



THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MASCULINITIES

ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS
FOR GENDER EQUALITY

THE ROOSEVELT HOTEL
NEW YORK, NY

Presentation:

*“Doing Drugs, Doing Masculinity:
using researcher made artwork to creatively
communicate findings from PhD research exploring the
role of recreational illicit drug use in the production of
Irish masculinities.”*

By

Clay Darcy



School of Sociology, University College Dublin, Ireland

Friday 6th March 2015

Personal Intro & Overview

Good morning everyone, my name is Clay Darcy, I am a PhD candidate in the School of Sociology, University College Dublin, Ireland. This morning I am going to present to you some initial findings from my PhD research, of which I am still in the early phases. My research seeks to explore Irish men's views on, and experiences of, illicit recreational drug use and how this relates to Irish masculinities.

My initial analysis of focus group data has been part expressed through a series of two-dimensional painted artworks and drawings that I have made, like this one here '*Irish Men*', which depicts my sample population.

Slide 2: Painting '*Irish Men*' – A Representative Sample



I have utilized my undergraduate training in the visual arts to augment my post-graduate studies in sociology. I have used the mediums of painting and drawing to aid the analytical and reflexive processes to develop a deeper understanding of the research data. My intention in creating such artwork and showing them to you this morning, is to invite you the spectator, to visually engage with the subject of my sociological enquiry: the relationship between Irish men's recreational use of illicit drugs and the display, production or maintenance of specific masculinities.

In this morning's presentation I will provide a brief background to contextualize this research, I will outline my methodology and what my initial analysis of the data reveals.

It is important to stress that my research is concerned with Irish men's recreational use of illicit drugs and *not* addicted / problematic drug use. Irish men are twice as likely than women to use illicit recreational drugs, such as, cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy (IFP, 2012; IFP, 2013; IFP, 2014). Irish men's recreational use of illicit drugs is very much under researched, particularly from a masculinities and gender perspective.

Slide 3: Drawing '*Men Who Stare At Beer*' –

Entwinement of Alcohol and Masculinity



This drawing the '*Men Who Star at Beer*' illustrates the starting point for my research, and depicts the well-established link between men and alcohol. Many scholars have explored the relationship between alcohol and masculinities (Lemle & Mishkind, 1987; Canaan, 1996; Gough & Edwards, 1998; Campbell et al, 1999), revealing that for many men their alcohol use is significantly entwined in their accomplishment of specific masculinities (Campbell, 2000; Peralta, 2007; Kimmel, 2008; Thurnell-Read, 2001a, 2001b, 2012).

This established link between alcohol and masculinities is important for my research, as it demonstrates that for some men, recreational drug use in the case of alcohol, contributes to their construct of masculinity. My research attempts to go one step further and explore whether a similar relationship exists with illicit recreational drugs.

Research Design & Methodology

For this research a qualitative grounded theory methodology is being used, combining focus groups with in-depth interviews as methods of data collection. Focus groups are being carried out with a representative sample of Irish men, and it is my initial findings from the first three focus groups that I am focusing on this morning.

Analysis

Slide 4: Analytic and Reflexive Drawings



Painting and drawing are tools that help me think. So, as part of the analytic process I made drawings based on my reading of the data and initial coding, these drawings express my growing understanding of the data and help clarify concepts and build theory. The drawings have been developed into paintings to express initial findings and invite others to visually engage with the research.

Results

In Ireland, a man's inability to maintain bodily control when drunk often results in comments from other men, such as, "*light weight*" (FG1, L: 1053) or "*one can man*" (FG1, L: 1055). These comments serve to undermine a man's masculinity, the implication is the lightweight or one can man, is not man enough to maintain bodily control. Some men use these comments to position themselves over other men, thus subordinating the recipient. What emerges from my focus group data is a similar phenomena existing in relation to a man's use of illicit recreational drugs; namely, cannabis.

Comparable comments emerged from the focus group data, including, the "*green machine*" (FG1, L: 1058) or going "*green*" (FG1, L: 940-1). These comments describe how someone can become nauseous from cannabis use. This turning green is viewed in a similar way to a man not being able to hold his drink. Turning green or becoming the green machine is regarded by other men as a lack of bodily control and conversely a lack of masculinity.

Another indication of the link between illicit recreational drug use and specific masculinities is demonstrated through the focus group participant's reasoning that Irish men's illicit recreational drug use '*is always competitive*' (FG1, L: 990), and that this competitive drug use "*happens everywhere*" (FG1, L: 934). Men's competitive illicit recreational drug use occurs with drugs that are generally regarded as being soft, namely cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine. As one participant put it, you cant really say "*I can do the most needles in one day, like inject the most like*" (FG1, L: 978).

Slide 5: Painting 'Smoking the Green Machine Under the Table' – Irish Men's
Competitive Illicit Recreational Drug Use



The above painting, '*Smoking the Green Machine under the Table*', expresses how men use cannabis to try out-smoke each other, the objective being to smoke the other person "*under the table*" (FG1, L: 954), or see who can "*hit a bong*" the most times (FG2, L: 709-10). Essentially, men out-smoking each other are trying to assert and maintain position over one another. Being able to consume large quantities of drugs or sustain prolonged periods of drug use can accrue "*big man*" status (FG2, L: 681).

Understanding the rationale for men's illicit recreational drug use, and how men deal with the effects of drugs is significant and complex. According to the focus group participants many men take illicit drugs to experience specific effects or to share experiences with peers. For other men, drugs are tools used to maintain a front or to bolster sexual performance.

