advocates for greater awareness and responsibility within the fitness community, framing himself as more ethical than those who promote performance enhancing substances.

The final quote regarding personal health complications further reinforce the anecdotal aspect of Deyzel's content. By sharing these personal experiences, Deyzel emphasizes the real-life consequences of steroid abuse and highlights the importance of informed decision-making. By drawing upon his own experiences and observations, Deyzel effectively educates viewers about the complexities and risks associated with steroid usage while framing himself as transparent by openly sharing these struggles.

Lastly, in video 3 "Beginner Steroid Cycle | | What to Take? Doses, Timing" Greg Doucette discusses his own experiences with steroids in conjunction with information about how to take steroids as a beginner, as evident in the two excerpts below.

Video 3: *"So my doctor, my endocrinologist has prescribed to me exactly 120 mg of testosterone per week, I do the shot once a week."*

*"The nurse had suggested vastus lateralis, the outer part of the quad, but for me, that sometimes is painful."*

The first quote provides insight into Doucette's personal experiences with steroid usage. By disclosing his prescribed dosage and administration regimen, Doucette demystifies the process for his audience while underscoring the importance of medical supervision and adherence to professional advice. This anecdotal account humanizes the educational content, providing viewers with tangible examples of steroid usage within a controlled medical context.

Similarly, Doucette's remark about the nurse suggesting the Vastus Lateralis for injections, alongside his acknowledgment of the potential discomfort associated with this site, adds depth to his narrative. By sharing his personal experiences with injection site preferences and discomfort, Doucette offers practical anecdotal insights that aim to complement the educational information provided. By challenging the advice of a healthcare professional based on his own experience, Doucette positions himself as an authority on the subject of steroids. The additional context of Doucette physically handling a syringe and vial of testosterone in the video further immerses viewers in his anecdotal and experiential narrative.

#### **5.1.4 Target audience**

In the recipient-focused analysis of social media influencers' discourse on steroids, it becomes apparent that influencers often employ vocabulary and tone that cater to a broad audience, transcending the niche realm of competitive bodybuilding. It is also essential to recognize the distinct styles present in their educational videos: scientific and anecdotal. In videos with a more scientific approach, influencers establish themselves as authorities on steroids, addressing the audience with a clear hierarchy of knowledge. Conversely, in anecdotal videos, influencers may adopt a more relatable language and style, aiming to establish a connection with the audience through shared experiences and personal narratives. Moreover, as the influencers position themselves as authorities on the subject of steroids, they also inherently position the viewer as someone with less knowledge on the subject, resulting in an unequal power dynamic. This is evident in many of the titles of the videos, such as "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?" "Beginner Steroid Cycle || What to Take? Doses, Timing" and "My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You." These video titles imply that the target audience consists of people who are relatively new to the subject by using words such as "beginner" as well as suggesting that the video contains a question that the viewer seeks an answer to.

Furthermore, the focus on supplying information to a broad audience is evident in the terminology used in the videos. The video "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From

Steroids?” by Renaissance Periodization uses many colloquial expressions when discussing steroids, as the following excerpts from video 1 show.

Video 1: *“You do your first 10 years as a natty. Like you damn well should, and I’ll get to more reasons on why that’s a good idea. And then you do drugs for maybe 10 years and then you hopefully quit the fucking sport because what the hell are you doing with your life?”*

*“Because ... you’ve been training for 1 to 3 years and you go full bore, that’s insanity, you might know nothing about yourself and you might have had great natty gains if you figured shit out but you never did and just started using drugs.”*

These linguistic choices serve to make the content more accessible and relatable to a wider range of viewers. By avoiding technical jargon and opting for colloquial expressions, such as “drugs” instead of “PEDs”, the influencer can effectively lower barriers to entry for individuals who may be new to the topic of steroids or who may not have extensive knowledge of fitness terminology. This approach implies an audience that includes not only seasoned athletes or bodybuilders, which is supported by previous literature that has noted a trend in which the topic of steroids garners attention from people outside of the competitive-sphere (Kijratanakoson, 2020, p. 341). This is further corroborated by the fact that the videos discussing steroids receive more views and engagement in comparison to other topics, such as programming or diet. However, as the excerpt highlights, the target audience can be seen consisting of individuals with at least general interest in health, fitness, and self-improvement, as some of the terminology such as “natty” (i.e., natural) may not be widely recognized outside of fitness.

The following part of the analysis examines the gender bias in discourse on steroid use among influencers, particularly emphasizing the disparity in attention given to female steroid supplementation compared to male counterparts. In contrast to the comprehensive discussion surrounding male steroid supplementation, female steroid use is scarcely addressed, often relegated to brief mentions or overlooked entirely. This absence not only reflects a systemic gender bias within the fitness community but also underscores the inherent challenges and complexities associated with navigating the intersection of gender

and steroid use. In the entire data, women are mentioned only twice, once in video 2 “Don't Use Steroids! But If You Do, Start With Orals Only” by renaissance periodization and once in video 4 “The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained” by Jeff Nippard:

Video 2: *“Females, the advice is much different. It is not just less Anavar, it is altogether different. Do not do the above, google Joe Jeffrey physique collective, he specializes in this kind of thing, give that a look and uhh it will sort you on your way.”*

The excerpt acknowledges the necessity for differentiated advice concerning steroid use for females. It emphasizes that the guidance for women diverges significantly from the recommendations typically provided for males, indicating an awareness of the distinct physiological and hormonal considerations that influence the effects and risks associated with steroid usage among genders. However, instead of elaborating on the specific considerations and potential risks for women regarding steroid use, the quote directs viewers to seek further information by searching for "Joe Jeffrey physique collective" online. This approach may leave female viewers feeling underserved within the discourse surrounding steroid use, particularly if they are seeking comprehensive advice or information tailored to their needs. Furthermore, the placement of this mention of advice for females within the midst of a lengthy video may diminish its visibility, mirroring the broader gender bias observed in the data. Viewers who do not watch the entirety of the video or who skip through segments are likely to overlook this information, thereby contributing to the marginalization of women in discussions about steroid use.

Another video in which female steroid use is mentioned is video 4 “The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained” by Jeff Nippard.

