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SUI GIOVANI E L'ALCOOL

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13

# **MONITORING RISK IN YOUNG PEOPLE**

A TEST FOR PREVENTION IN EUROPE

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SUI GIOVANI E L'ALCOOL

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# **MONITORING RISK IN YOUNG PEOPLE**

A TEST FOR PREVENTION IN EUROPE



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## Foreword

Both the individual and the collective human behaviour are an extremely complex universe, still very difficult to decode.

From the ethic-philosophical dimension, which for centuries has been the only key of interpretation, we passed to an inter-disciplinary reading where the microbiological, psychological, psychoanalytical, sociological and anthropological-cultural research widened the field of the exploration and introduced several new ways of interpreting.

In the old but still actual saying «video meliora probaque et deteriora sequor»<sup>1</sup> we didn't limit ourselves to deepen the moral or religious or philosophical dimension, but it became urgent to understand its reasons. Because in spite of the residual awareness of what, according to the collective norm or the self-consciousness, is regarded as «right» they make completely opposite choices which can put in danger the quality of life or even life itself.

In a social reality where the «vital» space of the individual is more and more narrowed by overpopulation and the individual as well as collective behaviour are more and more inter-dependant, the consequences of the «wrong» individual choices gain an increasing echo in the community, while the normal ones are mostly ignored.

<sup>1</sup> «I see the best things but I follow the worse ones»

Paradoxically, if on the one hand the freedom of individual choice greatly increased, on the other hand the possibility of applying this freedom are more and more conditioned by the consequences of these choices on the community.

Experience, education, sharing the collective norms rule the majority of our individual choices. Nevertheless the management of the limit between security and danger, right and wrong, pleasure and health is conditioned by many individual and collective variables which make very difficult to understand certain phenomena.

Risk is a permanent dimension of the human condition but in our time it reached a level of occurrence increasingly conditioned by a very technological quality of life. That is why in the processes of operational choices there are not only the so called rational capacities that suggest the behaviours, but also many individual and collective factors ranging from the functional integrity of the brain system to the deep unconscious conditionings to the environmental «pressure», interfering with the «rational».

If the mechanism of perception and evaluation of the risky situations is complex in the adults, it is obviously more complex in the adolescents. Here the risk acquires a wider value because it is linked to the psycho-physiological process of growth when the biological and, most of all, psychological factors play a very important role.

In the fulfilment of one of its institutional tasks, the prevention of alcohol abuse in the young people, the Observatory on Youth and Alcohol had to face the problem of the young people risky behaviours, not only in relation with alcohol but also with driving, use and abuse of substances, ordalic challenges.

The process of atomisation of the contemporary society

transfers to the individual the responsibility for his own behaviours, thus reducing and/or making less permeating the collective norms.

The promotion of the individual freedom resulted into an impoverishment of the social codes of behaviour. How do young people live this process? How do they make theirs the individual freedom/responsibility relation towards themselves and the community? How do young people live the social codes? Or better, what kind of relation is there between the social codes young people try to build up in their social environment and those that the adult society has structured and tries to impose? And furthermore, how is the evolution of these social codes of behaviour in a society that has to face continuous changes? Who is the educational agent (Formal operators? Informal operators? Media?) able to influence and promote young people safe behaviours? Who or what is able to orient the social codes in a recognisable way to the extent of being the object of preventive interventions?

These are some of the basic questions that the Observatory decided to analyse by working out new projects of prevention of alcohol abuse among young people.

In order to better understand some trends we thought it was important to deepen by an inter-disciplinary approach, the meaning of the term «risk» in the frame of the process of growth of the adolescent, meant both as an individual and social group.

In our times, the trend to protract in different ways the adolescential «limbo» on the one hand makes less attractive the «exploring» side of the phase of passage; on the other hand it favours a process of homogenisation and consumistic adaptation.

The loss of conflict, the acritical adaptation to the world of

the adults, their excessive protection, result into slowing down the process of identification and, accordingly, that of responsibility towards themselves and the others.

In this way the risk innate in the «exploration» and «adventure» which is part of the process of maturation, turns into a «challenging risk» against homogenisation, where the lack of «tests» brings to a distortion of the scale of judgement and perception of risk in the control of the individual and collective behaviour.

The aim of the Observatory was therefore working out a research project that would allow to explore from a European and inter-disciplinary point of view these aspects of young people risk taking behaviour. The first step was the constitution of a European working group formed by agencies and institutions with a long time experience in this field. They are:

*IFT Munich*

*Alcohol and Drug Addiction Unit Valencia*

*Panteion University Athens*

*University of Rennes 2*

*Alcohol Problems Clinic Royal Edinburgh Hospital*

*Observatory on Young People Discomfort - Cooperative "Rifornimento in Volo", Rome*

The choice of the European dimension was suggested from the need of not only gaining a cultural enrichment, resulting from the different experiences, but also creating a network which would allow, in a long term view, to carry out a permanent monitoring of the evolution of the risky behaviours in the European youth world.

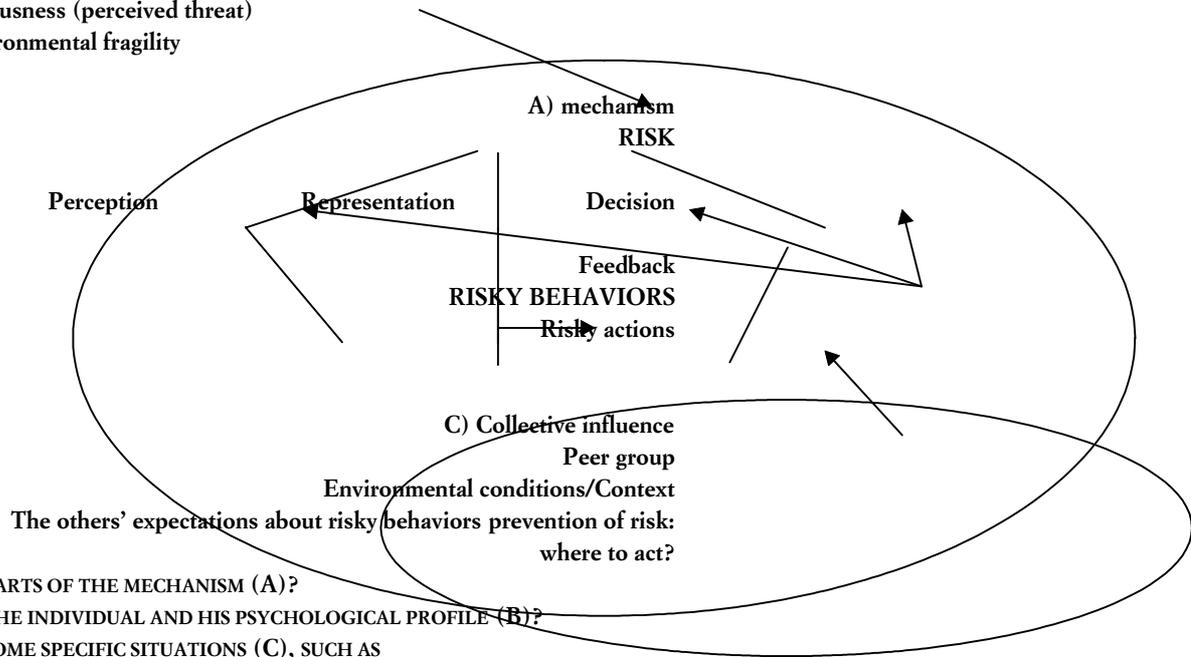
The aim of monitoring forced to reconsider the meaning of the risk, redefine its phenomenology and identify the common methodologies of study.

As a «running in» of the long term project we started with a

review of the «risk» universe in each of the countries taking part in the research through a qualitative analysis aimed at fitting the contents of the following scheme.

*Chart of the risky behavior*

**B) Individual influence**  
 Subject's vulnerability  
 Seriousness (perceived threat)  
 Environmental fragility



ON PARTS OF THE MECHANISM (A)?  
 ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE (B)?  
 ON SOME SPECIFIC SITUATIONS (C), SUCH AS  
 The peer group  
 The disco  
 Alcohol and drugs  
 Driving  
 Communication  
 Business hours, ...?

*Prof. Alain Cerclé - Dip. Psychologie Sociale Université de Rennes 2*

In particular it seemed important to divide the analysis of

the phenomenon into risk concept, risk perception, risk evaluation, risk taking behaviours and feedback on risk perception.

Each of these items was deepened taking into account the several variables that can intervene and can range from the individual (personality, experience, socio-economic conditions) to the collective factors (social pressure, cultural models, social organisation, quality of the public life). The research was preceded by a common review of the literature available on this issue.

From the methodological point of view, in this first phase it was agreed to start with a qualitative analysis through focus groups. The different focus groups were organised and managed on the basis of a common approach to which each research team added tools and methodologies according to its own particular competence, such as the field cultural-anthropological analysis carried out by Prof. Madianou in Greece, the analysis of the stories told by the youths of the groups made by Prof. Cerclé, the application of questionnaires by the group of Prof. Bühringer, the psychodynamic deepening analysis by the Italian group, the deepening of alcohol related risk by Dr. Ritson and the sociopsychiatric approach applied by the Spanish group of Dr. Torres.

This book, which opens with a review on the debate about risk by Prof. Carbone including a reasoned bibliography, wants to report the preliminary results of this project not only in order to put the first orientations at disposal of anyone interested but also for stimulating a useful dialogue with those who are directly or indirectly in touch with the Observatory to enrich the contents and smooth the future development of the project.

### *The European comparison*

Comparing the first results of the different country reports, some key concepts seem the same while in other cases the different cultures seem to influence more deeply both the evaluation of risk and the risky behaviours themselves.

Young people between 14 and 22 in France, Germany and Italy consider risk as a positive challenge. On the contrary the Spanish youth give risk a twofold meaning: on the one hand there is danger, on the other amusement. In Greece risk is perceived as a tool of personal growth, while the British link it to an «adrenaline rush». In all cases risk is linked to the search of experience or individual growth.

But what is the reason for the European young people to take risk? In Italy young people take risk in order to be noticed and part of a group, in France they say they look for new experiences, while Greeks and Britons affirm that risk is a part of being young.

Regarding the behaviours mostly considered as risky, the use of drugs appears in every country excepting Italy, where the range is led by the relational problems, and United Kingdom where risky behaviours are more linked to an immediate danger (physical violence, fights, walking on parapets of bridges, or harbour walls) rather than to long term consequences.

When talking about prevention all the young people interviewed believe that the personal experience can help avoiding future risks (the physiologic risk for growing up). Therefore, although in the frame of clear rules, they ask for a space for experimenting and sharing and discussing these experiences with their peers. The adults are entrusted the task of establishing the rules (Italy and Germany), provided that they don't try and take young peoples' roles (Germany). Another need

emerged from the results of the study is that young people want to take part in their own prevention (Italy, Spain, France) also because they stress the inefficiency of the traditional approach which is not as able to really influence risky behaviours as an action promoted by the youths themselves could be.



## COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS IN THE 6 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

156 YOUNG PEOPLE BETWEEN 14 AND 22, INTERVIEWED IN DEPTH BY PSYCHOLOGISTS.27 OF  
THEM DIRECTLY EXPERIENCED RISK  
THE RISK

	CONCEPT	MOTIVATIONS	BEHAVIOURS	PREVENTION
ITALY	CHALLENGE	1.NEED TO BE NOTICED	1.RELATIONAL PROBLEMS	DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY OF THE YOUNGSTERS ON THEIR OWN PREVENTION
	DANGER	2.BEING PART OF THE GROUP	2.DRUGS ABUSE	INFORMATION
	BEYOND THE RULES	3.DEFEATING FEAR	3.DANGEROUS DRIVING	CLEAR RULES AND PUNISHMENTS
GERMANY	CHALLENGE	1.SEARCH FOR FUN	1.TAKING DRUGS TO BE «OUT»	POSSIBILITY OF MAKING EXPERIENCES TO AVOID RISKS
	NEW EXPERIENCE	2.MAKING EXPERIENCES	2.TOUCHING TRAINS	ADULTS SHOULD NOT TAKE YOUTH ROLES
	EXCITEMENT	3.GAINING CONFIDENCE	3.DRIVING DANGEROUSLY	CLEAR RULES AND PUNISHMENTS
FRANCE	CHALLENGE	1.MAKING EXPERIENCES	1.TAKING DRUGS	THE PARTNER IS THE REFERRING FIGURE
	2.BEYOND THE RULES	2.FEELING OF A GROUP	2.CHEATING AT THE EXAMS	THE ADULTS ARE ASSOCIATED TO «REPRESSION»
	3.NEW EXPERIENCE	3.SEARCH FOR FUN	3.DANGEROUS DRIVING	POSSIBILITY OF MAKING EXPERIENCES TO AVOID RISKS
GREECE	1.NEW EXPERIENCE	1.MAKING EXPERIENCES	1.TAKING DRUGS	POSSIBILITY OF MAKING EXPERIENCES TO AVOID RISKS
	2.GROUP RITE	2.BEING DIFFERENT FROM THE ADULTS	2.ALCOHOL ABUSE	TARGETED PREVENTION BY AGE GROUPS
	3.BEYOND THE RULES	3.PROTEST AGAINST THE SYSTEM	3.DANGEROUS DRIVING	DISCUSSION AND SHARING OF THE NEW EXPERIENCES
SPAIN	1.DANGER/AMUSEMENT	1.LOOKING FOR FUN	1.TAKING DRUGS	INFORMATION

	2.CHALLENGE	2.GAINING SELF	2.DISCUSSING WITH THE	DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY OF THE
	E	CON-	TEACHERS	YOUTH ON THEIR OWN PREVEN-
		FIDENCE		TION
	3.GROUP	3.SEARCH OF AT-	3.TAKING PART IN FIGHTS	MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING WITH
	RITE	TENTION		ADULTS
UNITED	1.EXCITEME	1.MAKING NEW	1.WALKING ON PARAPETS OF	TRADITIONAL PREVENTION DOESN'T
KINGDO	NT	EXPE-	BRIDGES	AFFECT RISKY BEHAVIOURS
M		RIENCES		
	2.BEYOND	2.FEELING PART	2.PLACING BRICKS ON RAIL-	PREVENTIVE MEASURES SHOULD AIM
	THE	OF THE	WAY LINES	AT REDUCING HARM
	RULES	GROUP		
	3.AMUSEME	3.SEARCH OF AT-	3.THROWING STONES TO THE	INFORMATION
	NT	TENTION	RUNNING VEHICLES	

### *What to do? Suggestions for a prevention policy*

One of the few common elements emerged in all the countries considered is the evaluation of the preventive actions: the youngsters ask for rules and relevant punishments, target information not pedagogical, and most of all space to experience and direct involvement. Those elements should be taken in mind working out a prevention policy which, to be effective should

*Promote campaigns based on the youth language*

*Allow and stimulate the active participation of the youngsters in the preventive actions*

*The preventive message should have affirmative contents not focusing on damage but on motivations («warm» message)*

The next phase of this project will consist in working out and testing local policies of risk prevention in the European countries with a common methodology and strong local features in the contents. The future steps will aim at creating a standardised tool for monitoring risky behaviours which, on annual basis, could follow the paths of risk taking by young people in order to work out effective policies not only of harm reduction but mostly for heightening the threshold of the perceived risk.

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## Risk and Youth: Ambiguities and Paradoxes

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In recent decades adolescence and its travails have received increasing attention; in the 1990's in particular a notion somewhere between the sociological and the psychopathological has continued to gain credit - the notion of «risky behavior».

As is immediately evident from the present, albeit incomplete bibliography the number of publications dealing with the subject is imposing, and includes both articles and systematic, exhaustive monographs<sup>2</sup>.

To attempt to summarize such a vast amount of material would have been reductive, and since many of the more important publications are readily accessible for consultation I have chosen instead to highlight the ambiguities and paradoxes inherent in our society's approach to youth, to the culture of the young and to the dangers young people are exposed to.

### *1. Risk: An Ambiguous Notion*

Last August two tragic events captured the attention of the

<sup>2</sup> In English-language literature I suggest M. Plant and M. Plant, 1992 [1]; N. J. Bell and R. W. Bell, 1993 [2]. In

French literature: A. Tursz et al., 1991 [3]; M. Choquet and S. Ledoux, 1994 [4]. In Italian literature: F. Giori, 1998

[5]; A. Maggiolini and E. Riva, 1999 [6].

news media: the death in Switzerland of 19 excursionists during the course of a canyoning expedition in the gorges of Saxet-Bach, and the death in Italy of three Scouts swept away by floodwaters in the middle of the night when caught sleeping in a tent pitched above a riverbed.

I cite these two events because, above and beyond the usual indignation over the loss of youthful lives, I was struck by how in the ensuing debate the terms «risk», «accident» and «fault» were given a great variety of meanings. Specifically, the partisans of those proclaiming the «innocence» of those involved (such as the newspaper stating, *«we do not condemn them, it was an accident!»*) contrasted the concept of *risk* as the prediction of a *probability* with the idea of *risk* as *fault*. The reasoning seemed to be as follows: since the persons involved certainly had no intention either to do harm to others or to themselves, consequently no *fault* is to be found; no fault being involved, one ought not to speak of *risk*, but of *misfortune*. Thus put, this point of view appears on the abstruse side, while in reality far from just representing an unreasonable minority voice it instead expresses a terminological and conceptual ambiguity which thoroughly permeates our way of thinking and indeed our very culture.

To do soul-searching on the matter of risk thus means grappling with one of the basic concepts in Western culture, the notion of risk in fact harking back to a theory which has progressively come to permeate modern thought – probability theory.

Even if in everyday speech the «risk» theme casts an ominous light and is thought of as an analogue for «danger», *the concept arose as a purely mathematic model*. As an historic fact the notion of risk as probability theory was first elaborated toward the close of the seventeenth century in the peculiar milieu found in the world of professional gambling [7]; it is interesting to note that originally what was meant by «high risk» was simply a gambling situation where in all likelihood

great gain or loss hinged on a toss of the dice.

This model of probability calculation rapidly gained ground; from the birth of large insurance companies in the eighteenth century to the theory of risk assumption in investing, the calculation of risk has become a basic tool not only in the field of production and technology, but in the social sciences and health care as well. Throughout its course in various aspects of the economy and in the administration of public affairs, the concept of risk has always been associated with something undesirable, to the point that it currently designates the negative outcome of an event. Epidemiology, for instance, defines risk as «the probability that an event will take place, which is to say that an individual will become ill or die within a certain period» [8].

And yet, even though the term currently denotes the undesired outcome of an event, the «neutrality» of the original mathematico-probabilty meaning has not completely disappeared. And so it is that an aura of ambiguity has progressively stratified around the concept of risk.

Thus, a problem arises at the outset due to the fact that those who have dealt with risk in adolescence from varying standpoints (including that of Epidemiology, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology) tend to use as though it were univocal a term that instead condenses three very different outlooks: the moral aspect involving culpability [9], the social aspect of danger and the statistico-epidemiological aspect concerning probability [10].

In taking into account this ambiguity Braconnier [11] rightly observes that «the notion of risk is a hazy but necessary concept». It is hazy because it refers to markedly different levels of analysis: What is there in common between the statistical probability of an earthquake and the subjective idea of it among Parisians as opposed to San Franciscans? And yet – he

concludes – the notion of risk is necessary just because it allows the evaluation of the *difference* between *statistical probability* and *emotional representation* of the same.

By making evident the difference between risk and the representation of risk, with this latter consideration Braconnier introduces an element that helps us to take a step ahead in our analysis and which assumes central significance in the comprehension of risk and in prevention.

What relationship is there between the notion of risk and its representation? What does «the difference» that Braconnier mentions consist of? What it made me think of was an event that occurred several years ago which makes plain the importance of the question.

At that time I was a psychiatric adviser at the Hematology Clinic where, working in tandem with the physicians, one of the regular duties was the delicate business of the communicating the diagnosis. A hematologist colleague brought up for group discussion the incomprehensible reaction – for him – of a young female stricken by leukemia.

In brief, what had happened was this: in the course of examinations the patient had by stages come to learn what the diagnosis was, at which point she showed herself to be both informed and meditative; when the prospect of intense chemotherapy was laid out to her, she asked what were the chances of obtaining a cure. With the air of giving good news he told her that the probability was somewhere in the neighborhood of 50%. «That's too low!» firmly pronounced the girl, refusing the cure and demanding to be released.

This episode dramatically provides the measure of the *difference* between *probability* and *the perception of probability*, a difference which – as is evident in the episode I have narrated – may be fatal to ignore.

I shall come back to this episode, but the importance of making clear the difference between risk and the perception of the same merits a brief digression into the field of Anthropology, a field where the work of Mary Douglas *on the acceptability of risk* [9, 12] offer us a valuable perspective.

Douglas contrasts probability studies of risk analysis with the anthropologico-cultural point of view, which interprets risk perception «as a standardized cultural reaction» [9]. Risk, then, *is not «perceived»* (as a danger is perceived) but rather *«is defined as being acceptable or not by society as a whole*. When a community aspires to cultural homogeneity it starts signaling its most important choices by use of danger... public interest places a limit on the things worthy of attention, concentrating on certain dangers while ignoring others...; the effect of a culture is to concentrate attention on certain dangers, transforming them into moral guideposts, which is the reason why it is an error to try to study risk acceptability without making any attempt to consider the cultural setting» [12, p. 199]<sup>3</sup>.

The second useful point that Douglas drives home is that probability theorists who work on risk evaluation maintain in absolute good faith that they offer unbiased, objective data, but *«in a given percentage there is very little that is unbiased and objective...*, although people appear to think politically in terms of comparative risks, numbers do not count and the idea of risk gets written off simply as unacceptable danger» [12, p.157].

<sup>3</sup> In this regard Menetrèy [13] notes that the weight of social values is decisive in qualifying risk: the hypothesis might be advanced that the risk run by a business executive or sports figure is generally highly regarded, whereas a slum youth who engages in risky practices is considered a fool: the former are heroes, the latter a "clinical case"; the former are chased by photo-reporters, the latter by the police...".



Getting back to the example of the young woman ill with leukemia, Douglas' viewpoint offers us a valuable tool for the understanding of what happened: above and beyond the personal traits of the patient and the physician (which certainly did count but which we can consider as parenthetical), it is evident how the two different risk evaluations reflect the contrast between the two different cultural universes – the scientific world and the world of youth, which are characterized by radically different perspectives and parameters. That «50%» chance in the eyes of the physician represented the measure of scientific efforts, achievements and success, while for the youthful patient in perfect health up to just a few days previously the very same percentage merely indicated an unacceptable death threat. More generally, the discrepancy between the two perceptions of the same numeric value serves to underscore the scientific world's illusion that it possesses «objective» indicators inasmuch as statistically proven. In fact, (without questioning in the least the correctness of the statistical evaluation formulated by the physician on that occasion) this example illustrates the very point made by the cultural anthropologist, namely that the presumed «neutrality and objectivity» of the percentage given is misleading and puts a mask over intense subjective, affective meanings.

Such ambiguity is not normally made explicit in the literature, but the unease deriving from the widespread intuition that the evaluation and acceptability of risk do not constitute an absolute (but rather a function of different cultural parameters) has had the effect in recent years of causing studies on «youth culture»<sup>4</sup> to multiply; such studies have served to

<sup>4</sup> In Italy alone in the 1990's numerous monographs have been published on the topic; a partial listing follows:

"L'adolescente nella società senza padri", Pietropolli Charmet, 1990 [14]; "Giovani anni novanta. Terzo rapporto

l'ard sulla condizione giovanile in Italia", Cavalli and de Lillo, eds., 1993 [15]; "Giovani e generazioni: quando si

crece in una società eticamente neutra", Donati and Colozzi, eds., 1997 [17]; "Giovani verso il duemila: Quarto

point up the most recent trends: the absence of «rites of passage», the «standardization» of the generations, «prolonged» adolescence, hedonism, the «dictatorship of the present moment», the lesser importance of sexual problems and the greater importance of identity problems....

## 2. *What is the Relation between Risk and the Youth Culture?*

Braconnier [11] stresses that there is a specific basic indicator «in the aversion» to run risks, which aversion progressively increases with age, and which is subject to analysis on the basis of four basic habits: the tendency to choose the safest course of action, the tendency to obtain more information, the tendency to weigh decisions at length and finally the tendency to seek the advice of others.

It is evident that none of the above habits is typical of youth, but the interesting thing about the observation lies first and foremost in its implicit recognition of the cultural relativity of risk. Braconnier does not in fact assign an absolute value to this «aversion». «As a rule», he states, «the risk involved in a given course of action is overrated by older persons and underrated by younger persons, above all when the issue involves something that the young do and the less young can no longer afford to do».

One might say that at bottom the differing attribution of risk to a given situation is one of the current modes of expressing what at one time was referred to as the «generation gap». A familiar example is conflict within the family over the

rapporto Iard sulla condizione giovanile in Italia", Buzzi, Cavalli and de Lillo, eds., 1997 [18]; "Giovani, affettività e sessualità. L'amore tra i giovani in una indagine Iard", Buzzi, 1998 [19]; "Miti affettivi e cultura giovanile", Miscioscia, 1999 [20].

comparative risks of the use of tobacco and hashish, with parents concerned over the dangers of the latter and children using the mortality rates of smokers as a rebuttal (and in effect it is a good question where the greater risk lays)<sup>5</sup>.

In Braconnier's view, then, youth's point of view and capacity to assess risk is simply different but not necessarily less correct than that of adults. Many other authors (e.g., Millstein, 1993 [22]) are of the same opinion, having ruled out a «cognitive capacity defect» in the young as such compared to adults.

