

Men focused on muscle building struggle with binge drinking and other problems

November 8 2018



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Young men who are overly preoccupied with building muscle have a significantly higher risk of depression, weekend binge drinking, and dieting that is not connected to obesity. They also have four times the probability of using legal and illegal supplements and anabolic steroids, a new study from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) and Harvard University has shown.

The study also shows that 10 percent of men have what is thought of as the more common type of [body](#) image disorder. That is, they think they are too fat and want to be thinner. According to the study, more than one in three [young men](#) have been on a diet in the past year. Their dieting was unrelated to obesity.

The study brings to light many alarming findings. It is the first of its kind in Norway and internationally to investigate men and their relationship to their body and muscles.

The study makes clear that boys and young men struggle much more with body image disorders than we have been aware of.

Want the same body as Cristiano Ronaldo

Trine Tetlie Eik-Nes' study involved 2460 men aged 18-32 years. Men in the study made the following statements:

- "I'm thinking of taking anabolic steroids."
- "I don't think my chest is muscular enough."
- "I feel guilty if I miss a workout."

Eik-Nes is an associate professor in NTNU's Department of Neuromedicine and Movement Science. The study was recently published in the *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, and suggests that many young men are preoccupied with a drive for muscularity.

"The problem arises when the bodies of professional athletes like Cristiano Ronaldo become the ideal for regular young men who have jobs, studies and family. Training has to be your full-time job if you want to look like Ronaldo. He belongs to one in a thousand of the world's population who make their living from sports. Some people train as if they were on the national team, but they're only exercisers. This is

the difference we need be concerned about," says Eik-Nes.

She adds, "Girls are supposed to be thin and have small waistlines. Boys should have wide shoulders and big muscles. Those are the narrow ideals that young people grow up with today. It turns out that this unrealistic body image is as challenging for men as for women."

She believes that the body image challenges facing men have flown under the radar of researchers, parents and health professionals. "We've been aware of young girls and eating disorders for a long time, and how unfortunate it is to grow up with [role models](#) that are so skinny. Studies have been carried out on young men too, but they were asked the same questions as girls. Boys aren't looking to be thin. They want to have big muscles. So the questions given to girls are totally wrong if we want find out how young men see themselves and their own bodies," says Eik-Nes.

Muscles work like cosmetics

Previous studies have shown that boys who are overweight, or thin and lanky, are at greatest risk of developing [body image](#) disorders as young men. The study confirmed this idea, since the men's desire for a muscular body was unrelated to their weight.

According to Eik-Nes, muscles become a form of cosmetics for [muscle](#)-obsessed men. They're not building their strength to ski faster, or to get better at football or to improve their health.

"They're only exercising to build their muscles, without the training having anything to do with muscle function. That's a big difference," she says.

The challenge of being satisfied with your own body is the same across all education levels. People who are highly educated are no more

satisfied with their bodies than anyone else, the study indicates.

Should set off alarm bells

"This drive for muscularity could be a sign that young men don't have mastery over their lives, but they may feel that they're mastering how to work out. In this context, in simple terms, you could say that girls vomit, while boys are much more preoccupied with exercising than normal," says Eik-Nes.

She emphasizes that exercise in itself promotes health. It's when training takes over life that it can be problematic.

"Parents' alarm bells should go off if they have a youngster who's at the gym everyday, who just wants to eat chicken and broccoli and who consumes protein shakes or supplements all the time. If their whole world is about their workouts, parents should take the time to talk with them—for example, by asking questions about what they're actually training for," Eik-Nes says.

Young American men were the respondents for the study, which was conducted in the United States.

"The culture and the role models in the Western world are largely the same. I don't think Norwegian men would answer much differently than the American men did. This is the first study ever that shows the relationships between the desire for muscles among men and the risks this may entail. Now we have to go ahead and investigate the extent of the problem, the risk factors and treatment options," says Eik-Nes.

More information: Trine Tetlie Eik-Nes et al, Prospective health associations of drive for muscularity in young adult males, *International Journal of Eating Disorders* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/eat.22943](https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.22943)

Provided by Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Citation: Men focused on muscle building struggle with binge drinking and other problems (2018, November 8) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-11-men-focused-muscle-struggle-binge.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.