Video 4: *“While most of the data focused on male bodybuilders, it could be argued that the effects on females are even more severe and more permanent. In addition to the general health risks women also experience deepening of the voice, enlarged clitoris, decreased breast size, altered menstruation and baldness.”*

Firstly, Nippard's choice to preface his discussion by acknowledging the predominantly male-focused nature of existing data on steroid use sets the stage for the subsequent focus on the potential effects on females. By explicitly recognizing the limitation of available research, he highlights the importance of addressing the unique considerations and risks associated with steroid use for women, despite the comparative scarcity of data in this area. Furthermore, Nippard's use of language in describing the potential effects of steroid use on women is notable. The phrase "it could be argued" suggests a degree of speculation or uncertainty surrounding the severity and permanence of the effects, underscoring the need for further research and empirical evidence in this area. This linguistic choice serves to temper the assertion of definitive conclusions about the effects of steroids on women, emphasizing the complexity of the topic.

Moreover, Nippard's enumeration of specific physical effects experienced by women as a result of steroid use contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the potential risks and consequences involved. By listing these effects, Nippard highlights the impact of steroid use on women's health and well-being, moving beyond generalized discussions to address the specific physiological changes that may occur.

Lastly, Nippard's discussion of the limited focus on female bodybuilders within existing research on steroid use suggests the presence of gender bias not only within YouTube fitness content but also within the broader sports science community. By noting the predominance of data centered on male bodybuilders, Nippard indirectly underscores the disparities in research attention allocated to studying the effects of steroid use on women. This observation suggests that gender bias may extend beyond the realm of fitness discourse to encompass broader systemic inequalities, wherein female experiences and perspectives are often marginalized or overlooked. However, this phenomenon may be greatly attributed to the fact that female steroid use remains significantly less common (Sagoe et al., 2014, p. 393).

## **5.2 Ideology**

Next, the analysis will transition from exploring genre dynamics to examining the ideological underpinnings in the discourse of social media influencers discussing steroids. Ideologies encompass a framework of beliefs, values, and norms guiding individuals'

perception of reality, interpretation of information, and communication through language. As these figures educate their viewers through scientific data and personal experience, recurring themes emerge. Within these central themes, various ideological stances are evident among influencers. Consequently, these ideologies are communicated via the influencers' linguistic choices. Understanding these ideologies is crucial given the educational nature of their content and their self-positioning as subject matter experts.

### 5.2.1 Conditionality of responsible steroid use

Upon analyzing the influencers' content, it becomes evident that certain conditions are emphasized as prerequisites for what constitutes responsible steroid supplementation. These conditions range from tangible factors such as age thresholds to more abstract notions like maintaining an ideal diet. Moreover, within the educational genre, influencers often employ specific linguistic strategies, including directives and explicit advice, to convey their messages effectively.

#### *Physiological and psychological maturity*

In video 1 "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?" by Renaissance Periodization, Dr. Israetel outlines conditions that signify readiness for steroid use. The criteria outlined by the influencer is presented within the context of discussing the potential muscle growth achievable through steroid usage, as well as factors influencing it.

Video 1: *"I would embrace 10 years of natty training for the love of god at least 5. And wait until you are 25 years old."*

The statement employs the conditional "I would," indicating a suggestive rather than prescriptive tone. This linguistic choice allows for flexibility in interpretation, encouraging viewers to consider the suggested criteria without imposing a strict mandate. Furthermore, speaking in the first person can create a sense of authenticity and credibility, as the influencer is speaking from their own experiences and beliefs, potentially enhancing the persuasiveness of their message. However, the phrase "wait until you are 25 years old" presents a more explicit directive that addresses the recipient in 2<sup>nd</sup> person, highlighting a specific age threshold for steroid use. This directive carries weight within the discourse,

emphasizing the significance of physiological and psychological maturity in decision-making. This suggests that the influencer's discourse on steroid readiness is characterized by a consideration of both temporal and experiential factors.

However, an alternative perspective within the data offers differing viewpoints on the assessment of readiness for steroid use, as highlighted by the quotes present in video 8 “My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You” by More Plates More Dates.

*Video 8: “I see a lot of hypocrites in the community ... People say that you should wait until you are 25 and the same people started at 16.”*

The sentiment expressed suggests that some individuals advocate for waiting until a certain age or duration of training before using steroids, yet themselves may have disregarded these guidelines in their own journey. While influencers may advocate for specific criteria based on principles of safety and responsibility, the reality of individual experiences and choices complicates the application of these guidelines in practice. The tension between aspirational ideals and lived realities within the fitness community reflects broader societal debates about ethics, integrity, and authenticity in the pursuit of steroid use.

Furthermore, the use of intertextuality, where the influencer critiques remarks made by other influencers by quoting them, highlights the interconnected nature of discourse within the YouTube fitness community, particularly regarding the topic of steroids. By referencing and critiquing statements from other influencers, the speaker not only engages in a dialogue with their peers but also shapes the narrative surrounding steroid use. This type of intertextuality can have several effects. Firstly, it underscores the complexities and contradictions inherent in the advice circulating within the fitness community, adding layers of interpretation and skepticism for viewers. Secondly, it contributes to the formation of distinct voices and positions within the community, as influencers assert their own viewpoints while responding to those of others (Bloome & Hong, 2013, p. 6). However, for viewers who are not deeply embedded in the fitness scene, this intertextual exchange may lead to confusion, as they may struggle to decipher the nuances of the discourse or understand the context of the quoted remarks.

### *Medical supervision*

Many influencers advocate for continuous medical supervision for individuals beginning to use steroids. In video 3 titled "Beginner Steroid Cycle || What to Take? Doses, Timing," Greg Doucette advises viewers to consult a medical professional a total of 16 times.

#### Video 3: *"Talk to your doctor!"*

This quote serves as a directive for individuals considering or already engaged in steroid supplementation to seek professional medical guidance. The frequent repetition adds salience to the importance of constant monitoring. This recommendation hints towards the risks as well as the complexity of steroid usage and the potential impact on one's physical health. However, it's worth noting that this directive might also serve as a means for influencers to resign themselves of the responsibility associated with advising on steroid use. In video 3, Doucette offers concrete advice on steroid usage, including instructions on measuring dosages, recommending specific doses, and even showcasing the use of a syringe. Such actions present a potential contradiction, wherein influencers appear to offer guidance on steroid usage while also attempting to distance themselves from the ethical and legal responsibilities inherent in providing such advice. This contradiction raises questions about the influencers' motivations and the ethical considerations surrounding their content.

Moreover, the emphasis on the importance of ongoing medical monitoring in conjunction with steroid use is present in video 1 "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?" by Renaissance Periodization.

