



**‘Risk on the dance-floor’: An empirical analysis of
young people’s perceptions of risk associated with
nightclubs, methamphetamine use and young people
in the Adelaide night-time economy.**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of grandpa Ben, nanna Selma, grandpa Roy, aunty Sylvia and uncle Geoffrey. Though you were not able to complete the journey with me, your unconditional love, support and encouragement gave me strength, showed me humility and inspired me to accept each challenge, work hard and achieve this dream.

I hope that I have made you proud.

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ABSTRACT

In Australia young people's use of nightclubs has recently garnered substantial media and government policy attention due to a perceived increase in the use of illicit drugs such as methamphetamines in these leisure venues. This study sought to gain a deeper understanding of young people's risk perceptions and how they frame their nightclub use and, for some, the use of drugs. Specifically, this research examined to what extent their perceptions, and thus ultimately their leisure practices, are guided by lay models of risk-thinking, the normalisation of methamphetamine use in Adelaide nightclubs, and the characteristics, values and expectations of this social context. This research constitutes the Perception of Risk framework developed in this thesis.

To achieve this level of analysis, a mixed-method approach was employed with a sample of 549 young people in Adelaide, South Australia. Following an initial pilot study the main research used quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews and ethnographic participant-observation to collect data from 460 young people who attended one of five prominent Adelaide nightclubs during a 54-night period in 2010. In total 457 surveys and 22 interviews of drug users and non-drug users were completed that collected demographic data and evaluated their patterns of nightclub attendance, leisure practices, and methamphetamine use (perceived and actual), and perceptions of risk associated with nightclubs and drug use. This represents an original methodological approach and a first step in addressing the paucity of grounded research in this area.

Using the Perception of Risk framework the data obtained identified three pervasive themes perceived as having significant influence on young people's perceptions of risk: (1) the development of alternative forms of risk knowledge, (2) the use of risk management strategies and (3) a shift in leisure consumption ideals in the nightclub. The data also highlights the value of a bottom-up approach to understanding young people's perceptions of risk, as it not only impacts how drugs should be perceived/managed in the nightclub but also highlights the need for a broader acknowledgement of risk and other concerns within these venues. In addition, the use of informal risk management strategies by these young people

suggests that they perceive that there are effective controls that enable risk-reduced recreational forms of drug use and challenges current zero tolerance policy approaches. The data also indicates a substantive shift in the purpose and meaning of the nightclub as a site of leisure consumption for these young people. In this redefined environment drug use appears to have a limited role, suggesting the creation of a new youth profile that has moved away from traditional associations with deviance previously attached to this nightclub-drug use behaviour. Collectively, these themes demonstrate the need for a different approach to Australian drug policy that takes into account the changing nature of drug use in certain settings, particularly the nightclub, and incorporates lay perspectives and experiences in the development of realistic harm-minimisation strategies. This thesis argues that only by the adaption of this broader approach will a more effective, appropriate and situated response to young people's nightclub drug use in Australia be achievable.

DECLARATION

“I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text”.

Signature: _____

Date: 07 – 08 – 2013

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACC _a	Adelaide City Council
ACC _b	Australian Crime Commission
ACS	Australian Customs Service
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANCD	Australian National Council on Drugs
ATS	Amphetamine-type substance
AUD	Australian Dollars
CBD	Central Business District
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CMC	Crime and Misconduct Commission
DJ	Disc Jockey
DASSA	Drug and Alcohol Services of South Australia
DUMA	Drug Use Monitoring in Australia
EDRS	Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System
GCDP	Global Commission on Drug Policy
IHRA	International Harm Reduction Association
LEA	Law Enforcement Agency
NDARC	National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre
NDRI	National Drug Research Institute
OCBA	Office of Consumer and Business Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OLGC	Office of the Liquor and Gambling Commissioner
OMCG	Outlaw Motor-Cycle Gang
PDI	Party Drug Initiative
PSE	Pseudoephedrine
POR	Perception of Risk
REU	Regular Ecstasy User
SBREC	Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee
SAPOL	South Australian Police
UK	United Kingdom
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States

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“...it’s not perfect...but it’s mine”.