The painting below, '*Off your face*', represents how in Ireland, there are a multitude of similar expressions to describe the experience of being intoxicated by drugs, such as, *being off your face*, *off your head* or *out of your head*, and so on. Being off your face essentially describes the relinquishment of control and a temporary loss of self, experienced from certain types of drug use. However, what emerges from my data is that some men feel they must maintain some degree of bodily control and functionality while intoxicated.

Slide No 6: Painting '*Off your face*' – Maintaining Control & the Loss of Self



A complete loss of control and loss of self can be viewed by other men as weakness. The objective is to be able to take a lot of drugs, maintain control and then “*brag*” about it (FG1, L: 996). Securing bragging rights by consuming a lot of drugs and maintaining control, allows men to assert their position over other men. According to the focus group participants, for some men, their recreational use of illicit drugs serves to ‘*put on an image that everything is fucking brilliant*’ (FG3, L: 1291) or to fulfill their ‘*sexual appetite*’ (FG3, L: 1292).

Slide No 7: Painting ‘Drug Heads’ – Gendering of Drug User Typologies



Emerging from the focus group data are strongly formed drug user typologies; such as the ones in this painting – *smack head*, *coke head*, *head case*, *thick head* and *pill head*. These typologies center around specific drugs and the physiological effects of drug use; such as, junkie or smack head for heroin user, pill head for tablet user, stoner for cannabis user and so on. Other typologies, such as, head case or thick head are more descriptive of types of intoxication and drug effects experienced. These typologies are complex. Based on the focus group data there are contradictory views regarding the gendering of these typologies. It would appear the greater a man's exposure to women's drug use, the less gendered these typologies are, and the more interchangeable they become for women and men.

For those focus groups participants who had little exposure to women's drug use; drug user typologies were strongly gendered as masculine. Stoner was only applied to men and the participants expressed in their view "*stoner would be lads*" and that they had "*never heard anyone call a girl a stoner*" (PFG, L: 181-2). In contrast, participants who had higher levels of exposure to women's drug use applied these drug user typologies equally to women and men.

Conclusion

This morning I hope to have illustrated that, men's recreational use of illicit drugs is complex, but what does appear from my data is that within the Irish context there is a link between certain types of illicit recreational drug use and specific masculinities. For some men, doing drugs is a means of doing masculinities; through competitive drug taking, by bragging about bodily tolerance to drug effects, using drugs to maintain a front, and using drug taking as a means of accruing status and subordinating other masculinities. This complex link between doing drugs and doing masculinities will hopefully unfold in more depth as my research continues.

Thank you for listening!

Suggested Citation: Darcy C. (2015) 'Doing Drugs, Doing Masculinities', *International Conference on Masculinities: Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality*. New York City, NY, March 6th 2015.

Note: All artwork copyright of © Clay Darcy, 2015 – All rights reserved.

References:

Campbell, H., Law, R. and Honeyfield, J. "What it means to be a man': Hegemonic masculinity and the reinvention of beer." In: Law, R., Campbell, H. and Dolan, J.C. (1999) (Eds.) *Masculinities in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.

Campbell, H. (2000) 'The Glass Phallus: Pub(lic) Masculinity and Drinking in Rural New Zealand', *Rural Sociology*, Vol. 65, (4), pp. 562-581.

Canaan, J.E. (1996) "One thing leads to another": drinking, fighting and working class masculinities, In: Mac an Ghaill, M. (1996) *Understanding Masculinities – Social Relations and Cultural Arenas*, Buckingham: Open University Press.

Gough, B. and Edwards, G. (1998) 'The beer talking: four lads, a carry out and the reproduction of masculinities', *The Editorial Board of The Sociological Review*, (1998), pp. 409-435.

Irish Focal Point (IFP) (2012) *2011 National Report (2010 Data) to the EMCDDA by the Reitox National Focal Point, Ireland: new developments, trends and in-depth information on selected issues*, Dublin: Health Research Board.

Irish Focal Point (IFP) (2013) *2013 National Report (2012 Data) to the EMCDDA by the Reitox National Focal Point, Ireland: new developments and trends*. Dublin: Health Research Board.

Irish Focal Point (IFP) (2014) *2014 National Report (2013 Data) to the EMCDDA by the Reitox National Focal Point, Ireland: new developments, trends*. Dublin: Health Research Board.

Kimmel, M. S. (2008) *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, London: Harper.

Lemle, R. and Mishkind, M.E. (1989) 'Alcohol and Masculinity', *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, Vol. 2, (1989), pp.213-222.

Peralta, R.L. (2007) 'College Alcohol Use and the Embodiment of Hegemonic Masculinity among European American Men', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 56, May 2007, pp.741-756.

Thurnell-Read, T. (2011a) 'Common-sense research: Senses, emotions and embodiment in researching stag tourism in Eastern Europe', *Methodological Innovations Online*, Vol. 6, (3), pp. 39-49.

Thurnell-Read, T. (2011b) 'Off the Leash and Out of Control: Masculinities and Embodiment in Eastern European Stag Tourism', *Sociology*, Vol. 45, (6), pp. 977-991.

Thurnell-Read, T. (2012) 'What Happens on Tour: The Premarital Stag Tour, Homosocial Bonding, and Male Friendship', *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 15, (3), pp. 249-270.