#### Video 1: *"Get regular bloodwork done."*

*"You're like "Okay I need to gain 10 pounds in the next 2 to be a force in the national level stage, I talk to my coach, I talk to my doctor, blah blah blah, we're gonna ease into this and see how this works*

The first quote features an explicit directive that urges the people who are going to take steroids to get regular monitoring of health-markers. The second quote depicts the influencer constructing an ideal scenario or narrative of responsible steroid use. While the



inclusion of "blah blah blah" might initially seem dismissive of medical supervision, in this specific context, it likely signifies that the influencer has already mentioned medical supervision multiple times in the video. Therefore, it serves to indicate that there are numerous additional considerations involved, which he does not delve into in that particular sentence.

However, it's essential to recognize that while influencers advocate for medical supervision, the extent to which individuals adhere to this recommendation may vary. Factors such as accessibility to healthcare professionals, financial constraints, and personal beliefs about medical intervention may influence individuals' willingness or ability to seek medical guidance. For marginalized individuals facing socioeconomic barriers, the recommendation to consult with a doctor may exacerbate existing inequalities and put them in a precarious position (Samra & Hankivsky, 2012, p. 858). In such circumstances, individuals may feel compelled to navigate the complexities of steroid use without proper medical oversight, increasing their vulnerability to health risks and adverse outcomes. Thus, while the endorsement of medical supervision is a positive step towards promoting responsible steroid use, there remains a need for greater awareness and accessibility to healthcare resources within the fitness community.

#### *Perfect diet & Rigorous training regimen*

Alongside these relatively concrete parameters, influencers also espouse more ambiguous conditions, such as the ability to adhere to a perfect diet and training regimen. In video 8 "*My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You*" by More Plates More Dates, the author discusses his perspectives for what constitutes readiness to steroid use:

Video 8: "*My advice is to not start gear until you know 100% what you are doing in the gym and in the kitchen.*"

The use of possessive pronoun in the first quote establishes the speaker as an authority figure offering guidance to the audience. The quote also employs negation to convey the speaker's caution regarding the action of beginning steroid use. Furthermore, the use of "gear" as a colloquial term for steroids adds informality to the statement, potentially making

it more accessible to the audience, particularly those familiar with fitness culture. The use of “100%” in this context emphasizes the importance of certainty or confidence in one's knowledge and abilities before considering steroid use.

Furthermore, the phrase highlights contexts related to health and fitness, namely exercise and nutrition. This specificity suggests that the speaker considers these areas crucial for readiness in steroid use. While this criteria ostensibly aspires to promote comprehensive health and fitness practices, the ambiguity raises concerns. The notion of possessing comprehensive expertise regarding training and nutrition is inherently subjective and depends upon a plethora of factors such as personal beliefs and knowledge of nutrition, individual physiological needs, and metabolic profiles. It is important to note that what constitutes a perfect diet is not mentioned in the video despite this statement. This may lead to some viewers over-estimating their readiness to steroid use.

Similarly, the concept of a “knowing what you are doing in the gym” lacks quantifiable metrics and is not substantiated in greater detail in the video, leaving room for interpretation and variability across individuals. The ambiguity surrounding these conditions highlights the potential for individuals to overestimate their own knowledge and competence in navigating the topic of steroid use. As highlighted by the Dunning-Kruger effect, people with a rudimentary knowledge of a given subject tend to overvalue their skills (Dunning, 2011, p. 247). Without clear guidelines or objective benchmarks, aspiring users may inadvertently expose themselves to heightened risks and adverse outcomes.

### *Risk acceptance*

Central to influencers' delineation of ideal steroid use conditions is the recurring theme of accepting risks, emphasizing an acknowledgment of the potential consequences associated with steroid use. This is highlighted in video 4 “The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained” by Jeff Nippard which seeks to offer science-based information on steroids, their use and side effects. A similar sentiment can be found in video 6 “Why transparency about steroids could be a problem.” by Noel Deyzel.

Video 4: “... be aware of the risks and accept them.”

Video 6: *"You have to know what you are getting yourself into."*

The recurring theme of "accepting risks" raises questions about the correlation between risk acceptance and understanding. While individuals may acknowledge the potential consequences associated with steroid usage, their level of comprehension regarding these risks may vary significantly. Research shows that individuals tend to rank other people's steroid use as more risky than their own, which suggests that people may not fully grasp the implications until faced with adverse outcomes, highlighting the importance of education and informed decision-making in mitigating harm (Santos & Coomber, 2017, p. 35).

Furthermore, some influencers advocate for the notion that steroid use should be limited to a select few individuals rather than becoming a common practice. In video 1 "How Much Muscle Can You Grow From Steroids?" by Renaissance Periodization, Dr. Israetel presents a cautionary perspective, as evident in the two excerpts below.

Video 1: *"Most people should not start at all."*

*"Most smart people never start."*

The statements, while promoting a cautious approach, lack a clear criteria for determining who qualifies as part of the select group referred to. The ambiguity surrounding this recommendation may contribute to a sense of justification among individuals who perceive themselves as fitting the criteria for steroid use, despite potential lack of readiness or understanding. Furthermore, the mention of "most smart people never start" might be particularly perplexing to viewers, given Dr. Mike's own academic credentials as a professor in sports science, combined with his openness about his own steroid use, as it may create a perceived incongruity between his cautionary advice and his personal choices. On a broader scale, viewers may also attribute Renaissance Periodization's and Dr. Mike's success, at least partly, to the use of steroids. In the fitness community on social media, credentials and achievements have been found to hold significant weight, and the perceived success of influential figures like Dr. Israetel may influence viewers' perceptions of steroid usage

(Grande, 2019, p. 63). This contextual backdrop adds depth to the ambiguity surrounding the ideology of steroid use.

### 5.2.2 Natural vs. Enhanced Training

One of the prevalent themes that emerged from the data was the discussion regarding the results that one can obtain naturally compared to being enhanced. Influencers offer contrasting views on the efficacy and sustainability of natural muscle gains, contributing to a complex discursive landscape that reflects the diverse experiences and ideologies within the fitness community.

Some influencers assert that natural muscle gains reach a point of diminishing returns after a certain period, suggesting that significant progress becomes increasingly difficult to achieve without external supplementation. Such perspective is highlighted in video 8 “My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You” by More Plates More Dates.

Video 8: *“I think if you have a perfect diet from the get-go you can hit the point of diminishing returns and that you have mastered your natural potential in like.. 2 years.. and some people might disagree.”*

The linguistic choices employed serve to convey a perspective that emphasizes the challenges and limitations of natural muscle growth while subtly suggesting steroid use as a means to overcome these barriers. The phrase "diminishing returns" carries connotations of decreasing effectiveness over time. By using this term, the speaker implies that natural training reaches a point where the effort expended yields progressively smaller gains in muscle tissue. This choice of language underscores the perception that natural training may require considerable time and effort for relatively limited results, framing steroid use as a more efficient alternative.

