

# College men find steroids for better game less ethical than stimulants for better grades, study says

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In the eyes of young college men, it's more unethical to use steroids to get an edge in sports than it is to use prescription stimulants to enhance one's grades, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

And [students](#) who had themselves used stimulants without a prescription were more inclined to see such drug use as acceptable, according to the findings, which were published online in the APA journal [Psychology of Addictive Behaviors](#). This is one of the first studies to compare perceptions of off-label prescription drug use with perceptions of [steroids](#) performance enhancers.

"This is consistent with the idea that using performance enhancers is viewed as less ethical in the sporting world than in the academic world," said the study's lead author, Tonya Dodge, PhD, of George Washington University. "Interestingly, the students in our study considered off-label prescription [drug use](#) as more effective for success than using steroids."

Approximately 1,200 college freshmen (73 percent white) at Pennsylvania State University answered a questionnaire that presented two scenarios. One described "Bill," a [sprinter](#) for his college track team who does not have a lot of time to train before the championship meet and is worried he won't be able to improve. He gets steroids from a friend and ends up performing better than expected and wins the

championship race.

The second scenario presents "Jeff," a college student facing midterm exams who is worried that his grades in class may be low. He doesn't have much time to study so he gets some Adderall, a prescription stimulant, from a friend who tells him it will help him focus at exam time. Jeff takes the pills and ends up getting better midterm grades than he expected.

After reading both scenarios, the students were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with four statements: "Bill/Jeff is a cheater for using steroids/Adderall," and, "Taking steroids/Adderall was necessary for Bill/Jeff to do well."

The students were also asked if they had ever misused prescription stimulant drugs, such as Adderall, Ritalin or Dexedrine, or if they had ever used steroids. Less than 1 percent of the sample reported having ever used steroids while about 8 percent said they had misused prescription stimulants in the last 12 months. This compares to 8 percent to 34 percent of college students who have reported misusing prescription stimulants and 1.5 percent of adolescents and young adults who have misused anabolic steroids.

The researchers also asked the men if they had played a sport in high school to determine if that would affect their judgments.

Participants significantly rated Bill, the steroid user, as more of a cheater than Jeff, the prescription drug user. This difference got bigger if the students reported having misused prescription stimulants themselves in the past or if they had played a sport.

Overall, the students were more likely to consider Jeff's Adderall use more necessary to succeed than Bill's steroid use regardless of whether

they had misused prescription stimulants in the past or had played a sport. "One reason students may have felt Adderall was more necessary than steroids for success is because people may believe intelligence is less malleable than athletic ability. This view of intelligence might have led the students in this study to believe that taking Adderall would increase intellectual capacity," said Dodge. "This research can help mold future prevention efforts around off-label prescription [stimulant](#) use in the academic world."

**More information:** "Judging Cheaters: Is Substance Misuse Viewed Similarly in the Athletic and Academic Domains?" Tonya Dodge, PhD, George Washington University and Skidmore College; Kevin J. Williams, PhD, University at Albany, State University of New York; Miesha Marzell, PhD, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation; Rob Turrisi, PhD, Pennsylvania State University; *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, online, April 2012.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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