



**‘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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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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7 August 2013

## **DEDICATION**

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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

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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

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“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

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACC <sub>a</sub>	Adelaide City Council
ACC <sub>b</sub>	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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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Completing this PhD has been a challenging, yet also very personally fulfilling experience for me. What is most important to me is the acknowledgement that it simply would not have been possible without the help and support of a number of people, to whom I owe so much. Therefore, while I fear that my words could never convey just how much it means to me, I need to express my deepest thanks and sincere gratitude to the following people.

Firstly, I thank my principal supervisor Associate Professor Marinella Marmo (School of Law, Flinders University), for her ongoing support and unwavering commitment throughout my candidature, and in particular for her positive attitude and enthusiasm to see me achieve this goal. I believe that her attention to detail, research style and openness have contributed greatly to the quality of this thesis. Marinella, not only have you have taught me so much, but you have also challenged me to grow and learn about who I am. Your care, support and friendship have been truly appreciated, especially through the difficult times, and for that I am eternally grateful. I know that you are just as happy as I am to see the conclusion of this part of the journey, and so I wish you all the best in the future. I will sincerely miss working with you, and taking over your office, but know that we will continue to keep in touch.

Secondly, I thank my co-supervisor Dr Rhain Buth (School of Law, Flinders University), for his research skills, firm-but-fair attitude and for providing guidance when it was needed. Rhain, since 2009 I have learnt so much from you. Your guidance and support that has been greatly appreciated and will be sincerely missed; in particular your pictorial meeting notes (the ‘cone’), your willingness to chat, and your belief that I could achieve this goal. I wish you all the best with Ashleigh and Cassia (‘CKSB’), may they continue to make you smile.

Lastly, it would be remiss of me if I did not acknowledge Professor Andrew Goldsmith. Andrew, thank you for your efforts as my initial co-supervisor, and the part you played in the early conceptualisation and development of this

research project. I wish you all the best for your return to the Law School and look forward to keeping in touch.

At this point I should acknowledge that postgraduate research, particularly empirical research, would not be possible without the support, financial and otherwise, of the institution in which it is based. As such, I thank the Postgraduate Research Scholarship scheme and the Scholarships Committee at Flinders University for the (FURS) scholarship they awarded me from 2008-2011. Secondly, I thank the Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law, for their ongoing support and financial assistance, particularly in providing the funding that enabled the collection of valuable data in the field, within the Adelaide nightclub scene, and the dissemination of results at relevant criminology conferences in Australia. Last but certainly not least, I express my sincere gratitude to David Bamford (former Dean of Law) and the teaching staff of the Law School, who embraced this study and demonstrated genuine interest in this research project. I wish you success in your future projects, and David, I hope that everything goes well for you in your new position.

As I have already noted, this project could not have been completed without the help and support of a number of people, whose willingness and efforts to assist are truly humbling. As such, I express my sincere thanks to:

Professor Mark Halsey (School of Law, Flinders University), for his assistance in the conceptualisation and development of the quantitative survey instrument.

Ms Jo Heffernan, for her persistence and determination in 'dealing with' the numerous issues posed by the unintended 'water feature' in room 3.27. I am pleased to say that the problem has now been resolved. I also thank you for your friendship and support throughout this process, and especially for making me laugh when I needed it most.

Mrs Karen Jacobs, who as Faculty Research Coordinator (Research Higher Degrees) has provided wonderful support and has encouraged the development of a strong postgraduate research presence in both the School and the Faculty. Thank

you for making sure that I had – and completed – all of the relevant forms, and for being so approachable.

Mr Mark Neuling, who edited this thesis in accordance with the relevant University standards and guidelines. Mark, you have once again demonstrated the strength and depth of our friendship, for which I am truly grateful and continue to be humbled by. I wish you all the best in your writing, and look forward to building on our friendship.

Another important feature of my research journey, which I believe has not only contributed greatly to its overall success, but also the level of enjoyment I experienced each day during this period is that of the Criminal Justice team, which I have been a part of for the last six years. I am extremely grateful for the teaching opportunities, skill development and research experience that Professors Willem de Lint, Mark Halsey and Mark Israel and Associate Professor Derek Dalton have afforded me. More importantly, however, I thank you for the friendship, guidance and day-to-day support that you have given me, and all of the postgraduate students: that you always have time for us is remarkable and greatly appreciated.

As the first postgraduate student in criminology in the School, I have also had the pleasure of watching the postgraduate team expand to the group that it is now, which I believe is a key part of the School's success. As such, I would like to thank all of the postgraduates in Law, Criminal Justice and Legal Studies and wish you well in your studies. In particular, I want to express my sincere gratitude to Mr Rhys Aston, Mrs Nerida Chazal, Mrs Kylie Doyle, Miss Rhiannon Bandiera, Mr Jeremy Ryder, Mr Adam Pocrnic, Mrs Sue Jarrad and Mr Wondwassen Kassa. To Nerida, Jeremy, Rhiannon, Kylie and Rhys, I have truly enjoyed getting to know you and cherish our friendship, which I know will extend beyond the PhD. Thank you so much for being so pleasant to share an office with (the 'A Team'), for being there when I needed support and for being truly wonderful people – it has been a privilege.

I extend my gratitude to my Mum, Dad, and brother Stuart for the combination of encouragement, perspective, and constructive criticism that you have all offered to me throughout this journey. Thank you for keeping me grounded, for reminding me that there are bigger things in life than a PhD, and for making me take frequent breaks to do the dishes. The last few years have been difficult for us as a family, but I know that we will come through it far stronger and closer together. In this way, I am also thankful for the arrival of my gorgeous niece Elyssa to the family – thank you for making me smile. Importantly, I thank my Claire and little Eddie for their love and support, especially in the difficult times; you are truly beautiful and words cannot express how much you mean to me.

Finally, and most importantly, I must acknowledge the participants who facilitated the success of this research project. I am deeply grateful for the incredible insights you have given me about your lives, particularly when they were not always easy to give or reminded you of more troubled times. Thank you for giving up your time – without your efforts, this project could not have been achieved.

It would be remiss of me to forget to mention the music that has helped me through the last four and half years, which has often reflected the ups and downs of the process and provided me with a much needed outlet. However, although the styles during this time were many and varied it is unnecessary to list them here; rather I want to conclude – as a promise to Kylie Doyle – with a line from the Tim Minchin song *Not Perfect*, which I feel aptly summarises both the research journey that this thesis represents, as well as my overall life journey, in which I am about to take the next step:

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