Similarly, the phrase "mastered your natural potential" implies a sense of reaching the pinnacle of one's natural capabilities. This framing suggests that after a certain period of natural training, individuals may have maximized their genetic potential for muscle growth. By portraying natural gains as finite, the speaker reinforces the notion that steroid

use offers a pathway to surpassing these inherent limitations. The specific mention of "2 years" serves to highlight the relatively short timeframe within which individuals are purportedly able to reach their natural potential for muscle growth. This timeframe reinforces the idea that natural training requires significant time and dedication for relatively modest gains, further emphasizing the perception of diminishing returns.

Moreover, the recognition that "some people might disagree" introduces a concept of defeasibility into the discourse, which has been associated with the potential to alter the speaker's public image and restore it (Benoit & Henson, 2009, p. 40). This linguistic choice implies that the preceding statement about reaching natural potential within 2 years is open to being overturned or countered, offering an opportunity for the speaker to adjust their stance in response to differing perspectives. By acknowledging the potential for dissent or refutation, the speaker allows for the cancellation or revision of the assertion regarding the timeframe and efficacy of natural training. Thus, while the speaker maintains the stance on achieving natural potential within a specific timeframe, the acknowledgment of defeasibility subtly underscores the possibility of alternative viewpoints regarding the limits of natural muscle growth.

A similar perspective is highlighted in video 3 "Beginner Steroid Cycle | | What to Take? Doses, Timing" by Greg Doucette.

Video 3: "*So think about it. You could be growing muscle five times faster with a dose of only 250 mg.*"

*"... 5 years worth of muscle in 3 months time."*

The language used in the first quote is hyperbolic and persuasive, employing terms like "five times faster" to emphasize the potential speed of muscle growth achievable with a relatively low dose of steroids. This choice of language may capture the audience's attention and create a sense of urgency or desire for rapid results. Additionally, the use of the modal verb "could" in the conditional form suggests a promise for results, framing the statement as a potential outcome rather than merely a speculative suggestion.

However, when considering the greater context of the video, where Greg Doucette claims it is aimed at "demoting" steroid use, a contradiction emerges. Despite his disclaimer, the quote promotes the efficacy and allure of steroid use by highlighting the acceleration of muscle growth achievable with a relatively low dose. Furthermore, by framing steroid use as a means to achieve results "five times faster," Greg Doucette inadvertently contributes to the glamorization of enhanced training within the fitness community. Moreover, the specific mention of the small dose serves to downplay the potential risks associated with steroid use, framing it as a minor or inconsequential action by using the modifier "only". The minimization of dosage may further contribute to the normalization of steroid use, despite Doucette's stated intention to discourage its use.

Conversely, other influencers emphasize the substantial potential for natural growth, advocating for the efficacy of disciplined training regimens and optimal nutrition in facilitating significant muscle gains. Such perspective is present in video 1 "How much muscle can you grow from steroid" by Renaissance Periodization.

*Video 1: "If your genetics are average you are probably looking at around 30 pounds of muscle. If you have above average genetics, probably around 45 pounds of muscle over 10 years. 45 pounds holy crap that is a lot."*

This excerpt underscores the belief in the body's capacity for muscle growth, rejecting the notion of inherent limitations and advocating for perseverance in pursuit of fitness goals. The language employed in the quote is emotive and colloquial, evoking a sense of excitement. The exclamation "holy crap" adds emphasis and conveys a tone of awe, suggesting that the outcomes of natural training are perceived as remarkable. This choice of language serves to engage the audience and heighten the perceived significance of the information being presented. Furthermore, the specific mention of "pounds" in relation to muscle gain reinforces the idea of tangible results. By focusing on a concrete metric like pounds of muscle, the speaker provides a clear and understandable measure of progress, further emphasizing the efficacy of natural training. This emphasis on quantifiable results may serve to reinforce the credibility of natural training within the discourse, framing it as an effective approach for achieving one's fitness goals.

### 5.2.3 Steroid downsides

A significant theme evident in the data is the attention given to the potential negative effects of steroid use. While influencers mention a plethora of different harmful effects that can result from steroid use, a deliberate emphasis is placed on the physical risks associated with steroid use, portraying them as a central concern within the discourse. Topics such as heart health as well as adverse effects on organs and bodily functions are extensively covered, framing physical health as a primary consideration for individuals considering steroid use.

Jeff Nippard describes some of the possible health detriments of steroid use in video 4 “The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained”.

Video 4: *“Serious complications can arise after just 2 months.”*

*“Cardiovascular complications seem to be the most broadly and commonly accepted concern, with a 2015 paper referencing 25 independent case studies, wherein athletes, mostly bodybuilders ... suffered a frightening mix of fatal and non-fatal cardiopathies, including heart attack ... and stroke.”*

*“... while the cardiac implications might be the most lethal complication, a direct toxic impact on the liver is also well documented.”*

Nippard begins the literature review section of his video by examining the effects of steroids on cardiovascular health. The first excerpt captures the immediacy and potential gravity of health issues by using the modifier “just 2 months”, emphasizing the rapid onset of adverse outcomes. The second quote utilizes precise language to underscore the prevalence and variety of cardiovascular complications among athletes, notably bodybuilders. By citing specific examples and employing evocative terminology such as "frightening", "fatal", "heart attack," and "stroke," the quote effectively communicates the seriousness of the health concerns addressed. Together, these linguistic choices frame cardiovascular health as the primary concern when it comes to steroid use.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> excerpt, while still emphasizing the severity of cardiac ramifications, transitions into a discussion regarding the liver. The term "direct" emphasizes the immediacy and causality of the toxic impact on the liver, suggesting a clear relationship between the activity under discussion and its effect on liver health. Similarly, the phrase "well documented" lends credibility to the assertion by indicating that there is ample evidence supporting the claim. This term suggests that the toxic impact on the liver has been extensively documented in scientific literature or other credible sources and is in line with the overarching scientific style of the video.

While most of the discussion regarding the physical side-effects of steroids focuses on life-threatening instances of organ damage, some influencers mention cosmetic physical downsides. In video 8 "My Number 1 Piece Of Advice If You Are Going To Use Steroids That Nobody Will Tell You " by More Plates More Dates, the author mentions hair loss as a potential harmful side effect.