Maggiolini [23] specifies that «there does not appear to be any systematic error in the way adolescents weigh costs versus benefits», nor does it seem that the idea of oneself as invulnerable (here I am thinking of the «*personal fables*» Elkind [24] speaks of) is powerful enough in adolescents to cause a substantial underrating of the consequences of their actions. Moreover, analysis of social, cultural and personal data variables (as in *Giovani verso il duemila. Quarto rapporto Iard sulla condizione giovanile in Italia* [18]) rules out that the acting out of risky behavior is attributable to a lack of information or that it is directly caused by individual pathology: the propension to take risks instead appears to be an expression of a specific phase of adolescence and modulated in its manifestations by the evolution of youth culture.

<sup>5</sup> An interesting example of generational diversity in risk perception emerges from studies conducted by

Pietropolli Charmet [21] related to the marijuana smoking prevention campaign in the Province of Milan: From

talks with young people and adults it resulted that the young do not consider "smoke" to be a "drug", but

rather a harmless exotic substance; nor is "smoking" viewed as an attack on adults, but rather the young would

prefer to discuss the matter with their parents, whom they consider "alarmists" out of ignorance. Fathers, on the contrary, are very frightened over "joints" and believe that it would be a very, very serious matter if their

offspring were to smoke.

To speak of a «*propension* to specific phase risk-taking» naturally does not take us very far in our understanding of the problem, but it does help us to identify the heart of it and to make us ask ourselves about the difference between the generic «*tolerance*» [18] or «propension» of the young vis-à-vis risk and the actual acting out of truly *dangerous behavior*, a difference essential to bear in mind and which entails coming to grips with a further element of ambiguity: that inherent to the notion of «risky behavior».

### 3. *Risky Behavior: A «Chewing Gum» Notion*

The notion of «risky behavior» likewise presents itself as a *fluid notion* not readily definable. Using a term that might appeal to adolescents, Bérourd [25] defines such as a «*chewing gum*» category that may expand or shrink according to one's point of view.

The main reason for this «fluidity» is to be found once again in the ambiguity of the concept of «risk», which is further increased by the coupling of the term to a superdetermined manifestation such as «behavior», and to a polymorphous and unsettled period such as «adolescence».

On the other hand, if with Douglas [9, 12] we consider risk as a cultural product, then we must bear in mind all the more that «adolescence», too, is a cultural artifact. Going even further, sociologist Olivier Galland [26] reminds us that adolescence is «one of the best examples of a category produced by social thought and by a consciously structured conceptual elaboration». Even if all cultures recognize a transitory stage from childhood to adulthood, the duration, characteristics and unwritten rules of this phase are infinitely variable. And so even though every society apparently takes for granted the rightness and realism of its own particular vision of adolescence, the ambiguity necessarily inherent in its nature as a construct continuously compels us to ask ourselves not so

much whether any given adolescent is growing up properly (which would be a legitimate question), but rather whether certain adolescent manifestations are «normal» or not.

In dealing with the specifics of the question of «risky behavior» we must in fact at once come to grips with an *impossible question* that no author seems to be able to dodge: How «normal» is it for adolescents to take risks?

Philippe Jeammet [27] entitles an article on the subject: «*L'adolescence est elle un risque?*»; along the same line many authors – apparently unaware of the ambiguity of the term – propose the image of risk as not only physiological but downright necessary.

Cingolani [28] introduces his work *Le risque de s'en sortir* with the following considerations: «risk and adolescence: the risk is not only danger, defeat... and it is no mere happenstance that an old adage observes «Nothing ventured, nothing gained»; I therefore propose to describe risk in the positive sense of the term... and slightly modifying the popular saying I should say that «He who risks nothing, is nothing».

Irwin [29] maintains that «the assumption of risk in middle and late adolescence serves to fulfill the needs of development relating to independence and to the necessity of achieving mastery and attaining individual identity». Along the same line Jack [30] observes that «assumption of risks and experimentation during adolescence are considered normal behavior because they help adolescents to achieve individuality, identity and maturity».

Therefore: *necessary risk in adolescence*. The affirmation is virtually taken for granted, but it is one that does raise a great many questions. What difference is there between metaphor and the concrete act? What is the difference between adventure and danger? What is the difference between the phenomenology of certain behavior and the complexity of the

underlying motivation behind it? What is the difference between «adolescence» as a construct and individual adolescents?

Better than thirty years ago Erikson (1968) [31], in describing the task faced by every adolescent of achieving adult identity, evoked the familiar image of the trapeze artist who must throw himself into the void in order to reach a new hold. But in using this metaphor Erikson does not formulate a theory on the «normalcy» of risky behavior in adolescence, but merely suggests to the reader a state of mind, inviting the same to put himself or herself in the shoes of an adolescent who has to leave behind everything familiar and move on toward a murky future; the physiological adventure of this passage has nothing to do with the hard facts of trapeze artistry or –putting it into today's terms – with jumping or rafting.

Certainly those authors who speak of the «necessity of risking» are aware of the difference between the physiological need to experiment new possibilities and the acting out of truly risky behavior that might result in permanent harm or even death<sup>6</sup>, but nonetheless they appear to be victims of the confusion inherent to both the «adolescence» construct and in the definition of «risky behavior».

This terminological ambiguity which makes us say that during adolescence «risk is normal» constitutes no inconsiderable problem – one I believe is worth dwelling on, all the more so because *words are not neutral conventions* but rather indicators of the direction our actions take and therefore of our society's attitude toward youth and to the dangers to which youth is exposed. I do not believe that it is mere hap-

<sup>6</sup> Ever since the 1960's psychoanalytical literature on adolescence has made plain the difference between the need to act in order to experiment and mechanically compulsive, anti-evolutive acting.

penstance that, as Buzzi [19] notes, «the definition of risk as a negative value has now come to assume a positive connotation as a component necessary for achieving personal success». We ought to ask ourselves whether this terminological ambiguity (between risk as exposure to danger and risk as an expression of boldness) is not a reflection of the substantial ambiguity typical of our culture, which manifests itself as a renouncement on the part of adults to define roles and to assume their proper responsibilities toward the young.

#### 4. *Risky Behavior and Current Cultural Trends*

I am now thinking of an observation arising in the course of one of our research projects on adolescents who have motor vehicle accidents [32]: as we entered into the theme little by little we noticed with increasing concern how the problem went well beyond the imprudence of young people, and we were struck by the fact that their daredevil behavior met with the absolute indifference of the Civic Police regarding the traffic violations committed by the young drivers (it is a commonplace sight to see, for example, motorscooters zooming straight through a red light under the disinterested gaze of the police).

The more public opinion inveighs – excessively – against the way the young behave in the city (they litter, destroy things, make noise, are dangerous...), the less the proper authorities exercise their role and fulfill their function; it is a game of parts where beyond the apparent contrast of tolerance and intolerance adults show themselves to be united in their aggressiveness toward young people whom, when all is said and done, neither are accepted nor get protected.

In the final pages of their book *Risky Behavior in Adolescents* [1] Plant and Plant rightly remind us that «the young are not a separate race... their risks are also society's risks and their behavior reflects that of their parents and other adults in

their environment». In dealing with the same subject Christie and Bruun [33] gave described the function of young people as that of «good enemies»; on the same wavelength are to be found Forni's [34] observations on the youth subsystem as a tiny replica of what goes on in the adult world. If we observe the more common types of risky behavior from this standpoint, the rightness of the foregoing observations hits us in the face.

There is an obvious connection between the cultural trends in industrialized nations and a great deal of the collective behavior of youth; I am thinking of the anonymousness of our metropolises where the lone individual is increasingly less visible, and of the actions intended by «writers» or «bombers» to leave a powerful sign of their identity; I am thinking of the practice of somatic hyperstimulation (piercing, tattoos, alcohol, drugs, deafening music...) which attempt to fill the void of contact and of presence; I am thinking of the need to defy the limit cost what it may («edge workers» in sports, in sexual behavior...) which speaks to us of a society where the myth of globalization and the generational standardization [16] is depriving the young of a needed boundary, of a border indispensable for the structuring of one's Self; I am thinking of all types of «rapacious» behavior (group theft, promiscuous sex, poor food habits...) which mirror the consumerist aspect of a society that constantly arouses a desire for goods destined to disappoint; I am thinking finally of the sort of «Russian roulette» represented by ordeal (young people sprawled in the middle of busy highways, young people clinging to train cars in tunnels...), extreme gestures that tell us of the desperate need to receive a sign from some silent «god» to assure them of the right to be alive.

##### *5. The «Risk» of the Ambiguity of Risk*

That the ambiguity of the notion of «risk» and of «risky behavior» in turn represents a risk is indirectly borne out by the efforts at classification which so many authors have made



in trying to locate the fixed bearings in an overly fluid subject matter.

Authors with a behavioral or cognitive background such as Tonkin [35], Faborow [36], Assailly [37], Zuckerman [38], Human [39], Piccardo [40] and Bandura [41] single out as indices or parameters: *self-destructive behavior, awareness, risk-perception, sensation-seeking, boredom susceptibility, self-empowerment* or *self-efficacy*.

The literature with a psychodynamic orientation – obviously less tied to the phenomenology of behavior – has placed stress on underlying personality traits such as narcissistic frailty, lack of self-esteem, the tendency to act impulsively [32].<sup>7</sup>

Along with the attempts to describe peculiar personality traits, efforts have been made to identify criteria for classification, including the following proposals: 1) classification on the basis of type of conduct (e.g., certain authors ask themselves whether suicide attempts or deeply disturbed eating habits can or cannot be classified among those types of behavior considered risky); 2) classification based on the time that lapses between such conduct and the effect thereof (Holinger [42], for example, describes a continuum running «from a minor daily risk and therefore having delayed effects, to sensa-

<sup>7</sup> In this regard I fully agree with Menetrèy's observation about the need to distinguish "the good risks from the bad risks". In a paper delivered before the "Jeux de risques: enjeux de vie" Congress [13] Menetrèy stresses the peculiar nature of "bad risks"; namely, the dependence involved which is the exact opposite of adventure and experimentation: "dans cette optique la toximania est le contraire d'un risque, la dépendance ne saurais se confondre con l'aventure... elle represente la sécurité obsessionnelle de la répétitions": And, as Freud pointed out so masterfully, compulsive repetition is profoundly tied to the death wish.

tional exhibitions typical of risks with immediate effects); 3) finally, proposals have been advanced for classifications aiming at differentiating behavior according on the «active» or «passive» way of exposing oneself to risk.

Marie Choquet [10], who has been working for years in France on these matters, proposes a risky behavior classification that avoids making a sterile, endless catalogue of actions and attitudes, and instead suggests considering just two categories: problematic types of conduct linked to «acting out» (violence, drug use, high-risk sex...); and conduct concentrating on the body (unjustified consumption of medicines, food-related disturbances....).

But above and beyond this appreciable effort to simplify matters, Choquet also sheds light – negatively – on a core feature of risky behavior, something useful in differentiating it from other types of behavior (such as suicide attempts or deliberate injury to one’s own body): risky behavior (as previously seen in Bell and Bell [2] and in Tursz [43]) in her view is characterized *by an awareness of the possible negative consequences, but by the absence of an intent to do oneself harm.*

Once again the definition is useful, convincing and, thanks to this, reassuring, even though it must be asked how one goes about evaluating a factor as slippery as «intention», all the more so in that the greater part of the research hinges on «behavior» and has been performed on large numbers of subjects using necessarily limited tools such as the questionnaire.

Authors with stronger ties to the clinic than to research (e.g., P. Jeammet [27], A. Braconnier [11], A. Maggiolini [23]) have made an effort to get away from classifications and definitions (and even away from the quicks ands of «intentions»), and have *recognized the uncertain limits* between so-called risky behavior and those types of behavior where the distur-

bance has a frankly psychopathological sense (examples are suicide attempts or food-related behavioral disturbances), or that fit into the vast area of «evolutive risk» (Dryfoos [44]).

It seems, then, that the best definition of «risky behavior» is in the negative, meaning that it turns out to be easier to say what it is not than what it is; on the other hand, how would it be possible to evaluate given behavior «in the absolute»?

#### 6. *Beyond «Risky Behavior»*

In conclusions drawn from research performed for «Beneficial Aspects of Alcoholic Beverages», Bellotto [45] rightly stresses the need to avoid radical splittings in evaluating behavior; viewed in this light the fact that both the positive and negative aspects of alcoholic beverages are seen «in a relationship characterized by balance and in complimentary terms as a function of needs, individual traits and specific context» receives favorable interpretation.

But if it is true that it is important not to demonize risky behavior not in fact marked by «a frankly pathological sense» [27] (which is to say that cannot be considered symptomatic in and of itself), this does not exonerate us from going a step beyond «behavior» to ask ourselves, when an individual adolescent resorts to ecstasy, to an extreme sport or to piercing, what sense it makes and what modalities are involved.

In his recent book *Affective Myths and Youth Culture* [20] D. Miscioscia makes the important statement that «the seeking out of risk has no true and proper cultural backdrop; it rests above all on the compulsive action mechanism and on the need to externalize inner conflicts». It is therefore essential from time to time to try to understand the entity of the

conflicts and the characteristics of the action taken *above and beyond behavioral categories as such*<sup>8</sup>.

In our previously cited research [32] as well – on adolescents who have accidents – in talks with the young people being cared for trauma in an institutional setting it emerged that for each of them the same behavior assumed an entirely individual psychological or psychopathological meaning. And yet, had we used the usual methods for understanding the world of youth – tests and questionnaires – instead of talks with specialists, the nuances necessary in order for true comprehension and for overcoming stereotypes would have escaped us.

The fluidity of the concept of risky behavior is therefore further complicated by the extreme variability of the tools used for evaluating the same.

### *7. But the Complications Do Not End Here!*

But the complications do not end here; going from one ambiguity to the next we at last come to what I would call the «Mother of all ambiguities», the one inherent in the way our society regards youth. The basic problem in the approach to so-called risky behavior derives from the image of defiance and transgression that the adult world associates with the idea of youth and youth-related risk.

<sup>8</sup> For example, regarding extreme sports Miscioscia delineates two categories of potential "consumers" of the same type of risky behavior. The first typology includes self-confident individuals who can claim a mature, thoughtful philosophy of life and have as their ideal an adult attitude of courage and independence, while the second typology is instead comprised of "subjects frightened by life and unable to face the idea of death, which is the cause of their fear to face the more risky and dangerous situations".

I am thinking here of the widespread tendency to view adolescents subject to risk as though they were all potential «edgeworkers», but this point of view is only partially realistic.

It is certainly true that a pattern of risky behavior originates with youth's need for hyperstimulation with powerful sensations and to compulsively seek out limits to the feeling of indefiniteness. Still, one must ask why *the more sensational aspects of risky behavior are exactly the ones which we adults choose to look at*, relegating to a lower plane the other, more frequent but less provocative and transgressive forms of risk-taking, which perhaps for this very reason arouse less emotional involvement and interest in us.

Once more I shall return to the subject of motor vehicle accidents, a subject whose importance is confirmed by European statistics that indicate accidents as the number one cause of death among adolescents. News stories as well as research for the most part tend to emphasize the sensational aspects of the «Saturday night massacres» and the relation between reckless speed and drug use, *forgetting* the important detail that *the greater part of motor vehicle accidents<sup>9</sup> occur within city limits, in situations that do not involve either the excitement of high speed or thrill-seeking, but instead much less heroically are caused by over-tiredness, distraction, inexperience and the failure to use protective equipment such as crash helmets and safety belts.*

In short, here we are dealing with risks involving a failure in self-protection rather than thrill-seeking (the endorphin

<sup>9</sup> The Italian data provided in 1998 by the Osservatorio Sicurezza Giovani indicate that for the most part motor vehicle accidents occur in urban areas and that the most frequent cause (45.6%) is "distraction" and the least frequent cause is driving under the influence (alcohol...).

«hit»), whose dynamics are much closer to a parapraxis than to defiance and transgression.

The adolescents who are involved – at times repeatedly and with serious consequences – in apparently banal motor vehicle accidents in reality represent – as the European statistics show – the major risk category.

Along with them we find young people who contract venereal diseases (or even AIDS) because they are too insecure to insist on safe sex; girls who become pregnant because they lack sufficient self-esteem to protect themselves; all those who smoke, drink or consume drugs in order to be like their friends; all those who neglect their health because they do not accept their body; and those who quit school because they have no hope of being able to attain their goal – in a word, *a majority of youth who risk in silence*.

The fact that this vast phenomenon generally receives short shrift as compared to the attention paid to the more extreme manifestations – even in statistical terms – leads one to believe that the adult world is unconsciously fascinated by the more transgressive, sensational aspects of youth culture. *Piercing, rave, joystick, writers, bombers, edgeworkers...* a thousand exotic and somewhat cryptic terms which arouse curiosity in the «excluded» adult. Beneath the indignant astonishment there is a hidden tendency to act, or at least feel in collusion with the image of the invulnerable, omnipotent child whom so many of the young – but so many of the less young as well – are anguished over losing.

#### *8. Paradoxes of Prevention*

The tendency to emphasize the more sensational aspects of risky behavior has among other things great bearing on the effectiveness of the most important tool available for helping youth – prevention. As early as 1981 Rose [46] had already

pointed out the «*preventive paradox*» in noting that although it is the more extreme cases which run the greatest risks such cases are relatively rare, whereas the greatest preventive impact might be achieved by influencing not the «*extremist*» minority but rather the «*less extremist*» majority.

Along the same line, Plant and Plant [1] indicate a limit to prevention in the «difficulty in identifying, contacting and influencing persons with extreme behavior patterns».

«*The objective that is reasonable to set ourselves*», Maggioni [23] says, «is not the abolition of all risky behavior, but the attainment of a well-balanced vision of the risk-factor relationship...».

In the wake of these authoritative considerations I, too, should like to point out some paradoxes related to prevention.

*The first paradox* lies in «*how*» prevention is planned.

For years and years now research on the effects of information campaigns aimed at prevention have demonstrated the ineffectiveness or even the harmfulness of certain messages.

Beginning as far back as the 1960's with the description of the so-called «*boomerang effect*» (McGuire, 1964 [47]), up to the more recent critical analyses (Freimuti, 1992 [48]; Mannetti, 1997 [49]), many are the authors who have studied and denounced *the limits of projects which fail to avail themselves of the support provided by personal interaction*.

«Campaigns of an exhortatory nature», wrote Plant and Plant [1] after studying the disappointing results of the famous *Heroin Screws You Up* campaign launched in England in the 1970's, «appear to be founded on the political assumption that they are popular and that they transmit a sense of 'official de-

termination' to free the planet of an especially dangerous scourge. In many other countries as well similar efforts have been made accompanied by ringing declarations that the specific problem would be completely eliminated. Events tend to demonstrate just the opposite, namely that fear campaigns are counterproductive, while softer messages are basically useless. *Slogans* of this ilk are merely *empty rhetoric*, because *they absolutely do not take into due account the forces which drive people to assume «risky behavior»*.

For at least thirty years now with the facts in hand these prevention models have come under fire, but despite it all – and herein lies the paradox – the international panorama in this area remains substantially unaltered.

Naturally, fitting and constructive local programs<sup>10</sup> do exist, but for the most part economic resources (let us not lose sight of the fact that grand style educational campaigns are extremely costly) still tend in the direction of slogans and «ringing declarations», or worse yet, *scare tactics*.

*The second paradox* regards the object of prevention, «*what*» is meant to be prevented.

Despite the fact that well-known and abundant research underscores how risky behavior of different types tends to associate (*vide*, for example, Donovan and Jessor [51]; Jessor and Costa [52]; Giori [5]; research performed by the I.S.S. [53]; the findings of the «Enquete nationale» by Choquet and Ledoux [4]), preventive actions are instead still designed to

<sup>10</sup> I am thinking of such events as the impassioned conference "16 Years of Age, More or Less" held a few months prior to this writing in Milan on prevention campaigns conducted in the past decade by the Istituto Minotauro [50].



target individual forms of behavior (smoking, AIDS or whatever). As Maggiolini [23] rightly underscores, it would instead be useful to take «as a focal point for preventive action not so much individual behavior or a situation of risk, *as the relationship of the adolescent with whatever risk as such*».

And this is essential, all the more so since from the longitudinal studies made (*vide*, for example, Choquet [4]) it emerges that not only do risky forms of behavior tend to be associated with one another, but that when one type of such behavior is dropped all too often over time another type of risky behavior will take its place.

*The third paradox* in prevention likewise arises from a discrepancy between what research and the literature indicate and what is actually done. We might call it the paradox of «*where*». Which contexts are the most suitable for conducting effective prevention?

After carefully examining a full 100 prevention projects carried out in the United States, Dryfoos [44] compiled a list of characteristics associated with the best results. The common element linking all effective characteristics is the integration of the project at the grass roots level (school, workplace and so on). In light of these data what is particularly striking is the fact that the necessity of adequate contextualization gets neglected even for a category such as adolescence where identity is still ill-defined and the peer group represents the basic reference point, which is to say that it is a category physiologically dependent on context.

Concerning risky behavior, many authors have expressed themselves on the role played by either belonging or not to a group, and by what type of group.

In a society such as the present one where the «ethical family» has been transformed into the «affective family»

(Pietropolli Charmet and Riva, 1994 [54]; Collicelli, 1993 [16]), which is to say an environment that tends above all to sustain the emotional well-being of the children and much less so the interiorization of social norms and rules [54], the «peer group exercises the most authoritative influence, imposing a set of rules frequently much more important than those of the family. Initiation into the group means the rigid observance of rules and «causes the phenomena of conformity and contagious behavior that abound in groups of adolescents» [6].

The importance of the group in the manifesting or not of risky behavior or transgressive behavior has been illustrated by numerous authors (Cochran [55], Loretto [56], Kuipers [57], Cottino and Prina [58]) who have described the different weight and the opposite function of varying types of group (formal or informal aggregations) and who have especially observed how being a member of a group with a well-defined purpose (political, religious, sportive and others) deeply affects problematic behavior such as drug abuse.

Nonetheless, despite the admonition of literature concerning the importance of formal aggregations" in adolescence, prevention is still conceived as a message directed to the single individual.

It may be that the individualistic interpretative model is so deeply engrained in Western culture that «even the collective perception of risk is imagined as a *cumulative reaction of millions of individuals*» [9], or perhaps adults tend to unconsciously put out of mind the fact that the adolescent is a member of a group of contemporaries, a community which has always – starting at nursery school age – represented a central

<sup>11</sup> For example, the entire book "Adolescenza e rischio. Il gruppo classe come risorsa alla prevenzione" [5] centers around this topic.

affective and normative reference point.

To have really effective prevention nowadays thus entails that adults accept this narcissistic wound and recognize along with Pietropolli Charmet [60] that «today more than ever before it is the group that is the psychological subject which influences individual decisions», and which has the «supreme decision-making power and which binds all of its members to respect whatever decisions taken».

Approaching the topic of prevention in terms its paradoxes is in no way meant to belittle the efforts and the success of many projects carried out at the local level and inspired by the common awareness that *prevention is a process* whose effectiveness is bound up with the *duration* of the experience and the possibility of rendering the «object» *an active participant* in the decision-making process.

And yet, these efforts are not sufficient. To the contrary, epidemiological data clearly show that young people are taking on increasing risk. While the overall motor vehicle mortality rate has decreased in recent years thanks to the introduction of a series of preventive measures, no such improvement has been observed in the 15 - 24 year age group (*vide* [52]). A like indication emerges from variations in the incidence of AIDS: while some categories, such as homosexuals and recipients of multiple blood transfusions are see a declining risk, *the hardest hit group today is young people and adolescents* [61].

What is proposed, then – on the eve of the new Millennium<sup>12</sup> – is what we might term «*the paradox of the preventive*

<sup>12</sup> A few months ago in one of the most important high schools in Rome a preventive campaign promoting safe driving habits was held, which was conceived in terms of what one ought not to do: frightening stimuli (slides of

*paradoxes*»; namely, that it is just the category which by its very nature ought to enjoy the benefits of prevention – youth – is the one we are least successful in protecting. *To rethink prevention is therefore a central imperative...* unless we adults do not decide to include the activity of prevention among *our own «risky behavior»*.

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## Young people and risk in Italy

### *Introduction*

#### PREMISE

In the last few months of 1999 and in the first few months of 2000 the Social Co-operative called «Rifornimento in Volo» («In-Flight Refuelling»), in collaboration with the Permanent Observatory on Youth and Alcohol, carried out a research project aimed at exploring and monitoring the relationship between young people and risk.

In the introduction entitled *Young people and risk: ambiguity and paradox* we have tried to highlight the different levels and the many reasons involved in the inherent complexity in the relationship between risk and youth culture. Our research project was developed with the aim of respecting this complexity as much as possible.

#### RESEARCH AIMS

The main aim of this project is to identify and experiment the most suitable ways to understand young people's point of view in order to build up a model for meeting and listening which can be reproduced in different places and at different times that allows us to monitor adolescents' relationship with risk.

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In particular, we have investigated the ways in which young people conceive and perceive risk, 'old' and 'new' risky behaviour modes and their meaning, the factors (individual, collective, predisposing and precipitating) that influence the exposure to, or avoiding of, dangerous situations.

The aim is, therefore, split into levels, the first which is purely cognitive and the second methodological. Indeed, the answer to our doubts cannot emerge from simple questions asked directly to young people, but requires a «participant»<sup>2</sup> research process to be constructed in which young people are active in asking the questions and in which the understanding of the phenomenon arises out of the relationship between what they say about risk and everything that forms their background (their life story, their present situation, their existential outlook ...).

