

EDITORIAL:

The study of risky or risk-seeking behaviour of young people, generally, has increased tremendously, especially, since the past ten years. This followed the attention and interest in the light of what effectively was increased reporting of anti-social behaviour in most countries in Europe, and, in the United States and continued concern about young people's health in many countries in Africa because of the spread of HIV/AIDS. As most of the studies show, risky behaviour is not only an expression of personal preferences but also has a symbolic meaning and may be a source of personal gratification and enjoyment. Lyng (2008)¹, notes that risky behaviour as enjoyment has originally been studied in the context of extreme sports, but this perspective has since evolved to cover everyday activities and decisions such as occupational choices and drug taking. From this perspective, risky behaviour is driven by the need for excitement in light of an otherwise routine life, which offers little gratification outside self-constructed leisure time.

Another perspective is that risky behaviour is a source of social prestige and recognition. Social recognition, has, as a matter of course, long been considered to be an essential aspect of risky behaviour among young people who are seeking acceptance by their peers and or recognition into peer groups, most notably imitative behaviour as suggested by Coleman and Carter (2005).² The related research of how risk is perceived has similarly seen a surge with large volumes of such research validating Beck's claim that in late modernity, there is increasing individualisation and people's perception of risk. Numerous studies of risk perception among young people show that significant in this regard are peer pressure and what are considered desirable and acceptable norms. Taking a cue from this, the study by Asta Rau, Sarah Radloff, Jan K. Coetzee, Carlo Nardi, Ria Smit and Sethulego Z. Matebesi documents risk as perceived by students in three South African universities—it focuses on risk encountered in everyday choices such as sexual behaviour, alcohol use and freedom of association. The study builds upon a previous qualitative research conducted over two years (2008–2009) among Rhodes University (RU) Sociology students. A second—quantitative—phase began in 2010 when findings from the initial phase were used to guide students in designing and piloting a questionnaire. The question they asked is: To what degree do South African students from three different universities regard as being part of their lifeworlds risks associated with heavy drinking, sexual behaviours, racism, financial pressure and academic performance? In conclusion, they argue that post-apartheid South Africa is not different from other societies in late modernity where risk is seen as an ever-present reality that transcends social and geographical boundaries. This resonated in the perceptions of the young adults who participated in the study

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Lyng, S (2008) *Edgework, risk and uncertainty*. In J. O. Zinn, *Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- 2 Coleman, L. and Carter, S. (2005) *Underage 'risky' drinking: motivations and outcomes* York: Rowntree Foundation