Video 8: *"2 things will make people stop gear in most cases: going bald and having a major health crisis ... you have 100 000 hair follicles and one set of organs."*

The language used in this juxtaposition emphasizes the severity of both the cosmetic and physiological consequences, framing them as significant deterrents to steroid use. The author's choice to mention "going bald" alongside "having a major health crisis" draws attention to the potential impact of cosmetic changes on individuals' decisions regarding steroid use. By placing hair loss in the same category as life-threatening health complications, the author warns about the possible adverse effects as well as suggests that both types of consequences should be taken seriously and weighed carefully. This juxtaposition challenges the notion that cosmetic concerns are less important or worthy of consideration than physiological risks. Furthermore, the use of numerical comparison in the phrase reinforces the idea that both hair loss and organ damage should be regarded as significant consequences of steroid use. This comparison highlights the irreversibility of hair loss and the importance of preserving overall health and well-being.

Moreover, psychological effects are discussed by the influencers. This is mentioned in video 1 "How much muscle can you grow from steroids?" by Renaissance Periodization.



Video 1: *“Psychological effects are brutal. Anxiety through the roof.”*

In this quote psychological effects are framed as severe as well as being of great importance. The language employed, particularly the use of the adjective “brutal” and idiom “through the roof,” conveys a sense of intensity, suggesting that the psychological impacts of steroid use are profound and debilitating. The choice of words underscores the significant toll that these effects can take on an individual's mental well-being, potentially overshadowing the physical benefits gained from steroid use. Furthermore, the use of “are” in this context implies a definitive quality to the statement.

However, it's noteworthy that these psychological effects are often discussed after the physical ones, and they are afforded significantly less attention. This sequencing and relative emphasis on physical over psychological effects may reflect a broader tendency within the fitness community to prioritize the visible, tangible consequences of steroid use over the less visible, but equally if not in some instances more significant, psychological impacts. By framing the psychological effects as secondary, influencers may inadvertently downplay their significance, potentially reinforcing the belief that the physical benefits of steroid use outweigh the potential psychological risks.

In the data, one example emerged in which the psychological downsides were emphasized over the physical ones. In video 7 “one cycle won’t hurt” by Noel Deyzel he discusses the potential side effects of even short-term steroid use.

Video 7: *“It is one thing having to be on TRT for the rest of your life. It is another thing altering your brain chemistry from exogenous hormones resulting in crippling anxiety as well as depression.”*

The language used to describe the potential psychological side effects of steroid use places a significant emphasis on the severity and impact of these effects. The phrase “altering your brain chemistry from exogenous hormones resulting in crippling anxiety as well as depression” is particularly noteworthy in this regard. The use of the word “altering” suggests a fundamental change to the normal functioning of the brain, indicating that the introduction of exogenous hormones can have profound and potentially harmful effects on

mental health. This choice of language conveys the notion that steroid use can lead to a fundamental alteration of one's psychological state, implying a disruption to the balance of brain chemistry that governs mood and emotional well-being ultimately framing the psychological effects as being of central importance.

Additionally, the phrase "crippling anxiety as well as depression" evokes a sense of profound suffering and debilitation, emphasizing the severity of the potential psychological side effects associated with steroid use. The use of the word "crippling" suggests that these effects can have a disabling impact on an individual's ability to function, further underscoring the gravity of the situation. Moreover, the juxtaposition of "having to be on TRT for the rest of your life" with "altering your brain chemistry" serves to highlight the distinction between the long-term consequences of steroid use and the immediate effects on mental health. While the former implies a commitment to ongoing hormone replacement therapy, the latter emphasizes the acute and potentially debilitating psychological effects that can result from short-term steroid use. Furthermore, this comparison frames the psychological side effects as more detrimental than having to be on hormonal replacement therapy for the rest of one's life.

In addition to mentioning physical and psychological side-effects, influencers also mention aesthetic preferences. In video 4 "The Decision to Use Steroids | Anabolics Science Explained", Jeff Nippard discusses the reasons why he personally has decided to remain natural.

Video 4: *"I prefer the natural look."*

*"... More classic look."*

While the main purpose of video 4 is to offer a science based view into the use of steroids, Nippard opens the video by addressing the question of why he has chosen to stay natural. Thus, in addition to discussing the topic from a research based lens, the author includes his own relationship with steroids as well as opinions. The focus on the personal life of the author has been shown to be an important facet of operating as a social media influencer. (Hudders et al., 2021, p. 333).

The language used suggests a recognition that aesthetics and physiques are inherently subjective, challenging the notion that more muscle mass is always preferable in bodybuilding. This acknowledgment implies a consideration of the broader context of body image ideals and personal preferences within the fitness community. By framing the natural look as preferable, the discourse extends beyond health considerations to suggest that there may be distinct advantages to pursuing a natural aesthetic. This perspective highlights the value of natural training not only for its health benefits but also for the aesthetic appeal it offers, framing it as a potentially better option when it comes to acquiring an advanced physique.

#### **5.2.4 Ethical Considerations: Transparency & guidance**

In the dataset, ethical issues are approached from two distinct viewpoints: the ethics of steroid guidance and the ethics regarding the way influencers talk about steroids, such as honesty and transparency in competition as well as glorification of steroids. This dual perspective adds complexity to the ethical landscape surrounding steroid discourse on social media, highlighting the need for careful navigation and critical examination of the influencers' messaging strategies and their potential impact on the audience.

##### *Steroid Use Guidance*

Proponents of providing steroid use guidance argue that responsible advice can potentially mitigate harm by educating individuals on safe and effective practices. Such a view is presented in video 3 “Beginner Steroid Cycle | | What to Take? Doses, Timing” by Greg Doucette.

Video 3: *“As you may know my endocrinologist has described me 120 mg of testosterone for HRT.”*  
*“I am not a freaking doctor!”*

Linguistically, Greg takes deliberate measures to distance himself from endorsing steroid use. Despite providing detailed information on steroid protocols as well as the title hinting at advice, he constantly prefaces his remarks with disclaimers such as “I am not a freaking doctor!”. By framing his statements in this manner, Greg avoids explicit endorsements and

deflects responsibility for any potential consequences of following his advice. Additionally, his repeated reference to his endocrinologist prescribing testosterone for hormone replacement therapy further reinforces the notion that his guidance is not intended as medical advice but rather as personal anecdotal sharing.

It's crucial to note that the video functions as a response to an earlier video that Greg took down due to a shift in his beliefs regarding steroid advice. This raises questions about the stability of opinions in the influencer landscape and highlights the potential for evolving perspectives over time. The fact that Greg backtracked on his previous advice underscores the fluidity of opinions in this domain and prompts consideration of the reliability of influencer guidance on such matters in the future.