#### METHODOLOGY

Our first aim, therefore, was to abandon the quantitative temptation to carry out a research project on large numbers using standard tools such as questionnaires so as to create a space in which young people can communicate openly with an adult.

To speak about the need to risk is not, in fact, obvious; in an era in which many taboos have disappeared, the emotional, ethical and generational implications that risky behaviour imply mean that there tends to be a barrier of secrecy and suspicion surrounding this matter.

Not unjustly, young people wonder if adults will be able to listen to them in order to understand and not to condemn

<sup>2</sup> F. Neresini and C. Ranci, 1992, *Disagio giovanile e politiche sociali*, NIS, Urbino, p.147

them or, worse still, to «pry» into their world.

However, as Winnicott<sup>3</sup> wisely said: «*If we do not want to be told lies, we must learn not to ask questions*».

We *did* ask questions but to ourselves and it is starting from these that our work group built up a *listening model*, composed of a *cognitive process*, responding to the following characteristics:

- *to put young people in the position where they can consider and communicate freely;*
- *to collect their point of view both in its direct expression and in its dynamic development;*
- *to unite the cognitive moment with the project-operative moment, aimed at prevention;*
- *to arrange the material in a form which can be used for both a qualitative and quantitative analysis;*
- *to be reproducible in different places and at different times.*

We considered that the most suitable methodology to respond to these requirements was the focus group, followed by an individual interview.

#### THE FOCUS GROUP

The size of the focus group allows the participants to achieve three fundamental movements in a smooth individual-group oscillation:

*individual consideration: indeed, it is not necessarily true that young people have expressly questioned themselves on the matter of risk and its various implications;*

*comparison with their peers: the group allows the individual participants to*

<sup>3</sup> D.W. Winnicott, 1965, *The family and individual Development*, Tavistock Publications, London (in Italy, 1968, Armando ed., Roma)

*recognise themselves in a logical way in their differences, but also to say without saying using, thanks to this identification, the point of view and the experience of others;*

*communication with adults: the leader of the group is not the one who questions and assesses, but is more a presence that aids expression and exchange and represses anxiety, thus guaranteeing that the individual contributions within a path are articulate. Indeed, we must not forget that speaking sincerely about risk means facing threatening fantasies, and that the group needs the presence of an adult as a guarantor for its own 'safety' and for the possibility to re-emerge at the end of the path (it is not a coincidence that Franca, one of the girls who took part in the research, recalled the image of Dante and the risks of his initiation path at the beginning of the group meeting).*

The focus group was used, therefore, because of its capacity to activate and at the same time to contain fantasies, reflection and interaction; of course for this capacity to be performed at its best, certain conditions are necessary: there must not be too many participants; they must be quite similar in age; both sexes must be equally represented; and the young people must not know each other.

In our case we chose to work with six groups, three of which were formed of teenagers from 14 to 17 years of age and three of which were formed of young people aged from 18 to 22.

Each group was comprised of eight participants.

We chose the participants at random and we invited them individually using the same wording for everyone in which they were asked to take part in a survey on young people's opinions.

All participants were given a CD token to thank them for their help;

the duration of the meeting must be sufficient to allow the participants to enter into the matter in an emotional way but

also to guarantee the time to go into and come out of the question.

In our case we set aside an average duration of three hours but, due to the intense involvement of the young people, some groups worked longer than this;

the path of the focus group must be semi-structured (see Enclosure 1), that is, the leader must have a path for progressive investigation in mind and, more generally, different leaders must allow material which can be compared and which is equivalent to be gathered;

the leader must have experience with group dynamics and adolescent dynamics.

#### THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW

In the days immediately after the group meetings, individual meetings were held with all the participants. These meetings, in the form of a *semi-structured interview*<sup>4</sup> (see Enclosure 2), were on average an hour long and the interviewer was a different adolescence psychotherapist from the group leader.

The group experience was an opportunity to 'break the ice' regarding this subject and to encourage considerations and comparisons. The individual interview made it possible to investigate the personal point of view in more depth and to throw more light on the relationship between risk, life stories and personality characteristics of the individual participants.

<sup>4</sup> Semi-structured interviews, well-known in psychology (Grisez, 1975, *Metodi della psicologia sociale*, Il Pensiero Scientifico, Roma) are carried out by giving the interviewee stimuli to which he/she is invited to react in a free and associative way. The function of the stimulus is to represent a sort of protective screen for the interviewee's remarks.

The stimuli, which were expressly vague, promoted the expression of the dominant and shared risk representations that direct adolescents' actions in the various life situations.

The interviewers had the impression that the young people, once they were sure that their opinions were being listened to seriously, participated in the group and one-to-one exchanges offered to them with great involvement. Thanks to this kind of participation, the material gathered proved to be rich in nuances and information.

#### WORK IN THE FIELD

The task of carrying out the project was given to a researcher with special expertise in leading focus groups (who worked in all three cities) and to six adolescence psychotherapists (two for each city) who held the individual meetings.

The research staff share the same type of psychodynamic training. However, it was necessary at an initial stage to collect and discuss the theoretical and technical premises of the project.

The main operative guidelines were then systematised and written down in order to make the carrying out of the interviews as homogeneous as possible.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

A series of thematic areas was determined in order to systematise the material which arose from both the group and the individual interview.

I. SOCIO-PERSONAL DATA (this gathers information regarding the adolescent's living environment, family, work and studies)



2. SELF-IMAGE (this describes how adolescents see themselves, how they assess the present moment in their lives, any significant events, the capacity to use or the necessity to fill their free time and the main ways they chose to do this, the ability to carry out a task and to recognise themselves in an existential project)

3. RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS (this describes the ways, times and places, the role in the relationship with other young people of the same age, the presence or otherwise of a partner, the satisfaction and problems linked with these relationships)

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH ADULTS (this describes the real and phantasmatic type of relationship with parents or other reference figures)

5. CONCEPTION OF RISK (through stimulus situations the various meanings associated with the term «risk», the various reasons that one «risks», the image of a person that risks and his/her environment are investigated)

6. PERCEPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF RISK (this explores which behaviour types are considered risky and why certain risky behaviour types are not judged to be so)

7. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE (this explores how risk has been perceived in young people's personal experience, which external circumstances and which internal circumstances caused it and how this experience of risk has been elaborated)

8. PREVENTION (this investigates the level of information and the assessment of the efficacy of prevention campaigns)

Of these eight areas, the first four enable us to outline the youth's personal characteristics in those fundamental dimensions, which are integrated among each other, of the relation-

ship with oneself, with people of the same age, with adults and with the specific tasks of this age. The next four areas explore the relationship with risk in the way that it is considered, perceived, experimented and the way it could be avoided.

#### PROCESSING OF THE MATERIAL

The elaboration of material arising from separate areas can be used for statistical-quantitative and qualitative analysis.

In our case, given the small sample size, the statistical analysis has a purely methodological significance. If a sample more numerous than the pilot study were to be used, the significance of certain data could be noted.

Qualitative analysis, however, is fundamental to allow a lively and involving understanding of the phenomenon.

The material which came out of the individual interviews was recorded and subsequently transcribed in registers. This is a demanding way of working but it enables a richer and more elaborate analysis to be carried out.

After having ordered the young people's remarks using the scheme of the eight areas described above, we analysed the registers of the interviews with the *content analysis* method, which made it possible to identify the ideological arguments at the basis of the comments of those interviewed, in particular those regarding the conceptualisation, perception and assessment of risk. We tried to grasp the interaction between the factual dimension, that is, the events that were communicated, and the colloquial dimension, that is, the way in which they were communicated, and to connect the individual dimension of the experience with the collective dimension.

Content analysis is very common in social psychology (let us remember authors such as Bardin<sup>5</sup>, Krippendorff<sup>6</sup>, or, in Italy, Rositi<sup>7</sup> and Losito<sup>8</sup>) and has an importance of the situation under investigation which is not only descriptive, but it has inference at its main aim, that is, the possibility of tracing back to the causes and effects of the communication under investigation using the results of the analysis.

Indeed, in our work we considered the young people's comments as a kind of ideology the hidden meaning of which we have tried to grasp.

#### SAMPLE

The sample group is formed of a total of 57 participants:

48 youths (23 males and 25 females), aged from 14 to 22, chosen at random;

9 youths (7 males and 2 females), aged from 16 to 22, chosen because they had risky behaviour. In this case the semi-structured individual interview was completed by the stimulus-situations scheduled for the group work (see Enclosures 3, 4, 5, 6).

More than 70% of the youths interviewed live with their family, with both parents; 20% with one of the two parents (due to separation, divorce, etc.) and only 10% live alone or with friends. The young people are middle class, many of them attend secondary school or university and only a minor-

<sup>5</sup> Bardin L., 1977 "L'analyse de contenu", Presses Universitaires de France, Paris

<sup>6</sup> Krippendorff K., 1983 "Analisi del contenuto", Eri Edizioni, Torino

<sup>7</sup> Rositi F., 1981 "Semiotica e sociologia nelle pratiche di analisi del contenuto", in "I modi dell'argomentazione e l'opinione pubblica", 1982, Eri, Milano

<sup>8</sup> Losito G., 1996 "L'analisi del contenuto nella ricerca sociale", Franco Angeli, Milano

ity study and work.

The sample is very limited and certainly not statistically representative. Indeed, as we explained previously, the aim of our project was to test a methodology suitable for discovering the opinions of young people on this matter and for assuming trends regarding risky behaviour. From this viewpoint, significant differences with respect to sex, age and geographic origin do not emerge in the results of this research.

In order to check the transferability of the methodology we drew our sample from three different Italian cities: Milan, Rome and Naples.

## Part One

### *Risk: young people's point of view*

#### I. CONCEPTION OF RISK

In the conception of the young people interviewed, risk appears to be an ambiguous notion from both the terminological and conceptual point of view. The term risk can conjure up extraordinary and serious events, or aspects of life considered normal or banal: *«Running risks can put your life in danger too, like duels or shoot-outs»*; *«There are stupid risks too, for example taking an exam without having studied much»*; *«Nothing special, like smoking a joint»*.

The young people interviewed can be divided into two categories: those who consider risk as a central or significant side to their life and those, on the other hand, who see it as a secondary, separate aspect, to such a extent that for some this investigation seems to have represented the first or one of the few occasions to think about the matter: *«There is some risk in everything, you don't know how things will go, in a relationship with somebody, in a job...»*; *«Risk is a small part of my life. I consider it something that is very detached from me and my friends»*; *«I don't know what risk is, I've never thought about it before»*.

The greater or lesser willingness to personalise one's point of view concerning risk seems to be connected with the tendency or otherwise (in some cases because of difficulty, in other cases due to mistrust) to a consideration that directs personal choices in attaching a different importance to the ex-

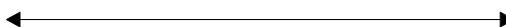
perimental dimension, to 'trying'.

The arguments revolve around the different ways of articulating, or separating, the thought and the action:

*«It is not normal to think and think in every choice, even whether to go by scooter or by bus»; «Thinking serves no purpose. It'd be necessary to do it so as to be able to understand»; «At times the ones who are more aware of risks are those that take them rather than those who avoid them»; «I have never been ill, I don't think about it much. I don't have any memories from an early age at hospital with relatives who are ill»; «I always try to think of the consequences»; «I always talk to my friends so as to understand what the least dangerous thing to do is».*

RISK AS AN EXPERIMENT

THINKING



ACTING SO AS

SO AS TO ACT

NOT TO THINK

'Trying' seems to assume two different meanings: one is acting so as to know and the other is acting instinctively, mechanically, which has compelling characteristics and thus is anti-evolutionary:

*«Risk means acting in a certain way, doing certain actions knowing that maybe you'll be faced with certain dangers but not thinking about it».* At times, the thought appears to be 'bypassed', 'crushed' by experience or reduced to an obsession: *«He couldn't stay calm, his only thought was that»; «I understood from the way he tried to get money, he was almost obsessed».*

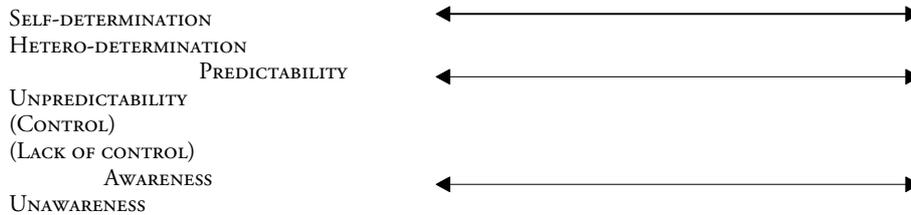
Other times the thought seems to be aimed at the simulation of a 'virtuous' risk or behaviour mode: *«I used to smoke cigarettes but I didn't breathe in the smoke, I wanted to show people that I smoked»; «With a new group I don't drink, I'm the nice one, I avoid all the negative things, for example I don't*

say that I've been operated on. I make them laugh by saying that I'm teetotal, that I love cuddly toys or cartoons, all things that young people like».

The views regarding risk are organised around certain shared aspects, each of which presents different nuances, that is, each assumes different psychological meanings. Indeed, for most of the adolescents interviewed, the idea of risk appears to be a constellation of meanings rather than a single dimension:

*«Risk is nothing less than a bit of everything all together, lots of different things».*

In particular, the young people interviewed indicate that this dimension can be observed from points of view that are to a greater or lesser extent close to their subjectivity, that is, to their personal experiences, or from a viewpoint that gives the responsibility to external factors that seem to 'alter' every subjective meaning.



In a first distinction, risk is conceived as a dimension regarding every single individual, the field of the personal initiative and the possibility to choose and act consciously or otherwise: *«Risk is subjective, there are certain things for which it is worth running risks and others for which it isn't».*

In regard to this, there is risk as property of an event or a situation which is unpredictable and inevitable, that is, in which it is not possible to keep control: *«Risk can be every-*

*where, it does not depend on me».*

The lack of control can be attributed to the influence of others on the individual and thus the most risky situations are those where interaction is the most intense and in which it is not possible to assert one's own will:

*«Riding your scooter is dangerous because something can happen that doesn't depend on you, in the sense that it is the others that can run you over»; «A friend of mine plays American football and has invited me several times but I won't do it at all because it is a situation that I can't control»; «I see risk as everything that does not depend on a personal choice, on my will».*

On the other hand, the lack of control is attributed to a kind of incompetence or negligence of the individual himself/herself, that is his/her tendency to risk 'passively', losing the awareness or the memory of the risk, or, without wishing to do so, making mistaken assessments:

*«A risk is going on your scooter without the awareness that if you fall off you might die»; «One must always remember that a situation is risky»; «There are things that you don't choose and you probably do without thinking»; «One evening I drank a 'Lemonhead'. I thought it was very light but really it was too much for me».*



'Passive' risk is contrasted with an 'active' risk, which is represented as the exposure to a danger that occurs when situations that can be predicted, controlled or avoided, are in fact sought and chosen. In this case, according to those interviewed, there is the will to exceed certain limits in order to arrive at the extreme point and, in the final analysis, to be stupid



or even mad:

*«Going back home at night in the car with friends who have been drinking is a dangerous choice because the risk is not unpredictable but is something that could be avoided»; «In our group of friends, fortunately, we don't have any problems: everybody's head is in place»; «Famous mountaineers who have had accidents have arrived at the extreme limit. There's a difference between experience, moving in a responsible way, and being crazy».*

RISK

NORMALITY



MADNESS

The aspect of madness seems to be used by certain young people as a container/representation of risky choices which are difficult to explain, whereas for others it seems to correspond to a position of extreme defence with regard to risks:

*«Only a madman blindfolds himself and rushes off at top speed on a scooter»; «There are some substances, certain types of drug, alcohol less so, things I don't take because I'm already a paranoid person as it is».*

However, between risk and danger, aspects are found that seem to act as a bridge or hinge between the two extremes. Some of those interviewed, for example, tackle the contradiction between choice and loss of awareness by resorting to the concept of unconscious and automatic choice:

*«To do a distance of even just a few metres, I don't know why, I automatically put on my seatbelt»; «Sometimes when one runs risks, one wants to hurt oneself. Perhaps it's an unconscious choice».*

Others, on the other hand, introduce the concept of 'calculated' risk, that is conditions in which the individual can

choose of his/her own free will to place his/her trust in situations that are partially unpredictable but necessary:

*«Trying a joint was my free will, not a risk. If it was a risk, it was a calculated one»; «I can't say that on Saturday nights I don't have an alcoholic drink but for me it's a controlled risk, whereas for others it's different»; «Taking that test without having studied much was a calculated risk».*

#### RISK AS A DOUBLE-EDGED WEAPON

##### POSITIVE RISK

##### NEGATIVE RISK

On the whole, risk is considered by young people in an ambivalent way, a sort of double-sided figure, to the extent that it is often possible to find contrasting and contradictory opinions within the same comments. One series of aspects is directed towards a positive assessment of risk whereas another series tends to represent it as negative. In the first case the ability to question oneself, to assume responsibility and to be enterprising is highlighted:

*«Risk is a test of courage, because if you run a risk you question your personality»; «Deciding not to run risks means deciding never to win, that is, never to be able to get what you want»; «It means taking it myself, according to my will, knowing that it entails consequences»; «Risk is a reappraisal of one's position»; «Positive risk must exist, it can be controlled; I am happier to run risks on the stock exchange than spend money drinking».*

In the second case, the aspect of loss is stressed, the aspect of mistaken assessment and the probability of having to face an unpleasant outcome or long-term effects:

*«I always consider it as a loss and quite a serious one, the death of someone close, catching a contagious illness»; «There and then I didn't think about it but later I paid the conse-*

*quences when I understood what I'd done. It wasn't nice»; «A person doesn't realise that drinking is bad for them».*

*«Even when he drinks a lot he enjoys himself. He's fine and that's that. He doesn't realise that he's running a risk»; «Not anything very risky. But there have been things that have happened to me that have then led to worse consequences».*

#### DIMENSION OF TIME

##### IMMEDIATE

##### DEFERRED

In assessing risk adolescents make reference to two time dimensions: one is the short term dimension linked to the possibility of obtaining an immediate effect in that moment; the other is the long term dimension regarding the consequences linked to risk in the near future.

In the first case, making choices and taking decisions seems to 'offer protection' from the uncertainty of the future. In the second case, on the other hand, impact with reality is no longer avoidable: *«Sometimes a person is prepared to run risks in order to have an advantage at once»; «After smoking I felt elated and happy but then, with time, some health problems began to appear which forced me to go to the doctor's because my eyesight had dimmed...».*

Another of the parameters used to assess risk is its negative effect on and in time:

*«Drugs also ruin your character because in the future, when a person is 25 or 30, they'll have wasted a lot of time in their life and they won't be able to organise it in other ways».*

At times this relationship between risk and time is inverted. In this case it is the passing of time that is perceived as a factor that allows for risk: *«Yesterday another tramp died in Rome. I hope and think that I will never become one myself but maybe*

*when they were my age they talked about these things too. The more you go on, the more risks you run».*

CONTEXT

AS A RISK FACTOR

AS A PROTECTION FACTOR

The context is considered important in its cultural and social components in order to assess the 'exposure to risk' and to attribute positive or negative meanings to certain risks.

Most of the adolescents interviewed stress a certain confusion in defining and distinguishing what is risky from what is not, that is, they perceive an uncertain limit. To this end, the confusing value of the cultural influence and the insufficient level of information is stressed:

*«It depends also on the awareness that you have and at my age we don't have much. Drugs, Aids, alcohol are taken for granted»; «Some risks make you independent in society and some are against society itself. For example, if I'm a scuba-diver and I dive down to 25 metres I'm cool, not someone who runs risks; if I'm into piercing and have red hair, I'm considered at risk!»; «It's the fashion now not to cross the road on a pedestrian crossing»; «It's an Italian cultural problem, a problem of mentality: the pill isn't given out in schools here as it is in France because there's a lot of hypocrisy, there's a backward mentality, the priests' mentality...»;*

*«I was always taught to distinguish between what is useful and what isn't; others come from different environments. Education is the base».*

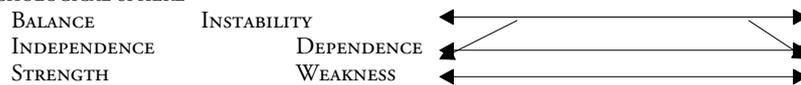
Many young people stress the importance of being able to place their trust in more detailed knowledge/information or reliable people that allow them to have a sure base that protects them from risk and the need, in some cases, for outside decisive intervention:

*«In the mountains, with the support of instructors, even though there is a little danger, the risk is practically nil»; «It was my parents too that stopped him from seeing that person. If it had been up to him I don't know how long this thing would have lasted»; «A person who doesn't know the effects of a substance runs a risk»; «I don't do things that I don't know inside out and that I don't know what reactions they can provoke in me».*

In other cases reference is made to parents, to a vaguely-defined outside super-determined influence, to a complimentary series of responsibilities or even to fate:

*«He has parents like that and so going on he's a little at risk»; «He has parents who plan all his days thinking that they are protecting him and not realising they are achieving the opposite»; «It's true that young people drive fast but if the roads were less microscopic, maybe fewer people would die»; «Every time a person makes a choice, he's necessarily running a risk. Afterwards, if things turn out badly, well perhaps it's fate».*

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SPHERE



Another important distinction appears to regard the aspect of risk correlated to the 'psychological position' of the individual that confronts himself with the outside world, other people themselves, and with the ability or otherwise to be different and to maintain a suitable balance between internal needs and external demands.

Risk as a condition of instability is distinguished from that as a condition of balance:

*«Risk is something that causes an instability of any kind, both positive and negative. It is a moment when one is in sus-*

*pense, both for the good side and the bad side»; «Certain decisions in life are risky like maybe I'll try and then see how it ends up».*

Various meanings are assigned to this instability. For one group of adolescents risk seems to be an attempt to enter into contact with conflict and the dependence/independence limit and with the need to abandon childish almightiness:

*«Drugs are a serious risk, you run the risk of being able to do without or not being able to do without»; «Risk is a limit to the human ability to act, to your free choice because if there are two options, you stop and weigh up the situation and maybe you rule out one of them, you don't run the risk or you take certain precautions».*

For a second group, on the other hand, risk seems to represent an attempt to overcome conflict, exceeding the above limits and leading to a sort of 'almighty control':

*«Risk in my opinion is feeling free, I mean doing what you feel like, doing it in any case, whether it's risky or not»; «For me smoking was a transgression. I wanted to show people that I smoked».*

In certain cases the fear of being dependent seems to be central and risk is associated with the weakness of the person and the tendency to let oneself be 'led' or 'convinced' by others:

*«It's risky to let yourself be carried away, I mean not to think about what you want but to let yourself be conditioned by the others. If a person lets himself get involved, he does something he doesn't really want to and maybe he does it in a superficial way, not really seeing what he's doing»; «The group of friends that my brother had led him astray. He's weak and he let him-*

*self be led away so as to follow the others»; «Other people have a religious vision of life: if you tell them to go at twenty km/h, they do it».*



Another recurring contrast is between risk as something that damages the individual's psychological sphere and danger for one's body, or between risk in concrete terms and in terms of interpersonal relationships:

*«Risk is something that can make you unhappy, it's not driving if you've been drinking. It's something that involves the person in his heart, in his happiness»; «Danger is a physical ill. The inner ill tends towards risk. Risk is losing a friend or the relationship with your brother or sister. Danger is going out at night alone».*

Sometimes the adolescents interviewed try to build a range of values between these two types of risk; other times they consider this to be impossible:

*«It's obvious that riding a scooter without a crash helmet is an absurd risk because all it takes is for someone to hit you to put your physical well-being into question whereas if you have an argument with one of your friends it's not the same thing»; «There isn't a range of values, first this, second that».*

However, in some of the young people's descriptions this differentiation tends to fade away. It is pointed out that the tendency to risk can be motivated by something 'personal', something that lies *underneath* the phenomenology of the event:





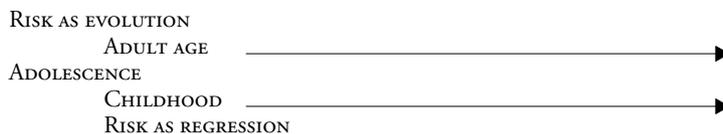
*every now and then, and every now and then I drink too much too. In my opinion you've got to transgress every now and then but it mustn't be a habit like for my friends».*

This difficulty in 'mastering' risk, as we will see later, causes the young people interviewed to take one of two sides: one part of them accepts the fact of being 'inside' risk, whereas the other part of the sample tends to stay 'outside' by avoiding a whole series of behaviour styles:

*«I always smoke joints, other drugs sometimes»; «I've got to be teetotal. The problem is that I love drinking and that if I drink half a litre of beer I'm out of my head for three or four hours without remembering what I'm saying»; «If I'm offered something to smoke I immediately say 'No thanks...'.».*

The contrast, however, appears to fall down in some ways since even those young people who claim not to run risks seem to feel their attraction by portraying risky situations as potentially satisfying or more satisfying than other more routine situations, or even as a missed opportunity that they will regret:

*«In mountaineering, in sports like boxing you risk your life but if you have this passion, you do well to develop it because maybe it is much more satisfying than an hour in the gym»; «I think that if someone wants to do something, they should do it, otherwise at some point in their life they'll find themselves saying: 'I wanted to do that and I didn't do it' »; «Compunction is better than having regrets».*



Running risks, however, is considered to be something deeply rooted in adolescence and growing towards the adult

age; it is also indicated as a dimension that is shared with the adult world. Some stress that, depending on the age, certain risks increase and others diminish:

*«Driving at night with friends who are drunk, Aids, getting pregnant. All problems that in any case derive from being adolescents and adults»; «Adults run risks just like we do. Certain things are unconnected with age»;*

*«It's an endless tunnel if you start using drugs when you're young»; «The older you get, the more you risk because you're risking with other people, you start a family. There's always the risk of choosing the wrong person or the wrong job, or abandoning people that you met before. In other aspects it's obvious, you go out less on Saturday nights and as you grow up you're tempted to do things that are a little more mature»; «Adults are more aware. They know that certain things will end up ruining you».*

Different too is the opinion regarding the ability to control impulses and experiences that for some people is at its greatest in adolescence while for others this occurs at an adult age:

*«I think it's more likely for an adult person to find alcohol satisfying and then not be able to control the situation»; «Parents, adults certainly have more experience so as to know what you're letting yourself in for»; «I always put on the seat-belt in the car and I also have to remind my father who forgets».*

In the following pages the evidence which emerged in the sample of the young people interviewed (in the focus groups, in individual work moments in the groups and in the in-depth interviews) regarding the meanings ascribed to the term risk, the motivations and situations for which one runs risks, the portrayal of the person who risks and his environment, is described in more detail in quantitative-qualitative terms.

