

**Here are the Drug Takers:  
Men, Masculinities and Illicit Recreational Drug Use.**

**Abstract**

Despite the significant gender disparity in Ireland's illicit drug landscape, this thesis argues that, men's gender invisibility has contributed to their predominance as drug users being overlooked and under-examined from a masculinities standpoint. To address this knowledge gap, the study makes visible men's drug taking as a gendered activity, revealing how masculinities and men's recreational use of illicit drugs converge. The research utilised a combined theoretical and analytical approach, incorporating masculinities theory as the primary lens, whilst also drawing from symbolic interactionism and sociological theories of drug use. The study employed a qualitative methodology. Nine focus groups were carried out with Irish men exploring their views on Irish masculinities and illicit drug use. In addition, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with men who identified as illicit recreational drug users, exploring their drug taking histories and drug experiences.

This study revealed a complex tapestry of interwoven connections, symbolisms and meanings between masculinities and men's recreational use of illicit drugs. The drug takers in this study used illicit drugs for a variety of reasons, some of which related to pursuing, maintaining or contravening conventional or hegemonic masculine behaviours. The research uncovered varied rationales for men's drug taking, which provide new explanations for men's propensity to engage in illicit recreational drug use. The central argument of the PhD is that illicit drugs are symbolic social objects that men can use to communicate messages about their masculine identity. By ascribing gendered meanings to their drug taking, men's recreational use of illicit drugs becomes part of their gender performance. Thus, drug taking men can do masculinities by doing drugs. However, not all drug taking contributes to masculinities and not all men view drug taking the same way. Therefore this PhD argues, depending on the situated perception and interpretation of the observer, men's drug taking can be perceived as enhancing and/or detracting from masculinities.

**Clay Darcy**

School of Sociology, University College Dublin, Ireland.