Another video that gives explicit advice on how to use steroids is video 2 "Don't Use Steroids! But If You Do, Start With Orals Only" by Renaissance Periodization.

Video 2: *"If you are going to do it, it is better to dip your toe in."*

*"20-40 mg for 3-4 weeks."*

*"You can start with an oral like Anavar which is one of the safest drugs that they have, it isn't safe, safest."*

In the first quote, a euphemism serves to soften the language surrounding steroid experimentation. "Dipping your toe in" implies a cautious approach to steroid use, framing it as a trial rather than a commitment. By employing this language, the video may lessen the perceived severity of steroid usage, potentially making it more palatable or less intimidating for viewers. Additionally, the video employs a nuanced approach to discussing the safety of steroids. While it explicitly states that no drug is safe, it emphasizes that some are safer than others. For example, the 3<sup>rd</sup> quote clarifies that while Anavar may be relatively safer compared to other steroids, it still carries inherent risks. This linguistic choice acknowledges the complexity of the issue and encourages viewers to approach steroid use with caution.

Moreover, the video provides specific dosages and recommendations for steroid use, further enhancing its practicality and accessibility. By offering concrete guidance, the video

aims to empower viewers to make informed decisions about steroid usage and mitigate potential risks. However, this specificity also raises ethical concerns about the potential for the video to be perceived as endorsing or promoting steroid use, despite its explicit title advising against it. The title of the video, is noteworthy, as it seemingly contradicts the content of the video itself. While the title advises against steroid use, the content provides detailed guidance on how to use steroids safely. This apparent contradiction raises questions about the intended audience and purpose of the video. It can be inferred that the video is aimed at individuals who are already considering or planning to use steroids, providing them with harm reduction strategies to minimize risks. However, it is possible that this normalizes steroid use by providing practical advice on how to use them.

A contrasting viewpoint is offered in video 5 “Why i'm open about my steroid use” in which Noel Deyzel explicitly mentions that he doesn't want to offer advice on how to use steroids.

Video 5: *“I will never disclose what gear I am using because I have a large young audience.”*

*“Last thing I want is someone to get hurt from something I said.”*

The first quote demonstrates Deyzel's sense of responsibility towards his viewers. His use of the modal verb in "will never disclose" emphasizes the permanence of his decision, indicating a commitment to withholding information about his steroid usage. By framing his decision in terms of audience protection, he not only communicates a sense of moral obligation but also positions himself with broader societal concerns regarding the influence of public figures on impressionable youth. Furthermore, the phrase "because I have a large young audience" underscores the specific demographic he aims to shield from potentially harmful information, highlighting his awareness of their vulnerability.

The second quote, employs empathetic language to convey Deyzel's genuine concern for the well-being of his audience. Through the use of the phrase "last thing I want," he emphasizes the importance he places on preventing harm, positioning himself as an advocate for safety and responsible behavior. Moreover, Deyzel's choice to withhold his steroid protocol, while stating his intention to avoid harm to his viewers, implies that

sharing such information on social media platforms is inherently harmful. This presupposition frames steroid use guidance as inherently risky. Thus, by refraining from divulging specifics about his regimen and expressing concern for his audience's well-being without delving into the associated risks, Deyzel positions himself as more ethical compared to his peers.

However, it's important to consider the broader context and ramifications of Deyzel's video within the theme of steroid guidance. Despite his reluctance to provide concrete advice, Deyzel's brand and persona are heavily associated with his muscular and lean physique, which he obtained largely through the use of steroids. The lighting and posture in his videos often accentuate his physique, potentially serving as aspirational imagery for viewers. This juxtaposition raises ethical questions about the potential influence of Deyzel's content on his audience. While he refrains from explicitly endorsing or providing guidance on steroid use, the prominence of his physique may implicitly promote a body image that is unattainable without the use of steroids. This disparity between his actions and words could potentially be detrimental, as viewers may look up to him and seek to imitate his behavior, prioritizing his actions over his verbal disclaimers (Jin et al., 2019, 568).

#### *Transparency in Social Media Influencers' Steroid Discourse and Competition*

Transparency has emerged as a powerful tool for influencers within the realm of steroid discourse, serving not only as a means of establishing trust with their audience but also as a distinct brand differentiator. By transparently disclosing their experiences with steroid supplementation, these influencers position themselves as authentic and trustworthy sources of information within the fitness community.

Video 5 "Why I'm open about my steroid use" by Noel Deyzel encapsulates a critical perspective on the behaviors prevalent among social media influencers in the fitness industry.

Video 5: *"Too many influencers are chasing money and profiting of vulnerability."*

*"Be mindful of who you follow."*

*"I don't think a lot of the younger influencers understand the responsibility."*

*"Before YouTube, I ran a successful IT-company. I am not in this for the money."*

The phrase "Too many influencers" suggests a pervasive issue, indicating that a significant portion of influencers engage in the behavior under scrutiny. This choice of language sets the tone for a critique of the fitness influencer community as a whole, rather than singling out specific individuals. Moreover, the use of "chasing money" conveys a sense of prioritization, implying that financial gain supersedes ethical considerations for these influencers. This framing positions financial incentives as a driving force behind the behaviors being criticized. Additionally, the phrase "profiting off vulnerability" underscores the exploitation of the audience's susceptibility or insecurity for monetary gain. By leveraging the term "vulnerability," the quote implies a power dynamic wherein influencers hold power over their audience's emotions or insecurities to promote products or services. This portrayal highlights the ethical implications of such practices, framing them as morally reprehensible.

Contextualizing this quote within the video sheds light on its significance within the broader discourse on influencer transparency and responsibility. Deyzel's decision to openly discuss his steroid use positions him as a counterpoint to the stated dishonesty prevalent in the fitness industry. By critiquing other influencers for prioritizing financial gain over honesty and transparency, Deyzel positions himself as an ethical figure who values integrity. However, a critical analysis reveals possible underlying motivations and strategic considerations at play. Deyzel's critique of other influencers can be interpreted as a form of self-promotion, wherein he frames himself as the virtuous alternative, which is further amplified by the quote "be mindful of who you follow" towards the end of the video. Thus, while Deyzel presents himself as open and honest, there may be ulterior motives driving his rhetoric.