I.A MEANINGS ATTRIBUTED TO THE TERM RISK

Table 1 indicates the priorities of choice of words associated with risk in terms of percentage of the replies of the population of adolescents investigated:

TABLE 1

PRIORITY OF CHOICE	PERCENTAGE
CHALLENGE	90%
DANGER	80%
TRANSGRESSION	60%
FEAR	50%
ADVENTURE	
EXCITEMENT	40%
COURAGE	30%
FATE	20%
EMPTINESS	10%

The words ‘*Challenge*’ and ‘*Danger*’ are those that recur most frequently in the adolescents’ comments on risk and, in a certain sense, determine its conceptual limits: on the one hand there is a tendency towards action, towards taking firm action; on the other hand there is a tendency towards thinking, towards reflecting before taking action, to investigate the consequences and motivations. From this viewpoint it is possible to group together the other words indicated by considering these two terms as organisers of the descriptions of risk:

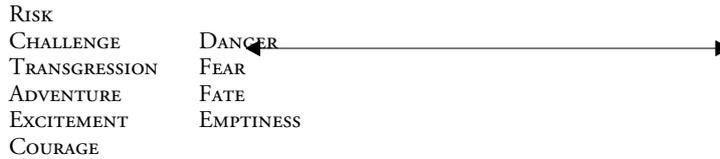


Table 2 illustrates the various meanings attributed by young people to the words chosen:

TABLE 2

CHOICE PRIORITIES	MEANINGS ASCRIBED
<b>CHALLENGE</b>	
( 90% )	CHALLENGING ONESELF, PUTTING ONESELF AT RISK TESTING ONE'S ABILITIES UNCONSCIOUSLY HAVING AN EXCESSIVE CONFIDENCE IN ONE'S ABILITIES SHOWING SOMETHING TO OTHER PEOPLE GOING AGAINST ONE'S FEAR BETTING IN ORDER TO OBTAIN SOMETHING MAKING CHOICES SUGGESTED ONLY BY ONE'S INSTINCT
<b>DANGER</b>	
( 80% )	SOMETHING THAT HARMS THE BODY AND THE HEAD DRIVING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE DRUNK DRIVING A CAR OR RIDING A MOPED TOO FAST DARING TOO MUCH
<b>TRANSGRESSION</b>	
( 60% )	THE FILM 'TRAINSPOTTING' THINKING ONE CAN COME OUT OF A SITUATION OF ANONYMITY NOT RESPECTING THE LAW SHOWING OFF TO FRIENDS
<b>FEAR</b>	
( 50% )	NOT KNOWING WHAT ONE IS UP AGAINST THE FEAR OF LOSING ONE'S AFFECTIONS THE FEAR OF BEING DISCOVERED ENDING UP IN A TUNNEL WITH NO RETURN NOT BEING ABLE TO MAKE UP FOR MISTAKES MADE
<b>ADVENTURE</b>	
( 40% )	CHANGING THE OLD WAY FOR THE NEW ONE RECKLESSNESS, THROWING ONESELF FROM A PLANE OR MOUNTAIN BELIEVING THAT ONE IS ENJOYING ONESELF BY PUTTING ONE'S SAFETY AT RISK
<b>EXCITEMENT</b>	
( 40% )	A EMOTION AND PASSION FOR THRILLS FEELING LIKE A HERO THE FEAR OF LOSING MAKES RISKS MORE ATTRACTIVE
<b>COURAGE</b>	
( 30% )	DARING A CHOICE OF LIFE: 'NOTHING VENTURED, NOTHING GAINED' ABILITY AND DESIRE TO CRITICISE ONESELF
<b>FATE</b>	
( 20% )	DEATH, INFECTION, ILLNESS WALKING ALONG THE ROAD AND BEING KNOCKED DOWN CARELESSNESS, MAKING MISTAKES
<b>EMPTINESS</b>	
( 10% )	GOING MAD UNHAPPINESS, SADNESS GIVING UP THE IMAGE OF AN EXPLOSION



Table 4 describes the various meanings ascribed by the young people interviewed to the motivations chosen:

TABLE 4

MOTIVATIONS	MEANINGS ASCRIBED
TOWARDS OTHER PEOPLE	FEELING THAT ONE IS IMPORTANT IN OTHER PEOPLE'S EYES NOT BEING CONSIDERED DIFFERENT SHOWING ONE'S ABILITIES BEING ACCEPTED BY THE GROUP
TOWARDS THEMSELVES	FEELING SURE OF ONESELF INSIDE THE DESIRE TO PUT ONESELF TO THE TEST IN SITUATIONS THE WISH TO LEAVE A MARK OBTAINING SOMETHING THAT IS CONSIDERED IMPORTANT WANTING TO CHANGE SOMETHING

**I.C SITUATIONS IN WHICH PEOPLE TAKE RISKS**

Table 5 indicates the main situations indicated by the adolescents as being those cases in which it happens that one runs risks more often, expressed in terms of percentage of replies:

TABLE 5

PRIORITIES	PERCENTAGE
WHEN ONE IS IN COMPANY	90%
WHEN ONE FEELS DOWN	70%
WHEN ONE FEELS AT ONE'S BEST	60%
WHEN ONE IS ALONE	50%

The choices made reflect the great influence ascribed to the external context, to the others, in determining risky situations or not. There do not seem to be particular differences in ascribing a weight/value to the emotional states connected with the person's psychological experiences: feeling high and/or feeling down are equivalent as factors considered to be 'the spur'.

Table 6 describes the various meanings ascribed by the young people interviewed to the situations:

TABLE 6

SITUATIONS	MEANINGS ASCRIBED
WHEN ONE IS IN COMPANY	YOU ARE SPURRED ON BY YOUR FRIENDS
YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE SEEN TO BE WEAK OR INFERIOR TO THE OTHERS	YOU WANT TO MAKE YOURSELF UNDERSTOOD
YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE PUT ON ONE SIDE OR TO BE EXCLUDED	
WHEN ONE IS ALONE	RISK IS THE LAST SOLUTION TO FIND SOMETHING URGENT
	ONE IS NOT AWARE OF THE RISK ONE IS UP AGAINST
	ONE FEELS SEGREGATED
	ONE WANTS TO PUT ONESELF TO THE TEST
WHEN ONE FEELS DOWN	ONE FEELS THAT ONE HAS NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE
	WE THINK THINGS OVER LESS
	ONE FEELS LOST
	THE PATH WE WOULD LIKE TO TAKE IS BLOCKED
	WE WANT TO FEEL BETTER
WHEN ONE FEELS AT ONE'S BEST	ONE HAS THE DESIRE TO WIN, TO LIVE
	ONE WANTS TO DEFY LIFE
	NOTHING AND NO ONE CAN AFFECT US
	ONE FEELS BIG, ABOVE EVERYTHING
	ONE HAS NO SELF-CONTROL

**1.D DESCRIPTION OF A PERSON WHO TAKES RISKS AND HIS/HER ENVIRONMENT**

In this section there is the presentation of the evidence which came out of the stories invented by the young people on the basis of an outline given to them (see Enclosure 6) regarding a limited situation and location (Saturday night in a disco) in which certain characters chosen by the adolescents appear. The stories develop according to a time sequence of cause and effect.

## ? The Saturday night story

### 1ST VERSION

The character is a boy aged between 17 and 19 who goes into a crowded disco in the town centre at around midnight. Outside it is cold and there is a crowd waiting to get in. He is with some friends and feels excited and full of expectations. He has the impression that the others feel excited and happy. He is drinking an alcoholic drink when he is invited by a friend to try an ecstasy pill. He decides to accept. The result of the evening is positive.

### 2ND VERSION

The character is a boy aged between 17 and 19 who goes into a crowded disco in the town centre at around midnight. Outside it is cold and there is a crowd waiting to get in. He is with some friends and feels excited and full of expectations. He has the impression that the others feel excited and happy. He is drinking a beer when he is invited by a stranger to try an ecstasy pill. He decides to refuse. The result of the evening is positive.

The two versions of the story are the result of the elaborations of the individual stories and the choices made by the whole reference sample. In particular, reference is made to a male of the same age as the young people interviewed. Two images are contrasted: an 'inside' (the disco), hot and crowded, and an 'outside' (outside the disco), cold and with a crowd of people trying to enter. The central character is pictured as being with his friends and feeling excited and happy. For half of the young people interviewed the person is drinking a vaguely-described 'alcoholic drink' whereas for the other half he is drinking beer. The most outstanding differences regard the people in this setting who pressure the boy into taking drugs and the influence wielded by these people on the



choice as to whether to take the drugs or not. For half of the adolescents it is normally a friend who incites the individual and who exerts a strong influence in terms of acceptance of the suggestion since there is a relationship of trust that appears to offer protection against 'nasty surprises'. For the other half it is normally a stranger that incites the individual but who has a greater influence in terms of refusal of the suggestion.

However, in both cases the result of the evening is positive. This seems to be consistent with what the young people indicated in other stimulus-situations regarding the difficulty in distinguishing between risk as a positive/structuring element and risk as a negative/destructuring element.

### ? An 'extreme' Saturday night story

The character is a florist called Corto Maltese. He is 51 years old and lives in Naples with his grandmother. It is Saturday night at about 10.30 when, all of a sudden, he goes into a disco called 'Out of this world'. He is with his lively grandmother and hears his name being called: 'Corto, Corto!'. He has the impression that the others feel as if they are being observed. He is drinking a Coca cola when he is invited by Jack to give his grandmother an ecstasy pill. He decides to do it and she dies.

The lively granny, before kicking the bucket, got up on the stage and started doing a breath-taking striptease, then she sat down and died. From that moment Corto, in memory of his sprightly 112-year-old granny started an anti-ecstasy campaign....

The motto was: 'Remember the oldies and don't mess around!'. Two months later Corto was killed by the pro-ecstasy gangs.

This is a story which represents risk as a 'passepartout', as a solution to all risks, that makes it possible to overcome a series of limits: between the various ages in life; between preservation and change; between a life that is too empty and a 'heroic, Dionysian' death; between being in and being out of this world; between a life full of experiences and a life that is still to be lived. Indeed: «*Imagination allows one to put impossible things together*».

When the outcome of this story is compared to the outcome of the first two versions it is possible to stress the greater importance attached to risk as a 'powerful instrument of change'.

**N.B.** The content of the first two versions of the story and the subsequent summaries were obtained from the analysis and the comparison of the common and recurring elements in the young peoples' comments.

Subsequently, using a series of stimulus questions as a basis (see Enclosure 6a), the young people drew up a kind of 'identikit' of the central character of the story from the point of view of his personal characteristics. In particular, two profiles emerged:

#### **? Profile 1**

The boy is quite happy with his life although there are some things he would change. His past was normal although he has had to go through difficult times which he would prefer to forget. He has lived without any major problems in a normal family who love him. In particular he has been disappointed by other people. He has managed to avoid bad situations but has at times made mistakes. His dream is to make himself known in life, to do something important. He associates with different people: friends, groups, schoolmates. For the

others he is a friend, a reference point, a person one can trust, and a person to have fun with. He is a reliable and sincere person. In general, he has ambivalent feelings: of love/hate; happiness/sadness; confidence/insecurity; calmness/anger. His future will be quite tranquil, full of satisfaction but also sadness and serious blows to 'swallow'.

To summarise, he is a good person, although problematical, who has nothing special about him; he represents the typical young man of today who wants to grow and improve. He represents an ideal figure who one would like to resemble.

### ? Profile 2

The boy is unhappy with his life because he does not feel fulfilled. He believes he is strong and self-confident but in reality something is missing for him. His past was very hard; without any limits; 'he would like to put a stop to it'. His dream is to become someone in life, but especially to find friends who do not lead him to do himself harm. He associates with different people, usually in a group and/or people who stand out from the rest. He often feels alone. For the others he is a confident type, a leader because of his hard-man behaviour; he has difficulty being himself. In general he has ambivalent feelings: of hate/love; ambition/anguish; strength/weakness. He does not know clearly yet what he feels and what he wants to achieve. His future is quite uncertain; it will be positive he is able to accept himself for what he is and to come out of the world of appearances.

To sum up, he is an ordinary person who is looking for his own real characteristics and who is conditioned by

the group of friends and by society.

In particular he lacks strength and consistency of sacrifice. He arouses feelings of tenderness and anger at the same time.

The two profiles outlined by the young people maintain certain constants: the desire to make oneself known, that is, to do something special that enables one to be recognised; the ambivalence of feelings, typical of the adolescent age, which represents not only an 'existential manner' but also an 'exploratory necessity' to test one's limits, not only external limits but also internal ones, between one emotion and another; to feel them and recognise them in a real way. Another point in common between the two profiles is that risk is not exclusively associated with a personal situation which is, by definition, 'disastrous' but regards everyone because it is in function of experience: that is, it forms a 'testing bench' on which to test oneself.

## 2. PERCEPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF RISK

The adolescents interviewed, first of all, share the idea that there are many risky behaviour modes and that these can be differentiated into big and small behaviour modes:

*«Risky behaviour? Many things spring to mind now»;  
«There can be many. From taking drugs to drinking, from driving your car fast to arriving at home at six in the morning after a full day, or betting money for some reason: cards or horses»;  
«Even smaller things, for example I'm a CD maniac. If I touch them underneath or if I pick them up in a certain way I run the risk of ruining them».*

MULTIPLE RISK  
RISK CONDITION



## BEHAVIOUR MODES

Secondly, they point out that risky behaviour modes in their experience tend to be inter-associated, as if their relationship were with risk itself rather than individual behaviour modes; some, more explicitly, talk of risk condition:

*«Someone that uses drugs can help to spread them, I mean they get involved. Someone who isn't so clear-headed can do risky things»; «The beer went to my head and I found myself half-undressed on the beach with that boy and then a friend of mine came and saved me»; «Reckless driving depends on what one takes in terms of drugs, in terms of alcohol»; «The risk condition is a very wide-ranging question that can't be reduced».*

### PROTECTION

REDUCTION OF +  
- UNDERTAKING TO



CUMULATIVE EFFECTS  
AVOID THEM

Indeed, rather than protecting themselves from specific behaviour modes many of the young people interviewed claim to be serious about facing the danger of «cumulative effects» deriving from the fact of being involved in more than one risky behaviour mode at the same time. From their comments, therefore, we can notice the attempt to reduce the effects of the damage rather than an undertaking to avoid them:

*«I drink. Wine is one of my shortcomings. However, on average, as I'm the one that drives, I don't drink much. I know my limit. If then I decide to get drunk, I get someone else to drive»; «The risk you run riding a scooter without a helmet is a risk for everyone. I'm over 18 and I don't wear one. But I'm*

a person who goes slowly, carefully»; «It's happened that I've drunk until I got drunk, at home with friends. It wasn't a risk because I didn't have to go out. I waited for it to pass. Maybe it's the risk of your conscience because the day after you feel ill».

Some of the young people, however, point out that this strategy can fail and that they need to be helped to control better the impulses so as to prevent risk:

«If you drive at 250 km/h you can have an airbag and put on your seat belt but if you crash, you'll die anyway. They say you must wear a seat belt but it would be enough to remember to limit your speed».

Other young people, on the other hand, seem to be engaged in the choice between various alternative strategies or in the attempt, in any case, to anticipate certain countermeasures to risky behaviour. At times, the balance between risk and countermeasure appears precarious although the adolescent presents it as if it were optimal:

«I know that if I come home alone at night something nasty could happen to me, but I know too that if I run straight from my car to the front door the risk is reduced a lot»; «I have never been admitted to hospital again because of my asthma: I smoke cigarettes and then I take my medicine as prevention».

#### PARAMETERS TO ASSESS «RISKINESS»

QUANTITATIVE  
( FREQUENCY OF BEHAVIOUR MODES)

QUALITATIVE  
(SPECIFIC CONTEXT  
RESULT OF ACTION  
PERSONAL MOTIVATION)

For the young people interviewed the determining factor in

the assessment of the «riskiness» of a behaviour mode seems to be, rather than the behaviour mode itself, the context in which it is adopted, the result of the action, or the degree of personal motivation. Naturally, the indecision in assessment is also connected with a large degree of ambivalence, typical of the adolescent age:

«It is risky to be alone in certain situations. Trusting people you don't know well enough»; «And then there are one's studies: imagine that someone studies for a long time and then is not able to finish them»; «In general I find myself in situations of tension but I prefer to stay out if it doesn't concern me directly. If it concerns me directly I tend to get involved, even too much so, not from the physical point of view but in speaking. Normally I try to avoid it unless there's someone who's doing something they really shouldn't. In that case, if they get hit, it's better».

Most of the adolescents claim to set a limit between risky and non-risky behaviour modes on the basis of quantitative rather than qualitative parameters that are connected with their supposed ability to decide their own limits: «Every now and then I drink alcoholic drinks and at times a bit too much, but I know when to stop»; «To drink once is one thing, drinking often is another...».

When talking about risky behaviour the young people interviewed do not confine themselves to stressing those behaviour modes experienced personally but they also highlight the risks that a person obliges other people to run, and those to which he/she is exposed due to other people. Therefore, the differentiation between active and passive risks seems to arise again:

«I would never take drugs to be honest, unless someone put something in my glass»; «When a person goes skiing off-piste they are aware of the risks they're running but they don't

think about the risk that they can cause other people. A little time ago an off-piste skier caused an avalanche»; «One day his girlfriend told him: ‘Listen, stop it or I’ll leave you’ and he started to hit her. We had to stop him. He’d been smoking and drinking before. In my opinion, taking drugs when you’re in company is dangerous, especially for the others»; «Illnesses are dangerous, both those that I could have and those caused by others»; «Passive smoking is dangerous».

Risky behaviour patterns are also associated with the sensation of exceeding the boundary of one’s age group, in one sense or another:

*«One evening I was playing on this seesaw with springs with a friend of mine. He jumped off and I got this scar. You don’t get on things for children when you’re seventeen years old»; «I went with those older lads but I didn’t realise that they weren’t very intelligent».*

In the following pages, behaviour modes considered to be risky and non-risky are described in detail together with the adults’ assessments of risk from the adolescents’ point of view.

## 2.A RISKY AND NON-RISKY BEHAVIOUR

The research made it possible to build up a type of ‘classification’ of risky behaviour modes reported by the young people interviewed. Table 7 shows the choices made by the sample:

TABLE 7

CHOICE PRIORITIES	PERCENTAGE
PROBLEMS THAT ARE TO A LESSER OR GREATER EXTENT SERIOUS IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS	70%
TAKING SUBSTANCES RECKLESS DRIVING	50%



ALCOHOL ABUSE	40%
UNPROTECTED SEX	30%
UNHEALTHY HABITS	20%
EXTREME SPORTS	
BRAWLS	10%

We can, however, rearrange the risky behaviour modes mentioned into eight large areas according to a different modality that allows us to understand the similarities and differences better:

TABLE 8

REFERENCE AREAS OF THE RISKY BEHAVIOUR MODES  
(IN ORDER OF PRIORITY)

1. AREA OF PROBLEMS IN FAMILY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS
2. AREA OF TAKING SUBSTANCES
3. AREA OF SPORTS
4. AREA OF DRIVING VEHICLES
5. AREA OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR
6. AREA OF UNHEALTHY HABITS
7. AREA OF BEHAVIOUR MODES THAT IMPLY A «TRIAL IDENTITY»
8. AREA OF BEHAVIOUR MODES WITH A TRANSGRESSION-TYPE OR ANTISOCIAL MEANING

1) *Area of problems in family and social relations*

Included among those problems described by the young people as 'personal' are arguments with relatives and/or friends; the loss of meaningful relations or maintaining them when the situation no longer proceeds in a good way; associating with people defined as being 'not good' who can lead one astray. Particularly heartfelt is the risk of being authentic and spontaneous which, if on the one hand opens up new relationship opportunities, on the other hand exposes one to big failure. The need to obtain success in interpersonal relations is so important that sometimes all the other behaviour modes

are made dependent on this aim and real 'offensive' and 'defensive' strategies to disappointments are organised:

*«I ran the risk of not having a good relationship with my sister, we argued all the time»; «Definitely going around with friends who are not good people or losing a friend»; «What's risky is something personal: saying everything that one thinks and feels, behaving in a genuine way, being yourself, because other people get angry»; «Telling someone everything without waiting for their reaction, having the courage to have everything, obviously thereby risking everything. If you don't do it, you run a risk and don't achieve anything»; «I've never been in the position of running risks any more and now no one looks down on me any more»; «At school last year I used to dress in a very strange way. I used to wear trousers with braces or plus-fours with my socks pulled right up. Everybody knew me because of those trousers. I was in the third year and used to show off».*

Some of those interviewed point out that personal risks are particularly hard to undertake and more difficult to manage because they are less definable in real terms, also because they are extended over time, and that the distinction between personal behaviour modes and others is valid up to a point because, as we have already noticed, there seem to be personal factors behind any type of behaviour:

*«Trying to convince a person to do something that they don't want to do is hard for me, particularly because I have compromise myself and I'm very proud»; «I find it more difficult to run risks in relationships, about something in the future»; «Personal risks are more difficult to control»; «Even when you drive you have your own personal style»; «Maybe when I see a nice lad I say to him: 'congratulations!'. It's risky because he might tell me to get lost».*

Personal risks seem to be closely connected with wanting

and fearing change:

*«If things are to go as you would like them to go, there must be a little risk. These are things that allow you to get people»; «There's the risk that a young person changes. At this age people have a certain behaviour mode. If they stay with older people they change, I mean you start to behave like them».*

2) *Area of taking substances*

In this area we find, by association, drugs, alcohol, anabolic steroids to increase one's muscles, or iatrogenic medicine and, sometimes, even cigarette smoking. The risk connected with unhealthy eating habits can also be included in this category:

*«It's a risk to take substances, even medicine, that can damage your health»; «Using anabolic substances is risky for those who want to have a certain physique»; «There was a friend of mine from a long time ago who became anorexic. There were five girls in our group and the four of us managed to get her to overcome her illness».*

Young people try to build up a kind of classification of the riskiness of taking substances so as to have a reference outline with which to set their behaviour modes. Once again we find the concepts of dangerousness, addiction, control and change associated together:

*«Alcohol is less dangerous than drugs»; «In my opinion heroin is dangerous, not smoking»; «I've been through situations where the biggest drug substance was alcohol»; «I used to smoke joints but I gave up because I felt I had changed physically. I realised this especially when I was playing. I never went out of my head but I've had friends who did every now and then».*

Despite certain opinions to the contrary, for most of the adolescents interviewed drinking and smoking represent more bearable risks than those deriving from drugs:

*«My room-mate smoked joints too. I told her: 'If you smoke joints, you'll become sterile'»; «I have my beer in the evening, I smoke my cigarette in peace. I'm not saying it's a lesser risk but a little slower».*

But they also try to build up a classification concerning the places in which risk becomes more dangerous or less dangerous. On the one extreme we find 'rave parties', on the other extreme there are places in the countryside, mountains, etc.. Discos represent an intermediate position:

*«A friend of mine went to a rave party. I don't know what he took, drugs, amphetamines, some pills. Frightening, a mental trip»; «I want to have this trip again, to enjoy it, because I know that if I were in a wood, in a quiet place it would be different»; «In a disco if you mind your own business, nothing happens to you».*

### 3) *Area of sports*

In particular mountaineering, martial arts, acrobatic horse vaulting, parachuting, boxing, skiing and body-building are mentioned, as are also football and gymnastics. Some of the young people interviewed define a clear differentiation between so-called normal sports and extreme, riskier sports. However, in most of the interviews this differentiation is not mentioned.

For young people, therefore, the level of 'dangerousness' would seem to depend, rather than on the characteristics of a specific sport, on the person's attitude to respect certain limits

or not:

*«The most risky are extreme sports: paragliding or free climbing or off-piste skiing»; «I've thought about the fact that my parachute could break and I could come crashing down to earth»; «I don't do extreme sports. I like safer things. However, now that I think about it, I've run risks before because one year ago I hurt my foot playing football and it has never completely healed»; «I went skiing once and as I was skiing down a slope backwards the tips of the skis started to open. I was afraid»; «I'm not good at skiing and I went on a black piste. I had a narrow escape»; «During one training session one of my teammates tried a new move and fell on his neck. It was really frightening».*

#### 4) *Area of driving vehicles*

This area includes driving cars and scooters, which can be reckless, leaving aside safety measures, in particular crash helmets or seat belts, or can be made in adverse weather or environmental conditions. The risk regarding duels in cars and motorbikes is often mentioned and the sensation of running risks when agreeing to be driven by people who have been drinking is quite common:

*«I sometimes go fast where I shouldn't»; «And then maybe I don't put on my seat belt when I'm driving around in Rome»; «I went on my motorbike when it was raining, on wet cobblestones»; «We met someone he knew and he said to him: 'Come on, let's bet our driving licence, let's have a race'»; «After having been drinking he started driving his racing car fast. I told him that if he didn't slow down, I would get out».*

The young people interviewed report that they try to identify protected places where it is possible to enjoy themselves driving without any danger but, also in this case, they perceive

the risk of exceeding the safety limit without realising:

*«When I go to the country I do 180-degree turns, but there it's all fields. In any case, I do it slowly, nothing risky»; «They usually do it on the village road or a country road where there aren't so many cars. But next to the village there's the main road and if you leave the village, for a joke, you meet the main road and you go on it anyway and so you don't realise what could happen to you».*

Lastly, several of those interviewed state that the risk from reckless dangerous driving depends also on the powerfulness of the vehicles available:

*«I've got a moped that goes at more or less 42 km/h. If I had a scooter I'd run more risks».*

5) *Area of sexual behaviour*

This area concerns promiscuous behaviour and behaviour modes connected with missing or insufficient protection: conceiving a baby or catching an illness, in particular Aids, but also living one's sexuality in ways which do not seem to be appropriate, or the risk of not distinguishing between the risks of sexuality and sexuality itself:

*«Obviously it's a wider problem than Aids because, like all eighteen-year-old girls, I've got the 'getting-pregnant-or-not problem»; «Also unprotected sexual intercourse is a big risk in different senses: someone runs the risk of getting pregnant, someone else of catching some disease»; «At times I've had 'alcoholic' sex but in that case I feel hardly anything»; «It's Aids that's negative because sexuality isn't negative, you mustn't confuse the two things»; «She's a bit free and easy, in the sense that one day with someone, another day with someone else, and the*

*consequences in our country are being reproached by people».*

Not using protection appears to be connected with the establishing of a trusting relationship:

*«It must be a person you trust and also a little symbolic in the sense that with a person with whom you have acquired a greater level of trust, you know where you are sexually better, you are more concentrated, you end up having a great intimacy».*

6) *Area of unhealthy habits*

This area includes very different behaviour modes such as smoking, excessive diets, gambling, amusement parks, the abuse of 'Play Station', the internet or role games, but also excessive studying, using the bus or, simply, assuming imprudent behaviour or behaviour which is too uninhibited: *«Another risk area is things that can cause harm to your health, cigarette abuse and also harmful dietary habits»; «Sometimes in the evening I go and play poker, then I wake up at three o'clock and think: 'Now the day is lost'; «Driving with your eyes closed»; «At Gardaland amusement park there were the twin towers and the 'kamikaze', twelve metres high. My boyfriend said: 'I'm not doing that again, once is more than enough'; «I used to have 'Play Station' and I spent hours and hours playing it last year at a time of acute depression, and I realise that it is the symbol of nothingness»; «Looking at someone else's girlfriend because he can notice. I won't do it and I'm a martial arts instructor!»; «Rather than being a friend he was someone who used the others, as he played role games a lot»; «Sometimes it happens in my studies but always small things. For example, volunteering in oral exams even if I'm not very well prepared, or copying»; «If you're out in cold and freezing conditions all week, you're asking to catch the flu»; «Those who go on their mopeds risk less than someone who goes by bus like me: there are people on the bus who do anything and you can never know who you're going to meet or what they'll do to you»; «My*

*brother went to London for New Year's Eve and he went just like that. I wouldn't have done that».*

7) *Area of behaviour modes that imply a «trial identity»*

This area concerns those behaviour modes aimed at reaching a greater control of one's environment, which, however, is reached by avoiding the comparison with real facts significant for assessment. In our sample this is mentioned exclusively by younger males and seem to be connected with an attitude of childhood/adult age juxtaposition and with the conflict between the terms of passiveness/activeness and impotence/powerfulness, characteristics of early adolescence:

*«Once I climbed a very high tree and I couldn't get down again; I wanted to go up to see if I could get up there, to see what it was like from up there»; «Once with my friend Lorenzo I swam all the way across the river Ticino, in a reach where we didn't know how deep it was, we didn't know if there were deep parts, if there were whirlpools underneath. We wanted to show that we could do it and then tell the others about it. There was quite a strong current but the biggest risk was that a boat might suddenly arrive»; «The brother of a friend of mine died because he decided to get off the mountain path and he fell from a precipice».*

8) *Area of behaviour modes with a transgression-type or antisocial meaning*

This area includes behaviour such as swindling, vandalism, brawls and drug dealing but also wearing punk clothes:

*«We got into the stadium with false season tickets. If they'd found us out, they'd have thrown us out»; «We secretly entered a golf course and we started throwing things in the lake. There was a guard who started following us. I've never been so*



*afraid»; «Hitting people»; «My cousin had a problem with ecstasy. It was him that gave it out, basically it was something a bit unpleasant»; «The other day I went to piazza di Spagna and there were all those lads with their hair on end, yellow, green, drinking, with chains. I mean those people who don't understand the difference between good and evil».*

## 2.B ADULTS' ASSESSMENT OF RISK

Also in this case we can see the suspicion of some young people for generalisations, and the choice as to how to proceed in a more relevant way to the specific case:

«I don't know. I never distinguish between the adult world and the youth world. In my opinion it's something subjective that changes from one person to the next. It's not true that adults are always against adolescents just as it's not true that adults must always try to understand young people»; «In general there aren't many differences but you have to view each situation case by case».

However, this research has made it possible to emphasise that, in the opinion of most of the people interviewed, adults assess risk in a different way from adolescents. A certain number of young people interviewed anticipate an exaggerated assessment of risk due to fear, while others speak of a more open attitude based on an adult assessment that is consistent with that of their age group. Lastly, some of them express the idea that the assessment also depends on the kind of adult-adolescent affective relationship or on the sort of risk in question:

«I think that adults assess it differently. In the sense that a young person risks more»; «There's a difference. For example, every time I go out, my father worries, even though he knows very well where I'm going and knows all my friends»; «My parents are very afraid but I'm very careful. I choose my friends. I don't go to discos»; «There are some parents who

don't let their children go out, they don't even let them go to their girlfriend's house because they think that something might happen. Those people really are over the top»; «Before I went to England my father said to me: 'Make sure you don't get pregnant'. I was fifteen and I replied: 'At my age?»; «My parents are normal people, they're not afraid. They bought me a moped. I consider them to be permissive»; «It depends also on the degree of trust that parents have in their children».

The difference in assessment above is sometimes portrayed as being natural, that is, deeply rooted in the different viewpoint, in the differences regarding the number and kind of experiences that one has had, in the greater or lesser awareness of the facts on which to base the assessment:

«It depends on which viewpoint you look from. Obviously if my mother knew what I do, she'd worry. My mother knows my abilities but she doesn't know them fully. She knows that I know the mountains but she doesn't know how well I know them. She knows I do martial arts but she doesn't know to what extent»; «Parents don't know young people's matters so well. They lived through them in a different way from us. They put too many things together, joints and cocaine, that I think should be distinguished»; «Of course there's a difference in opinions. There's a different situation for everyone. It depends on the story, the personal situation, the ideology that a person has»; «I believe in the saying that until a person sees it under their nose, they can't see it».

Other times the difference or the identity of opinions seems to be connected with the different way of conceiving risk, also regarding the different role held in the family or the kind of risk in question:

«Maybe an adult thinks of different risks. Maybe for me a risk means going on my moped and an adult thinks about losing their job or about risk in the family, I mean about the

responsibility. I haven't got big responsibilities, I have a very free life. I don't have to think: 'I've got a house, children to protect, to defend'; «Maybe for my father risk is getting sacked, but not for me. The risk involved in riding without a crash helmet is a risk for everybody».

Also in the relationship with their parents a high degree of ambivalence emerges, between accepting and refusing their opinions:

«I think a lot of my parents but they help to make me feel more insecure. I can't understand them, I mean I understand their worries, this is normal. But I have the doubt that they may be right about the kind of life I lead. For example, they're worried because they know that I like smoking joints, but on this matter I'd rather they weren't in such agitation, as if something nasty could happen to me from one moment to the next».

For some of the interviewees the difference in mentality between young people and adults can be seen as being positive because it guarantees a certain distance within the relationship, or increased closeness:

«Perhaps it's even right that there's a difference. I wouldn't like my mother to meddle too much or to do the things I do»; «When your mother finds out you smoke and asks you: 'Why do you do it?' , I think she's right because in the same way they do it for us, because they love us, we'll do for our children».

Sometimes, on the other hand, the adults' mentality is openly criticised and considered to be something that should be changed, also because it considerably affects the experience and behaviour of adolescents. Indeed, the young people interviewed point out that the little trust and the increased checking of parents on their children does not guarantee any

of the parties from possible risks, but, on the contrary, can make adolescents more vulnerable, inhibiting their critical capacities. Lastly, various young people explicitly request attention that is more aimed at their needs:

*«I think that parents and teachers understand very little about what adolescents live through. I'm very angry because I went from the middle school, in which there were some good teachers with whom you could build up a relationship, to the grammar school where I found another world, all old teachers who didn't know what needs a young person has. You can't give the responsibility of education to people who haven't even taken the trouble to read a book about adolescents!»; «My parents have been neither very good nor very bad. I have never spoken to them about certain things but I need adults to understand. Sometimes there's no dialogue, we speak on two different frequencies»; «There are certain parents who don't let their children stay out late in discos because they are afraid of drugs, but drugs can be found not only in discos. I know people who come home at two o'clock in the morning and so quite early, but they take drugs»; «Often it's the parents who cause damage for their children. Fortunately my mother has given me a lot of freedom in the sense that she reduced her control over me as I gained her trust»; «My parents are more afraid of me going out at night than if I have a problem with my boyfriend. They don't consider that».*

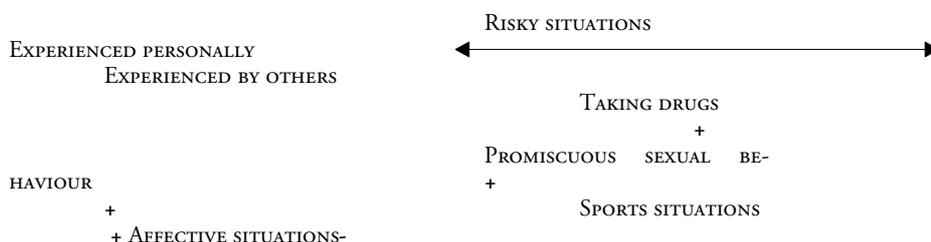
### 3. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF RISK

We can subdivide our sample into those who claim that they have rarely, or even never, run risks and those, on the other hand, who said that they have run risks several times in one or more areas of experience. A third category includes those who claim not to remember:

*«No, I've never run risks»; «I rarely run risks»; «It might have happened but I don't remember».*

Indeed, for some, memory seems to represent a risk in itself:

*«They're things in the past. I don't want to remember»;*  
*«You've got to go on and never turn back».*



While talking about risky situations experienced personally and by people close to them, the young people interviewed outline risk stories that tend to overlap. Three behaviour types are exceptions: taking drugs, excessively uninhibited sexual behaviour and risks in sports situations. In the first two cases the risky behaviour is ascribed to others to a greater degree than to the person himself/herself. However, in the second case this behaviour is attributed mainly to the person speaking.

This fact appears to support the hypothesis that adolescents find it difficult to talk freely about certain behaviour modes experienced personally, whereas they feel more at ease talking about other people, who can also become the object of their fantasies and projections, or serve as reference models who, by experimenting in a freer way, open the path really and metaphorically:

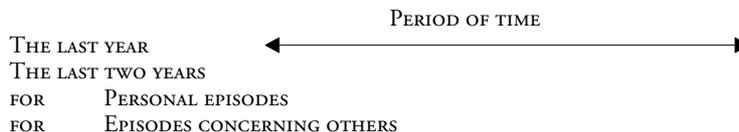
*«I experience risk because my best friend, Laura, likes running risks. Her philosophy in life is 'seize the moment', in everything: if she doesn't show off a little, she's not happy. My philosophy works like this: I see what the others do and I decide if I want to do it or not according to my thoughts».*

In any case, both in the episodes experienced by the interviewee and in those regarding others, risky behaviour modes of a sexual nature appear rarely and are nearly always referred to in an allusive way:

*«It was Saturday, when I normally go out wearing a short skirt. There was a tramp or a drunkard who stood in front of the door of the bus, his hands on his hips, his legs apart and a bottle in his hand. I had to pass near him and I was really afraid»; «When I come home late at night alone I'm afraid of nasty encounters but I screw up my courage».*

However, 'affective'-type risks, that is, the risk of becoming involved with a person and being disappointed or hurt, appear in large numbers:

*«Recently I had an argument with a friend of mine who gossiped for her own ends and there was a big mess. Now I no longer believe in friendship between girls because there's always jealousy because of boys».*



Those interviewed tend to mention episodes which happened relatively recently: over 70% of the situations experienced personally date back to the last year and 80% of episodes regarding others occurred in the previous two years. This fact can lend itself to different valuations. One can hypothesise that the high number of recent episodes highlights a low level of permanence of the memory attributable to a high use of removal as a form of defence against a traumatic incident; or that the proximity of the episodes experienced matches the age of the people interviewed, that is, it shows that adolescence represents an elective period for risky be-

haviour.

The episodes they tell seem to be concentrated throughout the whole year with a significant peak during, or at the end of, the holidays.

### 3.A SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED PERSONALLY AND BY OTHERS

The stories told occur in town in more than 60% of cases, both as regards personal risks and for those of others. The town, therefore, is represented as the most dangerous place, followed by the mountains and the countryside, while no reference is made to the sea environment. With the exception of the disco, mentioned by many young people, a multitude of micro-contexts in which risks were taken are indicated that do not lend themselves to significant comments: «around town», «in the metro», «at the home of friends», «at the front door», «at a party», «in a summer camp», «in the car», etc.

The young people claim to run risks mostly in the company of friends (60% of cases mentioned) but also alone or with brothers and sisters. The presence of companions seems to guarantee a feeling of greater protection and safety which, however, can be belied by facts, to the point of changing one's assessment completely:

«The current was strong but the two of us managed to resist it quite well»; «Taken like that it's dangerous. But taken with a friend I was sure that we would both be close...but then I wasn't very well and he didn't notice me at all»; «I tried smoking marijuana. I was fine in their company, but then I understood that they had conditioned me. I had been subjugated. It was as if I had been taken over by something that wasn't me».

When asked whether they experienced a particular state of mind in the risk situation, most of the young people inter-

viewed replied in a negative way; however, several of them indicated the presence of significant emotional states immediately before, during or after the risky situation:

«No, I was as usual»; «I was skiing normally, it was just a way of having fun»; «I was angry at my illness and I wanted to seem mature, I wanted to seem older but really I was a child»; «I was a bit excited, a bit happy, a bit important. I felt proud because the TV cameras were filming me»; «I was a bit excited. I had taken some 'trip' before but in very small quantities because having hallucinations was a little frightening»; «I had a hell of an afternoon because he had said very nicely: 'If I can, I'll call you this afternoon. If I don't call you, forget it'. I waited all afternoon»; «I had a terrible panic attack»; «At the beginning I didn't care at all because I couldn't remember anything. When rumour began to spread and then when I saw him again and we spoke about it, I was very embarrassed but not angry because by then I'd already done it».

Some of those interviewed seem to use a denial mechanism which is used to push away problematic feelings:

«I have tried drugs but I don't do them because I feel sad»; «I'm not afraid of taking drugs, it's just that it doesn't interest me...still, I'm afraid of the risks I'd run, but I'm not interested».

As regards risks experienced by others, the prevailing reply concerning the presence of a particular emotive state was «I don't know».

The young people interviewed are split between those who claim they were aware of the risks connected with the situation and those who admit that they were not aware of them, acknowledging an error of judgement or a state of indecision between awareness and unawareness. A sizeable minority, on the other hand, consider that it is impossible to make a suit-



able prediction and declare their impotence in the matter. Therefore, in the explanation of the event, we see again the chance determining factor that the subject seems to use to avoid the problematic confrontation with his/her responsibilities:

«At the beginning they seemed like nice, kind people but then when I began to see them more often I realised that they weren't»; «I predicted the consequences, or not. Even today I don't know if things would have turned out the way they did if I'd been there waiting for him»; «I can't work out what will happen, my will can't decide it»; «The problem was that I landed on a different and slippery kind of ground. I didn't make a mistake. It was fate»; «It's impossible to predict it. When it happens, it happens. What can you do about it?»; «Against such an unpredictable variable what can you do? I could only risk it».

The confrontation with one's responsibilities is also avoided by blaming the event on others:

«Actually things could have worked out fine but for him it was a day like the rest. It was absurd to be closed in within those four walls with Ermanno who was completely out of his head. He even got a camcorder out to film strange things, the stuff that was on the table».

The awareness of the risk is linked by the young people with fear and a feeling of tension which is faced with what we could define as a state of cognitive conflict and/or with taking action. However, when the action is taken without any awareness of the risks, subsequent consideration of the event has a questioning effect with the consequent appearance of fear:

«I knew the road was slippery but I said: 'I've got to go, I accept'; I had taken that road lots of times and I said: 'Okay, go on then'. But I wasn't willing at all»; «The fear and aware-

ness of the risk were so great that I didn't have the courage to do it. But then you're obliged to do it because you realise that you can't stay like that, you can't keep it keep it inside you. In precisely the moment that you run a risk, you feel freed of a weight»; «There are certain solutions to avoid accidents but you have to accept precautions, perhaps not saying to yourself: 'Don't worry, you're in the hands of fate. I'm able to avoid having an accident'»; «Beforehand I didn't think about anything. I said: 'Okay, let's do it'. Later, when I realised that it was risky behaviour and I became aware of what I'd done, I was afraid, I felt in danger».

A positive outcome of one's behaviour can increase one's self-esteem and drive away doubts about one's abilities, while a negative outcome can be alleviated by the enjoyment of a 'secondary advantage':

«In the end I felt good, as if I had reached the aim I'd set myself and so I was quite excited. I did it, yeah!!», «I was frightened but all in all I was fine. I was in the hotel, I was walking with crutches and all the sponsors gave me loads of presents».

The interviewees indicate that the experience can produce both a positive effect and a negative one, or can be 'filed':

«It changed my way of driving, but not only that, also my way of feeling life. If I drive fast, I save five or ten minutes but I do myself harm»; «I've got one friend in particular who drinks every Saturday to go over the top. He's very shy and reserved and he drinks in order to do who-knows-what, to become what he isn't. He becomes outgoing, he changes completely and he likes this»; «In the following days no, I didn't have any second thoughts or memories of what I'd done».

In the stories of meaningful events we see again the representation of risk as an aspect which belongs to childhood, or

which implies the attempt to become older:

«I ran risks when I was younger, not now because I try to lead a more controlled life»; «I could have avoided everything but I'd have had to feel big»; «Sometimes I see people who act big by running between cars»; «You smoke in order to feel like someone, to feel big, to be up to the situation, for all the needs of an adolescent who wants to overdo it»; «If I hadn't drunk it, they would have thought of me as a little girl».

But it is also significant how some young adults try to differentiate themselves from younger people:

«I'm twenty-two now and I say no, I can't fall back into this adolescent behaviour any more. Of course young people run risks too. It's a cultural idea that adolescents are the category at risk because the change is obvious: they have changes that are both physiological and changes in their nature but young people aren't immune. At twenty-two years of age one is an adult but I can't stand this label. You still want to be an adolescent in a sense and you still want to be a little foolhardy and not take things too seriously».

Lastly, it must be stressed that after running a risk, the young people interviewed tend to open their hearts to friends, although a fair percentage of them talk about it with their parents. Other reference figures, such as teachers, are absent.

In any case a certain number of adolescents claim not to have spoken to anyone about it and this percentage rises greatly when they speak about their acquaintances who have run risks:

«Outside that group I spoke about it to this friend of mine. Giovanni is older than me. He's twenty and we speak a couple of times a week, but really we tell each other everything»; «I

decided not to see him again, I decided to stay calm, to have a life of my own, to speak to my parents. I decided to go out with my mother, to go to museums, to stay at school to study»; «I faced this problem by myself and none of my relations or friends knows».

Some think they will repeat the risks they have run, or even risk more, others that they will risk less.

One group confesses that it is not able to judge in abstract terms:

«Anyway I want to do it again because I want to enjoy it more by preparing it better»; «Less because I'm a bit more aware now! And have more love of myself, perhaps. And also because I've put my head straight, I don't do moped races riding in the wrong direction»; «I can't answer that. I think that, whatever happens, it'll always depend on me. It'll depend on how I'll be later on and the conditions which I'll be in»; «It depends on the kind of risk. I think I'll risk more in certain risks, at work for example».

#### 4. RISK PREVENTION

As regards prevention our research has enabled us to identify a set of aspects, at times contradictory, concerning the type and quality of messages, means of communication, and their overall efficacy.

In particular, certain criticisms are indicated between the broadcasting side and the receiving side of the communication.

Prevention campaigns seem to be of little use or even counterproductive when compared to their set aim. It is pointed out that the messages are often too categorical, too full of meaning, and so do not promote consideration; furthermore,

they appear to be more aimed at modifying behaviour than considering the motivations which cause it; but, in particular, that these campaigns seem to proceed in a single direction, that is, they seem to anticipate a stereotyped, passive reaction rather than an active interaction that encourages the sharing of problems among young people and their adult interlocutors.

In the final analysis the sense of the campaign, in the opinion of the young people interviewed, seems to be more that of 'eliminating' the problem once and for all than that of allowing it to be explored.

#### 4.A PREVENTION CAMPAIGNS AND THEMES

All those interviewed say that they have heard of, listened to or seen one or more risk prevention campaigns, in particular in the month before the research:

TABLE 9

REFERENCE PERIOD	
-LAST MONTH	60%
-LAST SIX MONTHS	20%
-ONE YEAR	10%
-MORE THAN A YEAR	10%

We can, however, split the sample into three groups as to the degree of permanence and quality of the memory. A first group includes those young people who appear not to remember or to have vague and confused recollections which obstruct an active interaction with the medium and the message received:

*«I can't remember where I saw them»; «About Aids, but I don't remember»; «I have some doubts now. I don't remember if it was about Aids or drugs: there was a lad, first from behind and then close-up, his head turned round and his eyes were completely white»; «Yes, I can mention some, but only vaguely».*

A second group included those young people who remember the risk campaigns with relative ease and precision. They can place them in time and space and try to enter critical relations with the message received:

*«The campaign I saw about three months ago was nice. The one that says: 'Make love with all your body, even with your head'. It makes you think because it puts forward a positive message and not a terror one»; «I remember one that was broadcast on television in the evening. They were going home from the disco, everyone happy, singing, and then there was an accident. A voice said: 'My God!'. Then they showed the photos of various accidents that had happened, cars that were smashed up, it seemed that all young people were foolhardy».*

A third small but significant group is formed of young people who say that they have not seen prevention campaigns or have not linked them to the term 'risk':

*«I haven't seen a real campaign»; «There hasn't been a real campaign but there was all that controversy about singers who didn't want to do it»; «I've seen campaigns about drugs and Aids. I knew it was dangerous, that I had to be careful, but I never associated it with the word risk»; «Not about risk. I've never seen a leaflet with 'Be careful about risk' written on it».*

The adolescents interviewed, however, point out that it is possible to enter into contact with the campaigns using different channels:

*«I've seen them on television, at school, everywhere»; «I see that all the media are against risks, certain things within this topic».*

TABLE 10

MEANS OF COMMUNICATION	
●TELEVISION	60%
●SCHOOL	20%
●NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES	10%
●OTHER	10%
●RADIO	0%

As can be seen from the table, the most quoted means is the television.

For some young people this is the only means of information; many consider it to be the most effective. Several young people, however, especially the older ones, claim not to watch the television much, or not even to have one, or to follow exclusively a theme channel; others, on the other hand, consider it not to be very effective:

*«I only see them on television»; «I read them but if I listen to them on TV, they make more impression»; «And the TV never goes out of fashion»; «Perhaps seeing it on television helps, it opens your mind».*

*«Perhaps those on the radio as mass-media are not effective. In my opinion you've really got to see the person, see their face»; «I don't know if there are any more because I haven't been watching the TV much recently»; «I don't have a television at home but I see posters, I read the papers»; «I see the campaigns they do on MTV, I only watch that»; «The television seems to me to be less effective, it's remote. An image is one thing, a table with a booklet on it is another, you pass in front of it and maybe you stop and talk about it».*

Some, like the young man in the following example, explains how television allows one to distance oneself from the problem and defend oneself in a better way:

*«A person is happy to watch the TV and not someone who comes to school and talks to them. In the first case it enters your head, in the second case it doesn't. Because maybe you don't feel like listening, or you say: 'In any case I know these things anyway, it's no use repeating them'».*

Following the television we find, in order of appearance: the school, newspapers and magazines, advertising billboards, pamphlets and leaflets (in bars and discos), posters, phone cards, adverts on trams and buses or in hospital, communication on the internet:

*«I see them at school and on advertising billboards»; «The best channel is the internet because now it's everywhere and lots of people have it»; «In the bar there were some leaflets, they gave out condoms too when you left»; «At the end of my maths books there's a sheet that's all burnt with a picture of young people and underneath it says: 'Don't burn your life with drugs'».*

One interesting fact is that the school carries out rather an important risk prevention activity, although, as can be seen in this chapter of the research, young people's opinions concerning the matter are somewhat contrasting.