The final quote from video 5 suggests a background in entrepreneurship and success outside of the fitness industry. By highlighting his previous professional endeavors, Deyzel seeks to establish expertise, positioning himself as a credible source of information within the fitness community. This appeal to authority aims to bolster his argument and lend

weight to his subsequent statements. Furthermore, the assertion is a direct denial of any financial motivation behind Deyzel's involvement in social media and influencer activities. By explicitly disavowing monetary incentives, Deyzel seeks to portray himself as driven by altruistic motives rather than personal gain. This framing aligns with the narrative of authenticity and sincerity that influencers often employ to cultivate trust and loyalty among their audience and legitimizes his position.

The topic of transparency and its potential harmful effect is discussed again by Deyzel in video 6 "Why transparency about steroids could be a problem".

Video 6: *"I see videos daily on tiktok about steroids and tren. Where the concern comes in is glorifying steroid use."*

This quote encapsulates a critical perspective on the portrayal of steroid use on social media platforms. The assertion that the concern lies in glorifying steroid use suggests a recognition of the potential negative consequences associated with romanticizing the use of steroids. By acknowledging the prevalence of videos discussing steroids on TikTok, the speaker highlights the ubiquity of such content and the need to examine its impact on viewers.

However, juxtaposing this statement with the visual presentation of the speaker's physique raises questions about the alignment between rhetoric and action. Despite expressing concern about the glorification of steroid use, the speaker's own appearance, characterized by enhanced muscle definition and vascularity, could be interpreted as visually reinforcing the same ideals that they critique.

In addition to using transparency as a way to position themselves, influencers discuss transparency and fairness in competitive circumstances. One such example can be found in video 1 "How much muscle can you grow from steroids" by Renaissance Periodization.

Video 1: *"If you use steroids to compete in a tested federation... You are a cocksucker."*

The author's rhetoric is highly charged and derogatory, laden with ethical judgments and implications. The term "cocksucker" is employed as a pejorative insult that indicates moral condemnation towards individuals who use steroids while competing in tested federations.



Dr. Israetel appears to be highlighting the tension between the pursuit of athletic achievement and adherence to ethical principles of fair play. By framing the issue in this manner, he underscores the significance of maintaining integrity within competitive sports and respecting established rules and norms. Such language contributes to the stigmatization of individuals who choose to utilize performance-enhancing drugs in order to gain a competitive edge, further reinforcing the discourse of transparency in the realm of fitness and steroid use.

Furthermore, Dr. Israetel's public admission of steroid use and participation in untested federations adds an important layer of context to the analysis as it may influence how his audience perceives his moral stance on the issue. While he openly engages in practices that some may view as ethically questionable, his condemnation of steroid use combined with his openness regarding steroid use as well as his competitive background within tested federations allows him to position himself as adhering to a higher ethical standard, implicitly contrasting his own choices with those he criticizes. This framing positions him as more authentic and trustworthy than the influencers taking part in the actions being discussed.

## 6 DISCUSSION

Influencers contribute to the discussions on steroids through many ways. They discuss themes of conditionality for proper steroid use, the side effects of steroid use, the natural/enhanced dichotomy as well as steroid guidance. Within these themes, the influencers exhibit ideological viewpoints that differ greatly from one another. The contributions by the influencers in this thesis fall under the main genre of educational. Influencers aim to educate their viewers through two partly overlapping but largely distinct ways: by relaying on scientific literature as well as their own anecdotal experience.

Genre analysis reveals that influencers are framed as authoritative figures in the realm of fitness regarding the discussion of steroids. This framing is achieved through various means, including the showcasing of credentials in academia, status as a coach and personal achievements in the sport. This observation corroborates previous findings indicating that on visual platforms, influencers' physical appearance and professional background play significant roles in establishing their credibility and authenticity (Jin et al., 2019, p. 576; Grande, 2019, p. 40). Furthermore, influencers blended scientific and anecdotal accounts within the broader theme of education, often incorporating both into their videos. This corresponds with genre research indicating the fluidity of genre conventions in new media (Drew, 2017, p. 204).

Moreover, the analysis uncovered that the target audience for this discourse predominantly consists of individuals casually engaged in fitness activities. This aligns with the previous research that has noted a shift in interest towards steroids from elite athletes to recreational users (Hilkens et al., 2021, p. 10). The broad appeal of steroid-related content to individuals beyond the competitive bodybuilding niche suggests a growing interest in

the topic among diverse fitness enthusiasts. This phenomenon implies a certain level of sensationalism surrounding the discussion of steroids, underscoring the importance of further research to inform public health protocols and interventions.

In addition, the observed bias towards the male population in the content may, in significant part, stem from the influencers' target audience, a factor not readily accessible in public domain information. However, this raises considerations regarding the tailored nature of content delivery, potentially leading to disparities in information accessibility for women. Consequently, there's a risk of women being exposed to content ill-suited for their needs, posing potential health risks. Moreover, this phenomenon underscores broader societal issues surrounding gendered perceptions of fitness, particularly the historical association of muscularity with masculinity as well as the overemphasis on males in discussions relating to steroids (Guglielmetti, 2023, p. 5). Thus, it's plausible to assert that the content produced by influencers perpetuates and reinforces existing gendered discourses, thereby contributing to the maintenance of traditional notions of fitness as primarily a male domain.

Moreover, influencers hold varying viewpoints on the topic of steroids, reflecting diverse ideological stances. One contentious issue revolves around the notion of readiness for steroid usage, with influencers debating the criteria for such readiness. Some advocate for objective measures rooted in biological maturity, while others emphasize subjective factors such as perceived expertise in training and nutrition as well as risk acceptance. However, relying solely on subjective standards raises concerns about individuals not being able to accurately assess their own capabilities, as highlighted in prior research (Dunning, 2011, p. 247). Furthermore, many influencers stress the importance of medical supervision as a prerequisite for steroid use and recommend constant monitoring for individuals considering steroid use. It could be argued that this emphasis on medical oversight serves as a means for influencers to distance themselves from responsibility when disseminating potentially harmful information. Additionally, this approach poses challenges, as not all individuals have equal access to medical supervision, potentially placing certain groups at a disadvantage (Samra & Hankivsky, 2012, p. 857).

In the discourse surrounding the natural versus enhanced debate, influencers expressed a wide spectrum of ideological perspectives. Some emphasize the remarkable

achievements that can be attained through natural methods, while others contrast natural gains with the seemingly substantial enhancements achievable through other means. It can be suggested, that these variations in viewpoint may largely stem from differences in language usage. The prevailing frameworks regarding achievable muscle growth, grounded in research, likely inform many influencers' discussions, suggesting that they may be addressing similar outcomes. This underscores the core belief in discourse analysis that language has material consequences and is used to construct the world around us, suggesting the need for further inquiry into how language influences such public health discussions (Gee, 2014, p. 235). Lastly, it is worth noting that influencers in this study frame steroids differently than what has been observed in digital media previously. While Kijratanakoson's (2020, p. 342) study pointed to digital media downplaying the positive effects of steroids, the influencers in this study framed the benefits as highly impactful. This may be explained by the fact that 4 out of 5 of the influencers in this study have a personal history with steroid use, which may result in biases. This further reinforces the earlier observation regarding the influencers' physiques playing a central role on visual platforms, with viewers being more inclined to consume content from individuals with more developed bodies.