The other consideration concerns the fact that there are no young people who remember having heard prevention campaigns on the radio. This fact enables two hypotheses to be made. The first is that the large number of 'private' radio stations whose audience is mostly, if not exclusively, made up of young people are not interested in broadcasting messages regarding the risks run by their listeners; the second hypothesis is that young people are not sufficiently 'stimulated' by radio campaigns.

As regards the subjects discussed we find, in order of appearance: Aids (the use of condoms and the warning against



exchanging syringes), reckless driving (the use of the crash helmet and seat belt, limiting one's speed), drug consumption, smoking, alcohol abuse, wasting water, la camorra (organised crime), illegal gambling (the last three in the Naples area only) and support of education. About 30% of the young people make reference to more than one topic:

*«There are those about road accidents or the one about the children with Aids playing bar football»; «It starts with two friends who go and have an Aids test which is negative. They go and celebrate and then they keep reminding everybody to do the test»; «In the entrance-hall of my school there's a picture of an adult with a crash helmet and a child without a crash helmet»; «Yesterday I saw the one about water. They said not to waste it because in the future there might not be any more drinking water left and in poor countries already there isn't any»; «On TV there's the one about books. 'Come to the library' or something like that or the one about museums, about education».*

#### 4.B ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS

A large majority of the young people interviewed say that they agree with the messages, although later, when asked to determine their effectiveness in terms of impact, there are differences within the sample.

##### MESSAGES TRANSMITTED

INFORMING	REPRESSING	NOT INTERVENING
IN ORDER TO	IN ORDER TO	BECAUSE OF A LACK
MAKE UP FOR A LACK	COMPEL	OF ALTERNATIVES
OF EDUCATIONAL FIGURES		

A certain number of adolescents, especially among the youngest, point out the usefulness of campaigns aimed at informing also because they can fill a gap left by the educational reference figures:

*«They might work. If they keep repeating them, you never know, it might enter someone's head even if it's already in*

*there. Not saying anything is definitely worse»; «Because if there isn't a parent who tells you certain things, it's still a way of hearing about them»; «There are many people who don't have relatives who tell them: 'Watch out, you mustn't do this because it'll reduce you to this'».*

The greater usefulness of preventing psychological damage rather than physical damage is stressed:

*«The most terrible thing is losing one's head, losing people's affection, human relationships, you have to learn to avoid it»; «And do a campaign in which it's clear that you can have a crash because you feel lonely!».*

However, both these and the other adolescents appear sceptical about the achievable results:

*«They're definitely useless but they do well to produce them. One of the main problems is that people don't know these things. People don't know the effects of ecstasy pills. After the campaign it's up to your own conscience. If someone wants to do it, they'll do it anyway. If a person can't take anything in a bar that night, they'll take it the night after»; «It's a contradictory thing. In theory they do well to produce them because it makes people aware of the problems, but in practice I can't see so many results and so I don't know what they should do».*

Alternative strategies, based on 'repression' or 'not intervening' are set against the informative campaign:

*«They made a law about the crash helmet: compulsory, full stop. As for pills, it just needs more checks»; «I saw the one about accidents but it serves no purpose. It just takes more traffic police and more fines»; «The only thing to do is to legalise everything».*

	<b>REPRESENTATION OF COMMUNICATION</b>			
SHORT TERM	DIRECTED AT	ONE-WAY		IMPERATIVE
VS	BEHAVIOUR	VS		VS
LONG TERM	VS	TWO-WAY		REFLECTIVE
	DIRECTED AT	MOTIVATIONS		

The majority of the young people interviewed claim that information campaigns are useless because, even when they attract one's attention, they are not able to affect the personal motivations implied in risky behaviour:

*«They make then but I can't see a decrease in these types of behaviour»; «They even do those about ecstasy, with Jovanotti, I don't know who, completely useless»; «We young people are split into two groups: the people who don't want to do certain things and the people who like to do them. You can't do anything about it because people like me and my friends decide beforehand not to do these things; and for the people who decide to try, no campaign is any use»; «They're completely useless. A drug addict doesn't say: 'Ah, tomorrow I won't take anything else»; «The media have more effect on people who risk less than on those who always run risks»; «It's something that starts when you're young, from your conscience. A boy whose parents are separated or whose brother has died, who lives in a poor area, who doesn't do anything from morning to night, I can understand him. But you can't do anything at this level»; «I don't agree because they're not well made. They're made with the mechanism of psychological terrorism»; «Perhaps they're not very useful because if a person wants to do something, they'll do it anyway»; «It's useless, people don't attach importance to it because they're things that the television says and maybe from another world»; «The information campaign is no use. Adolescents of sixteen like adventure too much and then they've got to try drugs, you have to have a go with drugs!»; «I find that they're right but I don't know if they have an effect. You wouldn't think so because among my classmates I'm the only one who wears a crash helmet».*

The attitude of many young people appears to be mistrust-

ful, if not openly hostile:

*«Newspapers bombard you with news which maybe isn't so true»; «The one about joints becoming syringes. What a lot of nonsense!»; «To be honest I don't give a damn about the drugs campaign because I've seen it in a friend of mine and I've seen what needs to be done»; «After that lad, who I knew, died in the square, all these campaigns promoting the crash helmet started, also in my school. This makes me angry»;*

In the young people's comments, prevention is associated with advertising and it seems to share with this an outline of seduction and make-believe:

*«All adverts too, what was that one? 'Wanted: boyfriend'»; «It was a beautiful advert that can be seen only before the start of films at the cinema»; «They do social messages on television, don't they? Sometimes self-important and well-known personalities. I still do not understand why, if something comes out of their mouth, it's better»; «These campaigns are false. You see famous people wearing a crash helmet but if they really go by motorbike, they don't wear one».*

It is stressed that the choice of whether or not to carry out a prevention campaign responds to logic that is difficult to identify, which seems linked to the contingent moment rather than to long-term aims. Adolescents seem to feel caught in the middle of moments of incessant 'pounding' and other moments of 'deafening silence':

*«They wake up suddenly and do these campaigns and then they stop at once»; «It depends on the season. There's the one in which they talk about crash helmets. A few years ago it was Aids, it depends on the period. Now it's the season for ecstasy»; «These campaigns must be restricted a little because they can be negative. They bombard you and then they disappear»; «It should be a gradual and constant process. Every day someone*

*says let's have an anti-smoking campaign, anti-this, anti-that and after three months everybody's forgotten it already».*

Campaigns do not convince young people: they are too difficult to understand, too distressing, or they simplify or miss the main problems:

*«The one about the crash helmet, the 'man child' one, isn't convincing. Indeed, I don't wear one»; «They don't strike you so much. The one about Aids that's on TV, it took me a while to understand that one»; «The scenes where they show drug addicts as they are don't convince me much. Also because I've had the opportunity to see them when they're normal. They look like anyone else, but when you see them on TV it's a shock»; «I found it awful because it causes anxiety, it drives people away rather than bringing them closer»; «The media either give ready solutions or insoluble problems»; «Little is spoken about risks connected with sex: it's as if it were a taboo. I've never seen a condom on TV»; «It's true that we talk a lot about ecstasy and very little about Aids also among ourselves but they're the first to be ashamed of it».*

In the opinion of the young people interviewed these messages seem to be made for an adult audience only and have unrealistic aims that are out of proportion with reality. Some of those interviewed point out that 'terror' campaigns are counterproductive because they provoke reactive behaviour:

*«A person rejects messages of the 'don't do that because you fade away, you waste away'-type because they come from adults with an adult language»; «Saying 'don't drink', 'remember the speed limit' is excellent! But the metro is closed, the trains are blocked, everything is blocked and then they turn off the traffic lights!»; «In my school there are posters with 'smoking makes you lose your head' with little puppets without their heads. It's a really horrible thing and it serves no purpose. In fact, if an adolescent sees something like that, they light a cigarette in*

*front of it, even if in that moment they don't feel like one. They do it out of instinct».*

Many of those interviewed state that prevention campaigns should not give young people the feeling of being judged and should give them the freedom to decide; others, on the other hand, say that they should 'bombard' people more and put them in direct contact with certain real situations, even by using harsher messages:

*«I wouldn't do it completely against 'trip' because everyone must be free to make their own experiences but I would warn people of the risks there can be. Without judging. When I speak to a friend I tell him what happened to me»; «It's difficult to say what it should be like. Hearing a message once isn't enough. And also it's necessary to give everybody a little freedom so that they can form their own opinion»; «Something obsessive is no use at all because now these people have died and they fill your head, and every time they talk about pills»; «A violent message is better because I see the pitiful state these people are in and I say to myself that I never want to end up like that»; «The fear of the number of Aids victims is much more useful for them rather than that thingummy without a face that says that Aids is a problem. The symbol is of no use to us. It's the real figures we need. If you see that in Rome there are a certain number of people with Aids, and in that moment you're taking drugs, you say: 'Wow!'. Any young person will tell you that anything unconnected with the reality of that moment is not interesting»; «They should get you more involved and be more frequent, they should bombard people more because adolescents overlook it».*

Young people, as in the following examples, show how difficult it is to live between the need for and the fear of an outside authority, between the 'risk' of assuming responsibility and that of delegating it:

*«I don't know, I can't find a solution. It's something that*

*should come from within but authority cannot come alone, can it? There's the law about crash helmets but if they offer you an ecstasy pill it's much more complicated, you've got to decide yourself, haven't you? Of course they could teach risk education in schools»; «Risks are run much more by young people and so it must be a means that they use, not so much the school because they see school as an obligation. Maybe on the radio, at the discos they go to, where they are»; «It's not that I'm exactly against these campaigns, on the TV as on the tram where is written 'Get on the tram and you'll find yourself'. These things are definitely useful otherwise no one would invest in them. However I feel so small when faced with subjects like these».*

These campaigns seem to be more striking and effective when they transmit a positive or ironic, less valuational message. The adolescents interviewed believe that it is important to become involved actively in prevention and are happy when a friend, or a significant adult, becomes involved with them:

«If they do it in a funny way, maybe you listen to it more than the one that says that you mustn't smoke because you could get a tumour»; «Last year we raised some money for cancer prevention. We did a charity fishing day. It was good»; «In my opinion it's useful if you discuss this question spontaneously with your friends so that everyone expresses his or her own opinion and not when someone calls you, sits you down and explains everything to you. Also because you mustn't pass a judgement, a sentence, you only have to inform people so that everyone can talk about it spontaneously with friends. Parents shouldn't start preaching either»; «I think that there are very few things that can change the world and advertising on TV or at the cinema against drugs or lots of other things definitely isn't one of them. It's us that must put ourselves in the frame of mind to change things, I have to say what I think»; «These campaigns aren't to be followed completely, everybody must take the message in his or her own way. These messages must not be taken without being examined and discussed»; «It's also a question of education. A lot of parents

make a mistake of examining, now I don't know how to explain, in educating their children. A person must be able to make life beautiful. Have you seen the film 'Life is beautiful'? when Benigni enters the concentration camp with his son and he makes him believe that it's an amusement park. It's a mistake to do that, pretending with one's son that what's bad is good. But he was able to show his son by speaking and being with him the beauty there is in this world, which is very little. And so a person doesn't go looking for other things. If, on the other hand, a parent lets his children do what they want, they'll grow up the way they grow up, it's wrong»; «Teachers could teach us more. Even by using Manzoni one can find some connection and can speak about it and make the topics more relevant to today, one can escape from using half sentences. Often there are conferences for adults without inviting young people to speak; they must let everyone speak»; «These things about listening to young people should be done more often. They don't seem to attach much importance to young people: we're a little looked down on. Politics never says anything about young people either. Also for work they do something in theory but not in practice».

These latter statements are significant of the fact that adolescents detect a 'split' between the institutions and the youth world in ways of thinking and taking action. They notice a tendency of the authorities to blame young people for the failures in the process of social cohabitation rather than undertaking the weight of the institutional responsibility.



## Part two

### *Image of oneself and the relationship with one's environment*

#### I. THE IMAGE OF ONESELF

This research was not aimed at tracing a psychological profile of the adolescent participants. However, during the interviews certain elements emerged which are useful for outlining, albeit in a broad sense, the image that adolescents have of themselves and their surroundings, and for proposing a hypothesis regarding the level of integration of one's personal identity, *quite well integrated* in most cases and *not very integrated* in a minority of cases.

Here are some extracts from the interviews which illustrate the characteristics of those interviewees with quite a well integrated personality:

*«I'm nineteen years old. My name is G.. I did five years in a boarding school because of various family problems. I came out of this institution about six or seven months ago. Now I live with my parents here in Milan. I've got lots of interests: music, I sing in a group and I like rock music a lot, and also the cinema and shows. I'm attending the hotel school because I like the idea of travelling, I go to the tourism institute in via.....As a person I consider myself to be optimistic. I'm a person who aims at achieving things, although at times I give in, but I'm quite self-confident and I consider myself sensitive about many things and...that's all»;*

*«I'm twenty-one years old and I'm in my fourth year studying medicine. Unfortunately I don't have any hobbies in particular because of the fact that I'm studying. I don't have any friends because my life really is studying, home, university. I **have** got one hobby as it doesn't take up much time: collecting phone cards. I've had a boyfriend for the last six years, quite a long time. I've been with him since I was young, since I was sixteen. It's a school romance that fortunately has lasted, because they usually finish quickly. On a personal level to enjoy myself I like going to the cinema a lot, the theatre too. I don't like dancing much, I don't like discos. I prefer going to sandwich bars or pizzerias or seeing a film. I don't share the choice of young people today to go out at midnight and return at five o'clock, I could never do that».*

When speaking about themselves the young people are able to give a clear and understandable picture, they are consistent and consequential; there is no contradiction in their remarks. The description of their lifestyle shows they have good contact both with their own internal reality and with the external reality.

Conversely, in the case of not a very integrated personality we are faced with unclear replies, an expository style that becomes more contradictory and at times confused:

*«The first thing I do is to try to put the person I find in front of me at ease. I define myself as a close friend and first I'd try to put the person at my, and at his, ease. Formal introductions, like 'my name is this' and shaking hands, work. But there must be something that is noticed, the first thing that distinguishes one from this very informal presentation. Often a person introduces himself but remains empty. Indeed, after five minutes I can't remember his name any more it's become so formal. When a group of people comes together and everybody introduces themselves, I remember the introduction made by the person who makes some comment about something, like clothes, this person distinguishes himself from a cold introduction. If I have to in-*

*troduce myself on the whole I try to do this, to make friends immediately»;*

*«My name is N, I go to the classical grammar school, I play the guitar, and that's it (laughs). I play sport. These are more or less the things I would say...Well, yes, then you have to know the person, I don't define myself with lots of adjectives...not exuberant. I'm a bit shy but after a short time I open up a lot. I'm also a bit of a hell-raiser, perhaps (laughs), yes, but after a while, it takes me a while».*

? *Present experiences*

The vast majority of the young people interviewed claim that, at the time of this research, they are going through a good, or quite a good, period of their life, although many say that they have faced negative events recently.

These negative events largely concern situations of mourning such as the death of loved ones (grandparents or uncles/aunts), loss situations which, however, are often associated with transformation processes:

*«Obviously, as I said before, the death of my father. But other things too, maybe smaller things, I mean... changing life from one school to another. I'm still having difficulty leading a different life. I used to keep different hours, I had different things to do, I lived in a completely different environment; I left from one day to the next. Maybe in my mind I didn't think 'it's hard' but in my unconscious I found it really difficult. And then I spent all summer in Rome working, delivering pizzas, it was really tiring».*

*«This period at University has put me under quite a lot of stress. Not knowing what I'm going to do has put me under stress. There are a lot of people who don't know what to do. I*

*knew what to do but they wouldn't let me do it. The limited entrance to University threw me! (laughs). And then there was the death of my grandmother, everything at the same time»;*

*«Two years ago a friend of mine died whilst riding her moped. It was a terrible thing, really, because you hear that these things happen but you never expect that it could happen to a friend of yours. Then one day my best friend at that time came to school and confessed something that nobody knew: that her brother had also died in a moped accident and she had changed schools deliberately so as not to have the compassion because everybody said to her all the time 'poor thing, poor thing' Then, okay, there was something else, something very nice because a friend of ours, another scout, became pregnant, unfortunately, because she wasn't expecting it. However, she decided to keep the baby and she got married and that was something that raised my spirits because there was a death but there was a birth too».*

Positive events are of various kinds: often situations of change are described such as moving on from the middle school to the high school, the birth of a sister or brother or rediscovering the relationship with a parent:

*«I changed schools. In the middle school I felt lonely but now I've got lots of friends»;*

*«I wasn't expecting it any more but then my sister was born. It was a nice surprise»;*

*«There was something else that involved me a lot, in a positive sense! Last year for the first time I went on a trip with my father. It was really nice, I discovered aspects about him that I didn't know before!».*

The young people interviewed expressed a positive evaluation of their studying: 75% claim to be doing well at school or University.

In particular, many of the adolescents are aware of being in a period of rapid evolution as regards their studying commitments:

*«The relationship that boys and also girls have with studying in general isn't so great but after the first two years of the middle school, where I failed, I came back and I started to study. And so I have never killed myself studying but I have always had good marks, from seven to eight. When I did my school-leaving exams I had an average mark of eight».*

For young people studying is an occasion for discovery and exploration:

*«I'm interested in the new subjects like philosophy, technics, science...I'm very good at them»;*

*«In my studies I'm curious about everything that's new».*

Several of those interviewed point out that when they move on from the secondary school to University, they live through intense expectations about the future and their progress, which shows rather a demanding way of relating to studying:

*«I see University in a different way. The secondary school is something you do for a general education whereas at University there is a different concept of studying. You have to be professional in that field, you have to be the best. I have to know the subject inside out, I have to study and I have to stay at the highest level. There mustn't be anyone above me, or at least they*

*must be like me, at least in terms of knowledge»;*

*«I realise that as I grow I have to work more. Things become more complex and it's really hard!».*

? *Relationship with free time*

The young people interviewed seem to be quite involved in hobbies or sports activities but do not seem particularly interested in any associations of any kind, with the exception of the scouts.

Practically no reference is made to social or political interests.

The majority of adolescents seem to use their free time in a constructive way to explore themselves and their surroundings:

*«I dedicate my free time completely to sport. I like skiing and surfing and I've tried horse riding. This summer I was teaching children to surf: I had to unload the surf boards, prepare the sails and I worked for two hours, but this enabled me afterwards to have a surf board of my own and to go surfing for an hour... free»;*

*«In my free time I like reading very much, I go to the gym and go jogging. Also I work as a volunteer at the Red Cross. And then, sometimes, I go and help old people, again as voluntary service and then I go to the church hall to organise children's activities and then I study».*

The latter example seems to highlight a hyperactive operating style. However, from the general sense of the interview it is noticeable how the activities mentioned are the expression

of good contact with reality, in line with a harmonious evolutionary process. An exasperated activity, on the other hand, is indicated in the following example:

*«I play the guitar, I write songs, I've got to do an audition. Once, I was in love with the theatre, then my passion left me and I don't know if it was a passion or just a whim. I began doing theatre in September. I did a month and then there was an audition and I wasn't chosen. I did theatre for a year and I felt very good. I thought I was good but evidently I was wrong. I also tried to be an extra. I applied to the RAI for the programme 'A place in the sun'.*

*«As for sports I do everything and nothing: I'm good at nearly everything but I've never devoted myself to one sport. I've started to do canoeing. I'd like to do lots of things!».*

This description illustrates the wandering from one activity to another without being able to identify an authentic interest clearly, as if the purpose of the action were to fill an inner feeling of emptiness.

Other young people, on the other hand, point out that they are not able to use their free time in a profitable way: they are rather reserved and do not carry out an explorative activity:

*«Anyway in my free time I do hardly anything. I'm very lazy, I like listening to music»;*

*«It's a bit of an empty period but every now and then I play football, volleyball, whatever there is».*

## 2. RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS

In general, the majority of the young people interviewed claim to enjoy a good relationship with people of the same

age: to have many friends, classmates and from other contexts, and to have a least one group of friends to make reference to.

In particular, the adolescents place importance on the behaviour of the group in which, although there are special friendships, the collective aspect dominates and things are done «together»:

«We have a group of friends, we all play volleyball and then we meet up in the afternoon for a couple of hours... then we go home and study. Then we meet up on Sundays. These are people that I've know since I was little and who I've grown up with. Now I have a good friendship with a schoolmate from the grammar school»;

«We usually all go out together on Saturday night. We have a whale of a time».

A greater independence from the group, or the ability to be together with others in a more articulate and differentiated way, is displayed among the older people interviewed:

«I have a one group of friends basically. We're a group. And then sometimes we split up and meet up with other groups, sometimes other people enter our group».

Entering or leaving a group can, especially for the younger adolescents, form a disturbing element for the existing balance; for the older people interviewed, on the other hand, it appears to be more a physiological element:

«We had some problems towards New Years Eve because a friend of ours didn't want to come with us to celebrate and so they excluded him, let's say. He is, perhaps, my best friend but he had the wrong attitude saying that he wanted to go somewhere else and not with us. The thing I didn't like is that



afterwards the friends in our group didn't want him back any more. If he wanted to come back with us he had to apologise and ask to be accepted back and I didn't like that because we've been together for years and you can't exclude him in that way for something stupid, for something that the others wouldn't accept»;

«Now I've got another group. Until last year it would have been a problem because I used to go out with them. And then, of course, my mates started going out with younger girls, as always happens, and so we joined the university students' group».

Most of those interviewed claim to have a special friendship which began in childhood or more recently.

Among the older young people this special friendship tends to last for a long time and, even when changes or separations take place, these are tolerated and do not compromise the friendship:

*«And now the fact that University has started, and then he's started going out with a girl, and so I haven't heard from him for a while, but he's still a very good friend».*

Most of the interviewees say they have a boyfriend or girlfriend but seem more interested to indicate this presence or absence than to describe the type of relationship in more detail:

*«There's a girl, she doesn't come from here. We've been together for nearly a year. Different events have happened»;*

*«I haven't at the moment but I've had girlfriends. Yes, I mean, on holiday»;*

«No, we had an argument a few weeks ago».

### 3. RELATIONSHIP WITH ADULTS

Most of those interviewed describe a good relationship with parents, and with adults in general, although there is a conflictual aspect, typical of this age.

At times the young people describe an idealised relationship with their parents:

*«I have an amazing relationship with my Dad. I'm in love with him, he's my ideal of a man, really. I admire him for everything he does and has done».*

Others describe satisfactory relations:

*Fine, with Mum fine, with my Dad things are very good as we see each other twice a week and so when we're together we get on well. Of course with my Mum there are some problems but for stupid things like 'tidy your room' etc., but things are good»;*

«Because my parents trust me. If I ask for something they know that I need it and that there's a precise reason and so they help me as far as they can».

Other times decidedly difficult relationships are described:

*«They make me feel more to blame. And so I got angry, I went mad....*

Then there was an incredible row and I heard my grandma say that she was afraid that I would have a nervous break-

down».

The young people interviewed, however, show that they are also able to come into contact with the feelings of others (parents/adults) and to take these into account in the relationship:

«This year I've seen that...perhaps I've grown up, I don't know... and I've see that Dad feels bad about it, and so it makes no sense only making him feel bad (because I like making him feel bad). And so for the last few months I've been trying to please him, and it's hard. In fact, every now and again we end up arguing because he doesn't notice my efforts. My mother is happy that I'm trying to argue less, that maybe when I come back from school I call him and say 'hello Dad', I tell him how school was, since we see each other only for an hour in the evening because he works a lot. I think, that things are going better, he seems to be happier now»;

«before it was worse because we argued for trivial things, then my mother wasn't so well for a time. She had an illness which then passed. From then on we have all been a bit calmer, except that I'm not exactly so calm ... but it's okay, fairly good».

## Part three

### *Adolescents with risky behaviour*

#### I. NINE ADOLESCENTS WHO RUN RISKS

The nine young people (3 for each city involved in the research), chosen as they have in common a specific tendency to run risks, are different in age, sex, social class, lifestyle and type of risky behaviour.

Given the small sample size, the aim of the meeting with these people was not to draw general conclusions; nevertheless, the results of the interviews introduced us to very significant and interesting material, and not only because stories were entrusted to us in which young lives come into contact with danger and death, but because the topics which emerged offer a starting point for further consideration which we believe to be fundamental to direct new research and specific projects for prevention therapy.

We have analysed the material trying, first of all, to detect any analogies and differences in the relationship that these young people have with risk.

#### I.A ASPECTS IN COMMON:RISKY BEHAVIOUR AND LIFE STORIES

The first element in common that all the interviews emphasised is that risky behaviour is included consistently in the story of their existence and is fully part of the life story and life style.

In theory, a fact of this kind – especially for the experts in this field – should appear obvious and predictable. However, in reality, when faced with extreme behaviour and with an explicitly self-injuring value, we all tend to defend ourselves by hoping to find the signs of a sort of external fortuitousness.