The influencers' portrayal of steroid downsides emerged as a central theme within their content, with all of the videos addressing the potential negative effects of steroid usage. This is in line with previous studies on the discourse regarding steroids being heavily centered on the negative consequences (Kijratanakoson, 2020, p. 342). An ideological bias was evident, primarily focusing on the physical side effects. Among these, life-threatening complications involving vital organs were prominently discussed, alongside cosmetic issues such as balding and gynecomastia. Psychological downsides were often relegated to a secondary position compared to the physical effects, despite emerging research indicating a correlation between steroid use, anxiety, and depression (Karagun & Altug, 2024, p. 7). This emphasis on physical ramifications may reflect the overarching emphasis on the body within the fitness domain, where physical appearance holds significant value. Moreover, it can be posited that this ideological bias is influenced by societal perceptions regarding male mental health issues, which are often stigmatized and considered of lesser importance (Nattambo, 2022, pp. 182–183). This examination underscores the need for a more

comprehensive understanding of the impacts of steroid usage, encompassing both physical and psychological dimensions.

Within the dataset, transparency emerged as a recurring theme addressed by the video creators. Influencers consistently advocate for transparency among peers in their communication with audiences, as well as in competitive contexts. Notably, the influencers under scrutiny in this study actively embody this ethos of transparency, openly discussing their own practices in their videos and with 80% of the influencers chosen for this examination being open about their steroid use. It can be speculated that, in certain instances, this emphasis on transparency serves as a strategy to distinguish oneself from competitors, projecting an image of honesty and integrity. This emphasis on transparency as well as its role in branding in the social media fitness-sphere corroborate previous research (Reade, 2022, p. 550).

In the exploration of steroid use guidance, influencers revealed two distinct ideological stances. Some adopt a harm reduction approach, offering strategies they believe minimize potential harm for individuals considering steroid use. Conversely, another perspective emerged from the data, suggesting that such guidance could inadvertently promote steroid use. Regardless of the ideological stance taken, it's noteworthy that many influencers included in this study have cultivated their brand, at least in part, through steroid use, often showcasing the results of steroid use through their physiques. The potential impact of this on steroid use remains ambiguous. According to previous research, viewers may perceive these influencers as role models to emulate, potentially leading to the copying of their behavior rather than heeding warnings (Jin et al., 2019, p. 568). This raises questions about whether such exposure could contribute to increased steroid use, particularly in light of findings indicating that consuming fitness content is associated with a higher likelihood of considering steroid use (Frison et al., 2013, p. 1390). Further research is warranted to understand the relationship between influencer behavior, viewer perceptions, the type of fitness content consumed, and steroid use patterns.

Lastly, it can be concluded that the discourse surrounding steroid use on YouTube lacks a cohesive consensus among influencers, as evidenced by the varied and often conflicting viewpoints expressed. This is exacerbated by the prevalence of intertextuality, where influencers critique and respond to the remarks of their peers as well as their own,

further complicating the narrative. While this exchange of ideas contributes to the formation of distinct voices within the fitness community, it also introduces layers of interpretation and skepticism for viewers. This complexity may be particularly challenging for viewers who lack deep familiarity with the subject matter. Compounding this issue is the algorithmic nature of YouTube, where videos and comments reflecting viewers' preexisting opinions are prioritized and displayed prominently (Minseong, 2022, p. 4). Constraints such as the absence of a dislike bar further limit viewers' ability to assess how the videos have been received by the viewers, leaving those with rudimentary knowledge of the topic perplexed by the conflicting positions espoused by influential figures and their followers. This dynamic highlights the need for strategies to combat confusion and misinformation on social media, particularly considering previous findings indicating that regular gym users primarily seek information on nutrition, supplements, and training online and on social media (Hilkens et al., 2021, p. 10).

Despite the insights gained from this research, several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, due to the scope of this thesis, the sample size was small. While efforts were made to select influencers representing diverse perspectives, it is important to recognize that there are numerous other influential voices and popular videos discussing steroids on the platform. These additional sources may offer different insights and perspectives not captured within this study. Secondly, it's crucial to acknowledge the potential for human error and subjectivity inherent in discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. As with any qualitative research method, there is a large degree of interpretation involved in analyzing the data (Malterud, 2001, pp. 483–484). Thus, exploring diverse research methodologies, such as triangulation, in future studies could significantly enhance the reliability and validity of findings. By combining discourse analysis with quantitative methods such as surveys or experiments, it would be possible to corroborate qualitative insights with empirical data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of influencer communication on steroids (Aydın-Düzgıt & Rumelili, 2019, p. 300). Additionally, it's important to recognize the presence of personal bias in the researcher's engagement with the subject matter. As the researcher was a viewer of some the influencers examined in this study prior to embarking on the research, personal biases may have influenced the selection process as well as the interpretation of findings.

Future research should expand on this thesis by exploring key areas in greater depth. Firstly, investigating how influencers' ideological stances regarding perceptions of attainable progress and transparency influence followers' decisions and perceptions is crucial. Understanding the psychological mechanisms behind viewers' responses to influencer content could offer insights into behavioral patterns related to steroid use, integrating principles from psychological and behavioral research. Secondly, studying the long-term impacts of influencer discourse on steroid use, including both physical and psychological effects, is essential. Additionally, analyzing the role of social media algorithms in shaping steroid discourse can provide insights into misinformation dissemination and viewpoint reinforcement. Lastly, developing intervention studies to harness the positive aspects of social media in public health communication, as highlighted by scholars such as O'Keefe & Clarke-Pearson (2011, pp. 801-802), could inform strategies for effectively utilizing influencers to promote accurate information and healthy behaviors, ultimately contributing to the reduction of steroid misuse.

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### **Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Use**

ChatGPT, an artificial intelligence tool, was utilized in the creation of this thesis to assist with the structuring of information and to check for clarity and grammatical accuracy. All ideas, interpretations, and conclusions presented are entirely those of the author. Responsibility for the content is fully assumed by the author, and it is affirmed that the AI assistance was limited to the aforementioned tasks.