In short, we would like to say that one runs risks a little by chance and that if, for example, Giorgio (one of our nine interviewees) fell from the fifth floor while he was performing stunts on the windowsill during a party «*So as to be at the centre of attention ..., nothing more*», it was exactly as he says: «*nothing more*» than young recklessness, perhaps a little heightened by having drunk too much or smoked something. The fact is we would like to think that if this event happened it is because Giorgio, in that particular moment, was not himself, but listening to this story does not allow us to trivialise the incident and to add fuel to this defensive illusion: the few seconds in which the critical event occurred, the fall from the fifth floor, speak in reality of a ‘catastrophe’ that was always predictable and that is still relevant to the present.

Meanwhile we learn that many other times Giorgio, during parties, used to show off by doing these tests of courage: «*I used to do handstands on the other side of the balcony railings...*», but it is not only this; Giorgio’s existential situation has been very critical for some time: he is not able to free himself from his dependence on idealised parental figures: «*My father is able to do everything; even if I were able to get a degree, what would it mean compared to him?*» and conflictual parental figures: «*I hate my mother because I am similar to her in every way and I cannot avoid clashing*»; he does not have any friends, or a girlfriend; his studies are going very badly and he has changed university faculty several times: «*I have a mobile university career..., a bit up and down...*» and, to conclude, he does not have any interests of any kind, nor do any tension regarding his plans or an aim emerge.

This empty and desperate condition is much more serious

in that it is denied: the feelings of inferiority: *«I'm shy, I'm ugly..., I have no will...»* are indeed continually disguised by an attitude of denial: *«I'm not very interested in having friends...»* tinged with frankly arrogant shades: *«I'm a hot-head..., I love a high standard of living..., I'm an exaggerated exhibitionist...»*.

Also in his way of telling us his story, slightly excited, the need to disguise his depression emerges. Two lexical elements are particularly striking. The first is the recurrent and scornful expression: *«I'm fed up!»*. This expression punctuates the whole interview and censures his relationship with people of his age, with girls, teachers, parents and prevention campaigns; only in regard to his fall from the fifth floor, which might have understandably led to his feeling 'fed up', is the term not used and the many injuries he suffered, still evident, are cancelled by the expression: *«Would you believe me if I told you that I didn't hurt myself at all? I just cracked a vertebra»*.

The second significant lexical figure is the mask: his recounting of the critical episode, the party during which his display on the windowsill occurs, full of detail and effect, clearly intended to strike the listener, reveals the problematic core of his denial, exactly because of its detail: *«I went to that party wearing fancy dress...»*; *«I was very happy with the costume I'd managed to find...»*; *«I was told that if I didn't die it was thanks to the costume that I was wearing which acted like a parachute...»*. Indeed, despite his repeated failures, Giorgio remains rooted to his life-saving «hot-head's mask».

Depressive elements, that are very slight and which are immediately denied, appear in the background of his story and contrast with the statement: *«That evening I was very happy»*; the fact that after that party he had a date with a girl *«And perhaps I was afraid of what would have happened...»* and the fact that *«Probably, if I hadn't fallen, I wouldn't have passed*

*that year at university...».*

*Aspects in common: Risk and (un)awareness*

The literature on this subject (see the introduction: «Young people and risk: ambiguity and paradox») agrees in stressing that in adolescence, thanks to cognitive maturity, risk is usually clearly known.

Our group of nine young people generally confirms this statement: they all know that certain behaviour modes are dangerous, although the more one approaches personal experience, the less clear the notion of risk seems to be.

The common fact that we considered most interesting is indeed the split between abstract consciousness and real awareness.

A certain unawareness of the meaning of risky behaviour is therefore a common fact, although it is expressed in different degrees and ways.

Maria, for example, who has promiscuous and unprotected sexual relationships, knows she should use a condom but states: *«I don't care. I don't think about it. I just take care not to get pregnant...at least».*

On the opposite extreme we find the observation of Alberto who seems inclined to start to wonder about the sense of running risks but who stops wondering with the unsatisfactory justification that he is 'absent-minded': *«I don't know if in me there were any reasons not to fasten the harness..., of course...I realise that climbing is a bit of a risky activity for me because I'm...an absent-minded person ...».*

One special way of administering the separation between abstract consciousness and real awareness is to use *rationalisation*.

Gianni, for example, reasons that 'the more one risks, the less one risks': «*When you're at your best you know what you're doing, you're very concentrated and you don't run risks...The same for world champion Valentino Rossi, when he's at his best and in first place he never falls... It's not me that says so, other people say it!*».

Dario also resorts to this mechanism: «*...so as not to slow down, and to understand if a car was coming from some other direction...I turned off the lights...*».

#### *Aspects in common: Risk and other people*

A further element in common to the nine people interviewed emerges from the assessment of other people's influence on risky behaviour, in particular the influence that the peer group, parental figures and society in general have.

##### a) Risk and the peer group

All of those interviewed agree that when in a group one risks more:

because of the need to feel like the others

Maria, for example, suffered greatly from loneliness in her early adolescence: «*At school they used to avoid me...*»; now she goes around «*with wasters*» and, regarding her having promiscuous sexual relationships, says: «*I feel up to it,...at least I do something like other people*»;



because in groups one feels less afraid

Alberto: *«I think that in company you risk a lot...because when you're alone there's the element of fear which is a strong deterrent... but very often in groups you do things that...»;*

because the group encourages imitation

Bruno: *«I'm thinking about my experiences with a group of friends when I associated with boys who were bigger than me and I found myself in situations that were bigger than me...»;*

because peers exert pressure which is difficult to oppose

Franca: *«The group definitely has an influence...if near you there are people who take drugs..., who drink...I don't know,...if someone says to you 'try!', you can say no once but in the end you might fall for it...».*

b) *Risk and parental figures*

Parents and adults with a parental function are considered by all the young people interviewed to have no influence at all on risky behaviour:

because they do not know

Gianni: *«As I'm the youngest child I've been given a bit of freedom...and so sometimes I've gone too far..., in my opinion my parents have never known about these experiences (drug taking)...»;*

because they do not want to know

Carlo: «... My father...my father knows about the trains (on which Carlo paints) but it's as if he didn't know...Anyway, they leave the choice to me, I mean, they realise that I'd do it even if they told me not to...»;

because their authority is not recognised

Maria: «...My mother shouts at me all the time ...; And what about her? Doesn't she think about what she does?...She's never there, she always comes back late, I think she's got a man...»;

because their competence is not recognised

Dario: «... My parents are quite old...they'll be over fifty. They live in another world. They don't know anything about us young people...»;

Gianni: «Three years ago they spoke about Aids at school in a meeting about sexuality. The teacher knew less about it than the kids...».

c) *Risk and society*

Also in this area all the interviewees think that society does not have valid tools for prevention and help.

Some of them appreciate the information campaigns, although their effectiveness is considered only theoretical.

Franca: «Giving information is certainly positive but, as I have been through it too..., I think it is not enough.... I mean from a rational point of view, you understand, you know...but from a practical point of view...».

Gianni: *«Knowing things is useful, but how can I trust them? I mean, I trust them but I want to try. If I try, if I take drugs, that way I know what it is, I know it's bad for you...».*

Most of them have a decidedly aggressive attitude towards information.

Alberto: *«You don't get anything by frightening people...I think that very little is obtained by informing people in this way... I distance myself and I carry on doing what I've always done».*

Maria: *«Adults judge...they make me want to do the opposite...!».*

Giorgio: *«Information? It's all boring things. You run the risk of arriving at the opposite extreme. An information campaign that's too pounding drives you to say: 'Enough. I'm fed up! The more you tell me I mustn't, the more I'll do it'».*

#### *Inevitability of risk*

Neither peers, nor parents, nor society in general (as illustrated above) can, therefore, help a young person to risk less; but can the protagonists of risky behaviour do anything for themselves?

Once again the answer is 'no'; the young people that we interviewed say, albeit in different ways, that they do not have the tools to risk less:

because risky behaviour gives relief to suffering

Maria: *«It's easy to say: 'Don't risk!' You have to try feeling*

*bad first and then it would be interesting to see...»;*

because it drives fear away

Gianni: *«It was a challenge because if I was able to do it, as I was, the fear passed. If I hadn't been able to do it, because I was afraid, I'd have put my motorbike away in the garage...»;*

because reason is fragile

Franca: *«You know everything about any kind of risk: drugs, Aids..., but it frightens me a little that your instinct gets the better of you...»;*

Alberto: *«...I'd like to say that it would be possible to risk less but, unfortunately, it's not like that.... I'm...an absent-minded person»;*

because of the need to feel at the centre of attention

Dario: *«...There's always that desire to show off which, in the end, makes you do stupid things»;*

because risk depends on external factors

Giorgio: *«They say that young people have accidents, but why?...Yes, they were a bit drunk..., but if you make roads wider, maybe nobody will die».*

It is important to note that often in these young people's stories the subject of the risky act, the person who carries out the action, is not the 'I' of the narrator but «challenge», «instinct», «the desire to show off».

Therefore, when talking about risk they emphasise, even by their use of syntactical construction, that risk is a sort of 'thrust' of which the individual is not the promoter, but rather by which he/she is affected.

#### 1.B DIFFERENCES

Significant differences emerge.

#### *Aim of risk*

Two risk modes emerged in the group of nine adolescents (apart from the dangerousness of the behaviour): one aimed at realising quite a precise and conscious purpose and another in which the behaviour mode cannot be associated to any end at a 'conscious level' and appears as a true leap in the dark.

#### A) WHEN ONE RISKS FOR SOMETHING

Alberto, for example, faces his trips high in the mountains as real training: «*Climbing in the mountains is an activity that I started two or three years ago and that I've been doing seriously for a year...*»; and explains: «*There (high in the mountains) it's more dangerous, there are more risks, the ropes, snap links; and... it is more frightening...; it takes training, especially psychological training*». In the seriousness of this undertaking appears the hope that overcoming the real fears of the climb can also help to conquer the more indistinct fears of life: «*I believe it is an activity that gives you very much..., it's a big lesson of life that helps you and that can be applied to any situation...*». In Alberto's story, furthermore, (see Enclosure 7: «Three stories of young people who run risks») the challenge of fear and the need to overcome his limits appear to be evidently connected with the eternal competition with his father: «*I never let the opportunity slip to go against him, to challenge him in action...but then I feel bad about it, but it's an emotion I can't resist*».

Similarly, in the story told by Carlo (who is a passionate 'writer'), the aim of the risky behaviour is described very clearly. Carlo describes two types of risk: one which is absurd and is an end unto itself, which is not for him: «*Driving fast for the sake of driving fast, I don't understand it...*»; and one which is necessary in order to reach an important goal: «*There are things it's worth risking for...I risk only so as to paint...and so, in a certain sense, I risk so as to express myself*». And he explains: «*Painting has helped me to grow...it's a question of expressing myself, of leaving my mark...it's helped me, it's really saved me!*».

B) WHEN ONE RUNS RISKS FOR THE SAKE OF RUNNING RISKS

We do not want to say that in these cases risk is devoid of sense (certainly legible on an unconscious level) but rather that risky behaviour is not linked to a conscious aim but appears to be a generic, and equally alarming, *leap in the dark*.

Franca, for example, seems immersed in a haze that makes everything and everyone vague and homogeneous. Nothing in her life takes on a specific prominence and, as a consequence, risk too appears to be a generic 'taking the plunge' with no other aim but to escape from the present: «*One risks so as to try to change something.... I say: 'I don't know, maybe I'll try..., then we'll see how it ends up'.... One takes the plunge hoping for better things*»; «*A young person thinks less and takes the plunge more..... He thinks less about the consequences that there can be...*».

Along the same lines is Luigi: «*I had no experience of the river and I didn't feel in good shape, but I decided to take the plunge....Then later I thought a lot about it and I understood that when I left I was having one of my spells...*».

Also Giorgio, although in a more excited tone, sees risk as a non-specific and aimless urge, «*Without risk there is no spur.... There has to be a stimulus, a spur that takes you to the*

*limit*».

What the «*better things*», that Franca hopes for and the «*stimulus*» and «*limit*» to which Giorgio refers, are is very difficult to define. However, Franca and Giorgio also have great difficulty in defining, or simply describing, themselves.

An interesting variant on this way of testing risk as a 'leap in the dark' is that of risk in the sense of **fun**, an innocent and commonly-used term but one which implies distancing oneself, being taken away from oneself, and perhaps even the risk of losing one's way.

Gianni: «*Young people have to have fun, they need enjoyment*».

Giorgio: «*If there's no risk, there's no fun*».

Bruno: *Having fun grabs you, it gets you and... you don't think about anything else*»; and further: «*Young people of my age do things without thinking, for nothing, I mean...they enjoy themselves*».

An example of how the 'leap in the dark' and 'fun' intersect tragically emerges in Dario's story of the critical incident: *At night, I was on my brother's motorbike, without a crash helmet. There was a friend of mine with me and we were going to have some fun in a disco. At a junction, so as not to slow down, and to understand if a car was coming from some other direction, I turned off the lights. I thought that if I didn't see the headlights of other cars no one would be coming out and so I went through the junction without slowing down. A car arrived from the right. I braked and bent the motorbike but the back wheel went...».*

### *What running risking means*

The term 'risk' evoked three types of association in the nine young people interviewed:

risk as danger, risk as a challenge and risk as excitement. Also in this case we can identify two different types in substance: one subgroup which perceives danger, fear and challenge quite clearly, and a subgroup which seems to seek mostly excitement.

#### A) RISK, DANGER AND FEAR

The feeling of fear and danger dominate the scene in the whole of the story told by Alberto who raises fear to real exaltation: *Fear is a natural emotion but which is outlawed by our society...one tries to eliminate it..., but a person without fear is a person who is too dangerous for themselves...»; and later: Riding a moped in town is very dangerous. It's frightening, you can die...I always wear a crash helmet and I try to remember all the time that I'm at risk...».*

Along the same lines Bruno says: *You can never be too afraid...the proverb says so... 'The more afraid you are, the more careful you are'».*

Fear is, therefore, a component of risk that can be experienced consciously and used as protection from danger, as an ally.

However, not always can the voice of fear be heard so clearly because 'fear makes you afraid' too.

Maria for example who is perpetually on the run from herself and indeed defines herself as a *person who goes around»* says very clearly that there is fear but she does not want to feel



it: *Perhaps I have so much fear that I pretend it isn't there...».*

For Bruno: *Fear is always there, maybe you can refuse to admit it...but it's always there».*

Also Gianni, in remembering the motorbike accident in which his cousin died, recalls his fear as something to eliminate at all costs: *After that accident I used to ride very slowly...I was scared shitless...and then I said: 'Enough!'. I took a long bend very fast. It was a challenge and the fear passed».*

Bruno takes a middle position: *When I dived in (he describes a dangerous point in which the sea-bed is shallow and there are rocks – 'I'm the only one who dives in head first there because it's quite dangerous') the first few times I was afraid...but then the more you repeat it the more the fear disappears...the more confidence you gain»; and tends to project fear externally, onto the others: *Every time I fall from my moped I don't let it affect me. Perhaps some people get a bit frightened...».**

B) RISK, CHALLENGE, COMPETITION

As for the feeling of danger, also the sensation of challenge is more or less evident but always present in risk.

There is risking which is a **total challenge**, a sort of rebellion against 'everything'.

For example Bruno: *Maybe, I don't know, you get that feeling of anger with the whole world, perhaps in that moment you're on edge and you say...the world stinks and nothing goes right for you, maybe you go out and immediately do something dangerous».*

Alberto: *...I think there's an element of rebellion. I see ac-*

*tivities...that are a bit risky and I see that it's a criticism of society...a desire to break the common mould, to reject the rules...».*

Then there is a more specific **challenge, aimed at parents** or representatives of authority.

For example Maria: *To have control of the situation, I decide whether to come or go, whether to screw or not, where and with whom. To rebel against the world: I'll make those shitty parents pay and also the boss at work, she's an idiot who cleans floors all day....They haven't protected me and so I'll do as I see fit: a controlled risk».*

Carlo: *The guards are like that...if they catch you...it depends who catches you. You can find the one who gives you a good dressing-down for four hours, or the one who's fanatical, who wants to lay down the law, who wants to dominate..., but they've hardly ever caught me...although in the end the guards always arrive».*

But the **challenge** is also **with oneself**.

Bruno: *When you've overcome your fear and you're able to do it (diving head first in a dangerous place)...you feel stronger, more self-confident».*

Giorgio: *Running risks is a way of proving something. You say: 'Yes, this is dangerous', but I have to prove something to myself more than to others...that's the way it is....»*

Maria: *Risk is a challenge: let's see who's cleverer; since everybody has taken me in and they still do, let's see if I can take the others in sometimes....»*

It is interesting to note that, apart from these different levels, the challenge never takes on any ideological significance and this, in our opinion, is a characteristic (see introduction) that is very distinctive of today's young people.

c) RISK AND EXCITEMENT

While the feeling of fear and the desire for a challenge can, and often do, go together (because after all the challenge is to overcome one's fear), risk as a non-specific search for 'excitement' annuls fear and ignores the challenge; seeking excitement seems to be an attempt to satisfy a deeper and more general need: the basic need to *stimulate oneself* and to «feel good».

Maria says with concise clearness: *I can't stand emptiness, it causes me to panic. I need excitement so as not to feel the emptiness. When I do these things (chance, unprotected sexual intercourse), I feel it, otherwise I'm dead inside».*

Franca thinks along the same lines. Risk is a stimulus that opposes depression: *When I go through a moment of complete apathy and I really have no more stimuli...I summon up the courage to do certain things ...it's useful so as to feel it more, maybe it's a bit of fear, pain, emotion...perhaps also the desire to throw things into disorder..., the desire to escape, to escape from the humdrum; it's then that you run risks».*

For Giorgio, too, an important element of risk seems to be the search for a more perceivable feeling of oneself and the world: *One runs risks in order to feel alive, to commit yourself. Without risk less care would be given to things...».*

Excitement, therefore, as a stimulus so as to feel things more, but also as an *anaesthetic*: *The excitement of risk, says Gianni, increases your adrenalin and makes you forget your fear».*

Or just like a **drug**: Carlo seems to be fascinated by the excitement connected with adrenalin: *I'd like to try things like parachuting, as an experience, once...But then of course maybe it becomes an obsession, because you get these shots of adrenalin. It must be fantastic...».*

## Part four

### *Final considerations*

#### I. EXPERIENCE OF THE FOCUS GROUPS

Most participants gave a positive assessment of the experience because it enabled them to talk about the topic of risk for the first time, or in a deeper way than usual, even though the group was defined as a new and 'strange' experience, but a productive one:

*Generally we don't speak much about risk: about why you do it but not about the consequences, we only speak superficially»; Things have come out that we wouldn't have thought about if we hadn't had the opportunity to speak about it»; «I thought it was a kind of interview but it was a dialogue, a comparison. It gave rise to a very thorough debate on the matter, although even more could have been done: the subject of risk is a very wide topic and cannot be dealt with in a simple way»; I was happy with it. There was a lot of freedom of expression which is the most important thing. And I don't usually talk much about these subjects»; It was strange because you meet people you don't know and the first thing you do is to talk about important things. You usually start with 'what do you do? What sports do you play?'. But here we started immediately with things that you discuss when the other person is a friend»; We have had that exchange of views that it's difficult to have with your normal friends. With them it happens once in a while and you can't talk about it completely».*

Taking part in the group work gave the young people the

confirmation that they are able to express themselves about a difficult subject, that they can overcome their insecurity and the fear of comparison or 'abnormality', that they can listen to others or, at last, be listened to, that they 'count'; but also that they can transform their point of view through common focus groups:

*It was interesting to realise that this subject is within everyone's reach; I understood a lot of things that were not clear to me; At first they were new faces but then after we had been speaking for five minutes it felt like we had known each other all our lives; It's been a good experience because you speak about these things with people you already know. But when you're there things come out that you don't expect and that help you to consider the question; I like this way of speaking. It's interesting to hear other people; I liked it because I was able to find out what other people think about things that occur to us; It has been a very special experience. Sitting round a table in a circle creates a different atmosphere because there is, necessarily, a person facing you, something which doesn't normally happen; Initially I was afraid of what the others might think about my way of life but then there was a good dialogue, a meeting/exchange between people with different ideologies. But what I appreciated the most was someone listening to me; I saw that these people sometimes shared other people's ideas, and other times they didn't, as I do. I saw that it's normal and so I was willing to speak; Yes, it opened a dialogue, we were able to speak, our embarrassment disappeared at once. In fact, for one question we were given a quarter of an hour and we spoke for about an hour; At the start I wasn't sure because I only knew the people by sight, but once we started talking I no longer thought about who I had opposite me but what they said and I appreciated them; It's nice helping people to carry out research or prevention; I liked the usefulness that there can be in analysing adolescence in these troubled periods. With all this technology I'm happy if our situation, in its small way, can be re-valued into something bigger; It's been useful as a social question; The group has been a good experience and I think that the same thing could also be done with people considered to be at risk,*

*not to leave them in a ghetto; I'd always thought of risk as an individual thing. In the group, thanks to the others, I understood that the context exists; I used to think that all those people who risked a lot were Martians but now I understand that it isn't true.*

The adolescents, as can be seen, felt at ease with group work which was not particularly structured and which was determined in common with the others during the course of the activity. From this point of view the story (Enclosure 6) containing the 'ecstasy' stimulus was criticised in part by the young people interviewed because, as it was too linked to recent events in the news, it hindered their ability to express themselves freely, thus confirming the adolescents' doubts about certain aspects of prevention that we explained earlier.

*The little story about ecstasy was fun, although I'd rather that we hadn't spoken about this after someone died because of this, because drugs have existed for a long time and this topic mustn't be discussed only when something sensational happens. It would be necessary to understand the causes of it; I didn't like the story about ecstasy because it was too limited and closed. It led you to write certain words. It wasn't free. However, I liked the risk scale a lot.*

## 2. THE GROUP OF THE 48 «NORMAL» PEOPLE

The adolescents in the sample have made it possible to highlight an articulate system of shared ideas fantasies and emotions, both in the group work and the individual interviews, which represent:

risk as an unstable and vague concept with the function of organising different and various meanings;

risk behaviour modes as on a 'continuum': between consideration without action and action without thinking; between

control (that makes events predictable) and the lack of control (which exposes one to unpredictability); between relinquishing a relationship with other people and its dogmatic acceptance; between banality and exceptionality; between conventional 'normality' and challenge, a symbol of 'non-conformism' or 'abnormality'.

These young people waver between the two different sides but seem to succeed in not being at the ends of the 'continuum', although, in various situations, at the cost of considerable effort. They show, therefore, that they have a generic «tolerance» or «inclination» towards risk, a physiological need to test new possibilities, but rarely do they put genuinely risky behaviour modes into practice.

The predominant mechanism behind the most risky behaviour modes is of a conflictual type, that is, one risks in order to «prove» something, to overcome one's limits and widen one's field of action so as to «overcome weakness».

Secondly, and in accordance with the above, the young people interviewed clearly express the difficulty in discriminating between risk as a positive element giving structure to one's personal identity and risk as a negative element, removing this structure, which makes movement on the 'continuum' above difficult and, sometimes, distressing. This difficulty is consistent with the high degree of phase-specific ambivalence between keeping the family reference setting, typical of childhood, and the final adoption of a personal style, typical of the adult age.

The young people interviewed stress that they use the peer group as the predominant reference system for adopting or avoiding risky behaviour but appreciate the help of competent adults who are able to give them support in their effort to find their bearings among various choices, and that they become involved with them in the elaboration of the meanings of their



experiences. However, they criticise, at times harshly, those adults who remain absent or are present only when passing moralistic judgement.

Furthermore, these young people tend to represent prevention, as it is carried out at present, as the exclusive prerogative of the adult world. This world seems to propose pre-packed concepts and models of life which one can only accept, and therefore promotes a break with young people's way of living and conceiving the world. Young people, however, display a marked sensitivity towards prevention, exploiting the positive aspects, suggesting changes and modification, and criticising the useless and non-functional aspects.

### 3. THE GROUP WITH THE NINE PEOPLE WITH RISKY BEHAVIOUR

The group of the nine young people with risky behaviour has proved to have many elements in common: risk expresses essential aspects of the person and his/her story; none of the interviewees risks «by accident»; risk is well known to all of them but there is a division between theoretical consciousness and real awareness. In the presence of peers, in a group, one risks much more, whereas parents and society in general can do nothing effective to help young people to risk less; however, just as much an illusion is hoping to find the means to avoid danger within oneself.

On this basis the first 'dramatic' conclusion to be drawn is that risk is considered unanimously to be inevitable. This substantially fatalistic position is certainly alarming but it underlines the importance of reconsidering prevention and proposing it as an occasion to make the interested party an active part of the project.

Important differences have also emerged in the group: leaving aside the greater or lesser type of risk, two different risk styles can be identified: one can risk for something, to realise an aim, or one can «risk for risk's sake», in conformity

with a way that we have defined «a leap in the dark». A second significant difference is in the conception of risk as «danger», as a «challenge» or as a «source of excitement»: where the feelings of fear and challenge predominate, risky behaviour appears to be linked to conflictual elements and to the need to overcome one's limits thanks to this action. In those cases in which risk is sought as a source of excitement, it seems that the young people are talking about a structural void and the attempt to satisfy the need to stimulate oneself so as to feel alive.

In summary, two fundamental typologies emerge: there are those who risk out of the need to assert themselves and to feel better, more acceptable, and those who risk because risk is the only way of living, of feeling alive.

#### 4. DIFFERENCES AND COMMON ELEMENTS BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS

There seem to emerge some important *differences* between the «normal» adolescents and those who adopt risky behaviour:

risk is conceived by both as a challenge, danger, source of excitement and fate. However, in the case of the «normal» sample the predominant association (and consequent risk style) is with the challenge and danger<sup>1</sup>, whereas for the other nine the prevailing relationship is with fate and with risk as a source of excitement, useful to fill a void;

for the «normal» adolescents the most feared risks are those that involve a loss or break-up regarding relationships, whereas the other nine indicate the risk that a «break-up» might occur in themselves;

<sup>1</sup> As can be seen from Table 1 on page 21.

in the «normal» sample the division between theoretical consciousness and real awareness is less evident: risky behaviour modes appear to be more in connection with adolescent ambivalence and the respective conflicts;

in the «normal» sample a less close relationship emerges between risky behaviour and life stories, that is, with the traumatic events of the past.

Despite these differences, there are several *points in common* between the two samples. In their remarks the young people point out that:

the roots of risky behaviour are deep and that one does not run risks because of disinformation;

everything that sounds like a criticism, threat or indoctrination does not facilitate the introjection of a model of self-protection and can even be counterproductive;<sup>2</sup>

ways of exploring experiences and meanings linked to risk such as group discussions (that do not offer solutions but ask questions, and in which the peer group is supported by a competent adult) are considered by the young people interviewed to be not only the most pleasant but also the most effective because they cause a process of active participation and therefore encourage consideration, the only real protective factor against risky behaviour that is «released» in an instinctive and automatic way.

The aim of our research was predominantly investigative but, as is well known, no knowledge is given without entering

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that the young people assess prevention and its limits in a consistent way with the researchers (see introduction to the research).

into contact with, and modifying, the subject. In the course of the interviews which, at times, especially in the case of those people at risk, were emotionally intense, the young people interviewed displayed interest and participation for a subject which the majority of them had never considered in an organised way before.

Not only did they express favourable comments many times but also they found it difficult to stop the focus group and interview activities which often lasted longer than the researchers had anticipated.

There have even been positive consequences: it was pointed out that in certain cases this occasion for discussion helped the young people to overcome a critical moment both in their studies and their interpersonal relationships. This supports our hope: to have given the young people the possibility to observe themselves from a new viewpoint and to understand themselves better.

## Appendix

### *The tools used*

#### ENCLOSURE I THE FOCUS GROUP

##### OPERATIVE AND METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURE

##### ? ACTIVITY STAGES ?

##### AIM

##### 1. RECEPTION AND INTRODUCTION

PRESENTATION OF AIMS AND STRUCTURE OF THE MEETING TO ESTABLISH THE GROUP AS «WORK GROUP»

INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS TO THE GROUP AND ANALYSIS OF EXPECTATION

##### 2. APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT: REPRESENTATION OF RISK

- COLLECTING THE IMAGE OF RISK WITH ASSOCIATIVE MODALITIES TO BRING OUT THE VARIOUS MEANINGS OF THE WORD 'RISK'

FIRST ON AN INDIVIDUAL AND THEN GROUP LEVEL

TO COMPARE THE OPINIONS OF INDIVIDUALS SO AS TO ASSESS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GROUP ON INDIVIDUAL VIEWPOINTS AND THE LEVELS OF INDEPENDENCE

CHOICE OF ONE OR MORE WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TERM 'RISK'

TO VERIFY THE DEGREE OF HOMOGENEOUSNESS AND/OR FROM A SET LIST DIFFERENTIATION OF ANSWERS GIVEN BY INDIVIDUALS TO

( ENCLOSURE 3 ) DE-STRUCTURED/STRUCTURED STIMULI

##### 3. INVESTIGATION OF THE TOPIC: REPRESENTATION OF A PERSON WHO RISKS AND THE PERCEPTION OF RISK

-BUILDING-UP OF THE STORY OF A 'PERSON' WHO RISKS AND TO BRING TO THE SURFACE DESCRIPTIONS OF THE IMAGE OF A CONTEXTUALIZATION OF A SETTING PERSON WHO RISKS AND HIS/HER ENVIRONMENT

(ENCLOSURE 6)

DESCRIPTION OF THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS TO HIGHLIGHT THE DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF A PERSON WHO OF AN INVENTED CHARACTER RISKS IN HIS/HER OUTWARD AND INWARD ASPECTS

(ENCLOSURE 6A)

COMPARISON AND INVESTIGATION IN A GROUP OF INDIVIDUAL 'STORIES' TO REVEAL THE PERCEPTION OF INDIVIDUAL AND/OR AND ANALYSIS OF THE VARIOUS FACTORS INVOLVED CONSIDERED COLLECTIVE, PREDISPOSING AND/OR PRECIPITATING MOST IMPORTANT BY THE GROUP FACTORS TO

HIGHLIGHT THE CHOICES/PRIORITIES OF THE ELEMENTS WHICH CAME TO OUT

FINAL CONSIDERATION ABOUT THE PERCEPTION OF THE MOTIVATIONS

TO VERIFY THE DEGREE OF HOMOGENEOUSNESS AND/OR (WHY DOES ONE RISK?) AND THE SITUATIONS IN WHICH ONE RISKS DIFFERENTIATION OF THE ANSWERS GIVEN BY INDIVIDUALS (WHEN DOES ONE RISK MORE?) TO DE-STRUCTURED/STRUCTURED STIMULI

(ENCLOSURES 4 AND 5 )

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FINISHING

- BRIEF FINAL SUMMARY OF THE EXPERIENCE TOGETHER WITH THE GROUP  
TO SUMMARIZE THE MEANING OF THE MEETING FROM A GROUP/INDIVIDUAL VIEWPOINT TO ALLOW A PERIOD OF CONSIDERATION IN ORDER TO ELABORATE THE CONCLUSION OF THE EXPERIENCE

ENCLOSURE 2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW DRAFT

INTERVIEWER CODE.....

INTERVIEWEE CODE.....

? GROUP EXPERIENCE

*How did you feel in the group in which you took part?*

? SOCIO-PERSONAL DATA

*Who do you live with?*

*What do your parents do?*

*Which school do you go to or what is your profession?*

? SELF-IMAGE

*Let us speak about you. If you had to introduce yourself to someone, what would you say about yourself?*

*How are things going at the moment?*

*Has there been anything in your life recently that you have become very involved in?*

? RELATIONSHIP WITH PEERS

*What kind of relationship do you have with people of your age?*

*Do you associate only with your schoolmates?*

*Do you have friends that you see outside school?*

*Do you have a group of friends?*

*Do you have a special friendship?*

*In general are you satisfied with these relationships?*

*Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?*

? RELATIONSHIP WITH ADULTS

*How are things going in your family?*

? RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDYING

*How are things at school/university/work going?*

? FREE TIME

*What do you do in your free time?*

*Do you have any hobbies?*

*Do you practice any sports?*

*Do you attend any associations (cultural, religious, sports, etc)?*

? PERCEPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF RISK

*We have already talked about this in the group but which behaviour modes do you consider to be risky?*

*Do you ever do anything risky?*

*Can you think of a specific episode that concerns you or someone close to you?*

*Can you tell us what happened?*

*Were you/was he/she in a particular state of mind?*

*Did you/he/she know what you/he/she was/were risking?*

*Why did things turn out the way they did?*

*Did you/he/she foresee the consequences?*

*How did you/he/she feel afterwards?*

*What could have been avoided?*

*Did you/he/she discuss what happened with anyone?*

*Do you think that in the future you/he/she will risk more or less? Why?*

*You have spoken to us about how you see risk. In your opinion how do adults, for example parents or teachers, assess risk?*

? LEVEL OF INFORMATION AND ASSESSMENT OF RISK PREVENTION

*Have you ever heard about, listened to or seen information or prevention campaigns about risk?*

*Where?*

*About what type of risk?*

*Do you remember one of these campaigns in particular?*

*What do you think about it? What struck you about it?*

*Do you agree with the message?*

*Did it seem useful to you?*

*How long has it been since you saw or heard it?*

? OTHER

*Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have talked about?*

ENCLOSURES 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 6A

STIMULUS-SITUATIONS

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### ENCLOSURE 3

*Which of the following words, or other words, do you associate the word «risk» to?*

PUT A CROSS NEXT TO THE WORD OR WORDS THAT YOU CHOSE OR WRITE THE WORDS THAT OCCUR TO YOU:

ADVENTURE .....

CHALLENGE .....

FEAR .....

FATE .....

DANGER .....

EMPTINESS .....

COURAGE .....

TRANSGRESSION .....

EXCITEMENT .....

AN INVENTION OF ADULTS .....

<sup>1</sup> For the nine adolescents with risky behaviour, who did not take part in the focus groups, some questions aimed at exploring the concept of risk were added along with the stimulus situations given to the other sample group (see Enclosures 3, 4, 5, 6).

• .....  
.....

ENCLOSURE 4

IN THIS LIST OF MOTIVATIONS FOR WHICH »ONE« RUNS RISKS, CHOOSE THOSE WHICH CONVINCED YOU THE MOST. PUT A CROSS NEXT TO THE ONE OR ONES THAT YOU CHOSE, OR ADD OTHERS:

- FEELING UP TO SOMETHING.....
- FUN .....
- THE NEED TO BE NOTICED .....
- GOING AGAINST THE STREAM .....
- FIGHTING FEAR .....
- HAVING THE SITUATION UNDER CONTROL.....
- FEELING PART OF THE GROUP .....
- FEELING ALIVE .....
- REBELLING AGAINST THE WORLD.....
- .....
- .....

ENCLOSURE 5

IN THIS LIST OF SITUATIONS IN WHICH ONE RISKS, CHOOSE THOSE THAT CONVINCED YOU THE MOST. PUT A CROSS NEXT TO THE ONE OR ONES THAT YOU CHOSE, OR ADD OTHERS:

- IN COMPANY .....
- ALONE .....
- WHEN YOU FEEL DOWN .....
- WHEN YOU FEEL AT YOUR BEST .....
- .....
- .....

ENCLOSURE 6

»LET'S MAKE UP A STORY«  
TRY TO THINK OF A PERSON, GIVE HIM/HER A NAME, AND AGE AND A PLACE TO LIVE.

THE PERSON IS .....

AND IS CALLED .....

HE/SHE IS .....YEARS OLD

AND LIVES .....

IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT AT ABOUT .....

WHEN .....

ENTERS A DISCO .....

OUTSIDE .....

HE/SHE IS ALONE OR WITH .....

AND FEELS .....

HE/SHE HAS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE OTHERS FEEL .....

HE/SHE IS DRINKING .....



WHEN HE IS INVITED TO .....  
AN ECSTASY PILL BY .....  
HE/SHE DECIDES TO .....  
HOW DOES HIS/HER NIGHT CONTINUE?

ENCLOSURE 6A

*What characteristics does the person whose story you have told have? Describe him/her by answering the question that you will be asked. Try to answer straight off without thinking to much about it.*

1. WHAT DOES HE/SHE DO?
2. IS HE/SHE HAPPY WITH HIS/HER LIFE?
3. WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT HIS/HER PAST?
4. WHAT DOES HE/SHE DREAM OF?
5. WHO DOES HE/SHE ASSOCIATE WITH?
6. WHAT DOES HE/SHE REPRESENT FOR OTHER PEOPLE?
7. WHAT FEELINGS DOES HE/SHE HAVE?
8. HOW DOES HE/SHE SEE HIS/HER FUTURE?
9. IN BRIEF WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS PERSON?

## Literature on Risk in adolescence

### *Risk in adolescence*

This section is dedicated to the comprehension of the relationship between adolescence and risk:

The first part is concentrated on the concept of risk, a term which, although it usually refers only to the negative outcome of an action, may also refer to positive results.

Risk and development: In adolescence risk has a particular function (such as the construction and the strengthening of identity through exploration and the testing of ones' limits and resources), but it stops being physiological, taking on a pathological connotation, when people put their lives and those of others in danger: for example, the habitual use of harmful drugs is a way the adolescent uses to escape from reality, avoiding confrontation with every day difficulties which would permit him to grow-up and test his abilities.

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#### THE INCLINATION TO RISK.

In the context of research on the origin of the inclination to risk in adolescence, literature examines various factors: individual factors, background factors, the influence of peers, and

gender differences.

Individual factors: in this part we have assembled articles and books which study the role of personality traits, of psychological factors and of intrinsic motivations of risk-taking in adolescence.

Background factors: research on external factors which determine risk behavior are concentrated on the one hand on the role of the cultural and social background, on the concept risk and the kind of risk behavior enacted, and on the other on the influence of the family on the initiation of such behaviors.

The influence of peers: one of the main goals of adolescence is to bring about the process of separation/ individualization from the family, and in this context the peer group can have an important role in the setting in motion of risk behaviors.

Gender differences: the literature we examined shows that during adolescence males and females adopt different types of risk behaviors, because of their different perception of risk. This difference in perception could be due to the difference in development paths and in the social pressure put on them. In particular, males seem to risk and underestimate risk more than females.

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#### RISK PERCEPTION

This section includes research that deals with risk perception and risk knowledge, difference in risk perception in adults and adolescents, and perception of some specific areas of risk taking (HIV/AIDS, and dangerous driving).

Risk knowledge: the findings show that adolescents seem to have quite a good knowledge of which types of behavior are risky, but this knowledge is not integrated into their actual behavior.

Adults and Adolescents: in adults risk perception seems to be more coherent with their behavior, adolescents on the

other hand seem to have some sort of unrealistic optimism which makes them believe that «those things won't happen to me».

HIV/AIDS: The above observations emerge from studies mainly focused on the perception of the risk of getting AIDS/HIV and of having a road accident. Research on risk perception seems to be mainly concentrated on these two aspects of risk behavior.

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#### RISK BEHAVIOR

We have included some researches into single types of risk behavior; these studies have been divided into four sections: dangerous driving and accidents, substance use (alcohol, drugs, tobacco), sexual risk-taking and violent types of behavior.

An important aspect of risk taking is that risk behaviors are not isolated, they are connected together in what is now called the risk behavior syndromes, or constellations, which cover various types of behavior: we have therefore included in this part also the researches which take into consideration the co-existence of various types of risk behavior.

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#### PREVENTION

The studies on the prevention of risk behaviour in adolescence have been divided into three sections: the first is more general, on prevention and problems connected with it, the second is on interventions in the school background, and the third is on the influence of the mass media.

Problems: in connection with the prevention of risk behavior in adolescence, two important problems emerged: the first concerns the necessity of concentrating the prevention not on single types of risk behaviors but on all the types; considering them as closely related (the concept of risk behavior syndrome) from a preventive point of view, implies that working to eliminate only one type is absolutely useless, as there will always be others ready to take its place; the second problem concerns the ineffectiveness of interventions which do not involve, in their planning, the adolescents themselves.

The school background: many of the studies of prevention in risk behavior were carried out in schools, making use of the possibility of direct interaction with adolescents on the subject of risk.

Mass Media: some researches have focused their attention on the prevention campaigns disseminated by the mass media, analyzing their impact on adolescents and the effectiveness of their message.

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## 6. BOOKS ABOUT RISK

1. LES JEUNES ET LE RISQUE: UNE APPROCHE PSYCHOLOGIQUE DE L'ACCIDENT. BY J.P. ASSAILLY (1997).

*This author faces road-accident risks in adolescence through a careful review of the relevant literature. He does it by examining, separately, the three key concepts (risk, accidents and adolescence) without forgetting the inevitable relations which exist between the three aspects.*

2. ADOLESCENT RISK TAKING BY N.J. BELL AND R.W. BELL (1993).

*The authors sustain that the concept of risk taking, to have a substantial impact, should not be used simply as a shorthand device for referring to a set of behaviors that place young people at risk; instead, the use of the concept must suggest something about a more global orientation to the study of dysfunctional, dangerous, sometimes life-threatening behaviors of youth. Contributors to this volume explore a risk-taking perspective in this second sense. The adoption of this perspective represents a commitment to utilize the concept of risk-taking in a fundamental way—to explore it as a source for new approaches to understanding these adolescent behaviors and for generating different questions than have been asked in the past. Although not all contributors deal explicitly with dysfunctional risk taking during adolescence and young adulthood, all chapters contain implications for research or intervention with adolescents.*

3. RAGAZZI SENZA TUTELA. LE OPINIONI DI 11000 GIOVANI. BY S. BISI AND G. BRUNELLO (1995).

*The text presents an inquiry that the «Fondazione Cesar» conducted on 11363 adolescents aged between 16 and 20, to understand the world they live in. Through a questionnaire the authors tried to analyze which factors are directly or indirectly connected to the propulsion to risky behaviors, with a special attention to accident-proneness.*

4. HANDBOOK OF ADOLESCENT HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOR (ISSUES IN CLINICAL CHILD PSYCHOLOGY) BY R.J. DICLEMENTE, W.B. HANSEN, L.E. PONTON (EDS.) (1996).

*A multidisciplinary group of researchers and clinicians offer a variety of perspectives in describing the epidemiological trends associated with specific risk behaviors. This book provides a comprehensive assessment of adolescent health risk behaviors—such as smoking, violence, teenage pregnancy, and AIDS among many others. Experts describe trends and changes in risk behaviors over time and illustrate theoretical models useful for understanding adolescent risk-taking behavior and developing preventive interventions; they review the state-of-the-science with respect to prevention strategies for each type of risk behavior; and identify effective methods of treatment.*

5. WORTH THE RISK: TRUE STORIES ABOUT RISK TAKERS PLUS HOW YOU CAN BE ONE, TOO BY A. ERLBACH (1998).

*Although this book is really meant for young readers, it is interesting for its' examination of the value of taking risk; the true-life case studies of 20 teenagers are presented, along with information on how to act in situations where risk is involved. The book looks at the difference between positive(those that help you 'sharpen your skills, gain insight, and change yourself or the world for the better') and negative risks (taken to be noticed or for revenge), helps young people to judge the consequences, and gives advice on how to successfully execute a risk-taking plan and what to do in case of failure. In an era when risk-taking is most often associated with dangerous behavior or poor choices, such as drugs or gangs, this inspiring book gives*

*more than 20 first-hand profiles of children who have taken risks, pointing out the advantages and also the possibilities of rejection or failure.*

6. NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ADOLESCENT RISK BEHAVIOR. BY R. JESSOR (1998).

*This volume is the outcome of a conference on «New perspectives on Adolescent risk behavior» held in Los Angeles in June 1996. The conference was an effort to capture and consolidate the pervasive changes that were taking place in the way adolescent risk behavior was being studied at the close of the century—changes in conceptualization, in research design, and in analytic methods. Knowledge about risk behavior has expanded largely in recent years, and it has become far more coherent and systematic than before. Today's conceptualizations encompass a wide range of causal domains, from culture and society on one side to biology and genetics on the other. The chapters of this book reflect, in one way or another, this newer orientation to inquiry. Three major domains of adolescent risk behavior are represented in the various chapters: problem behaviors (such as drug use, delinquency, early sexual activity and risky driving), psychopathology (depression), and inadequate social role performances (such as school failure and work-related difficulties).*

7. THE CULTURE OF ADOLESCENT RISK-TAKING BY C. LIGHTFOOT (1997).

*The book is all based on the theoretic perspective which considers risk-taking in adolescence a kind of game which puts together personal meanings and peer group culture and contributes to the development and definition of both. The infantile game between grown-ups and children has the same goal: the definition of the self in the relation to the other. Risk-taking is therefore the manifestation of a socio-psychologic process; it is in fact only through social life that one becomes an adult.*



8. SELF-REGULATORY BEHAVIOR AND RISK TAKING: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES BY L.P. LIPSITT, AND L.L. MITNICK (ED.) (1991).

*Emerging from two conferences sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health, this volume discusses scientific and clinical knowledge in areas of health concern where behavioral factors are known causes of, or are implicated in, death, disease, and disability. The 24 papers are in six parts: epidemiological considerations—preludes to intervention, developmental and cultural aspects, mechanisms and processes, psychopathology of risk taking, further intervention issues, and implications and speculations—self-regulation and risk.*

9. ADOLESCENTI TRASGRESSIVI; LE AZIONI DEVIANTI E LE RISPOSTE DEGLI ADULTI. BY MAGGIOLINI, A., & RIVA, E. (1999)

*The book collects together the observations emerging from various interviews between operators and adolescents in many different settings: psychotherapies, consultations, and prevention programs in schools and interventions with minors who have committed crimes. After analysing the affective meaning of transgressive behavior (such as stealing, lying, attacking...) the authors propose many possible strategies of intervention to prevent the transition from physiological transgression (which can be a logical part of the adolescents' development) to real criminality.*

10. HEALTH RISKS AND DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSITIONS DURING ADOLESCENCE BY J. SCHULENBERG, J.L. MAGGS, K. HURRELMANN (EDS.) (1997)

*This book focuses on the different developmental transitions during adolescence and young adulthood and relates them to risks and benefits for young people's health and well-being. The authors advocate the broadening of the concept of health promotion to include assistance with negotiating the changes that occur as individuals move into and out of adolescence. Chapters*

*from many of the most prominent researchers in the adolescent field from several countries are included in this volume.*

II. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RISK TAKING BEHAVIOR (ADVANCES IN PSYCHOLOGY, VOL. 107) BY R.M. TRIMPOP (1994).

*This volume examines what motivates people to engage in risk taking behavior, such as participating in traffic, sports, financial investments, or courtship. The wealth of studies and theories (about 1,000 references) is used to develop a holistic theory of risk motivation that is presented in the form of a dynamic state-trait model incorporating physiological, emotional, and cognitive components of risk perception, processing, and planning. Assumptions were tested and support was found using a sample of 120 subjects in a longitudinal study. The concepts and findings are discussed in relation to psychological theories and their meaning for daily life.*

12. RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOR (WILEY SERIES HUMAN PERFORMANCE AND COGNITION) BY J. FRANK YATES (ED.) (1994).

*Yates' book provides a single source of current information which critically reviews and synthesizes scholarship on risk-taking behavior by cutting across multiple contexts and points of view. It offers detailed insights into concepts of risk, changes in risk-taking over the life cycle, research on the issue of risk-taking in group settings, models and evidence concerning people's behavior as well as recommendations on adapting design considerations and personnel training to encourage more appropriate risk-taking behavior and future research on this subject.*

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ANNEXE

THE EUROPEAN NETWORK

## France

### A narrative analysis of «risk stories»

#### *1. Introduction*

Young people, like their older counterparts, share their experiences by recounting them. The stories they tell obey narrative laws. It is for this reason that we have applied certain narrative and speech analysis methods to real-life stories relating to the experiences of young people. This approach appears to be particularly well suited to obtaining a better understanding of the social norms which govern narrative behaviour in young people.

#### *2. Population of interviewees telling their own stories of risk:*

17 people made up this sample - 9 girls and 8 boys. These young people were aged between 14 and 23 years. Eight of them were aged between 14 and 15 years. They were all pupils in a secondary school in Brittany and there were 4 boys and 4 girls. At the time of this study they were all in their fourth year of secondary school.

The other eight (between 19 and 23 years) were met at a young people's social club. There were 3 young women attending business college, 3 economics students (second and third year), 1 young man in the last year of secondary school (preparing for the baccalaureate), 1 young woman studying international tourism. The last female (22 years old) answered an

oral interview on risk-taking.

It is important to note that 6 young drop-outs aged between 20 and 22 years old refused to answer our questions about the risk (either in a text or an interview). They explained that they never take risks and claimed to have uneventful lives. This cynical point of view shows how distanced they are from the dominant representation of risk as a challenge. They view themselves as being with the losers not with the winners, the «fighters».

### *3. Method*

The subjects consented to take part in this research and wanted to remain anonymous. We collected 17 individual stories. Moreover, we discussed risk experiences in a group discussion with 5 people age between 16 and 20.

First, we tried to collect oral stories of risk by conducting individual interviews. It appeared that it was difficult for this young population to recount this type of story orally. This suggested two questions: is it difficult to recount risks orally or is it difficult to talk about risk to unknown researchers? In earlier researches we had already observed that young people with social difficulties found it difficult to express themselves individually concerning forbidden behaviour (e.g. consumption of drugs and alcohol). In contrast, the same people were much more talkative in a group context. They even became excessively expressive in discussing their forbidden behaviour (Cerclé 1998). In order to let them express themselves naturally we chose to collect written stories. Only one oral interview was conducted as part of this research.

We then asked a group of young people to tell their risk stories.

### 3.1. *Individual risk stories (N = 17)*

We explained our experiment during our initial meeting with the young pupils aged between 14 and 16. We then saw them in the classroom (without the teacher) to ask them to write their stories of risk. They were given one hour to do this. Before they started writing we talked for a few minutes with them about the concept of risk and tried to find a definition together. This short discussion helped most of them to picture the story they were going to write. Sometimes, when it seemed necessary we helped them think about the question by showing them a drawing. This depicted a person trying to pick some fruit at the risk of falling off a ladder. As far as our older subjects were concerned, after having checked that they matched the expected standards, we read them the instructions. They produced their responses in exchange for 50 francs. We were allowed a period of one week to do it, although two of them decided to respond immediately.

The writing instruction was as follows:

«Could you write on a page (about 300 words) a risky experience you took alone or with other people, in other words, a story in which you took a risk».

Moreover, for the older subjects, a definition of risk was suggested: «danger that you can evaluate the possibility of, that you can more or less anticipate.

The risk involves the notion of uncertainty, damage, vulnerability and benefit.. ».

Despite this definition (given with the instructions), 4 people from the older group wrote what we can be termed a meta-analysis. On the basis of the risk-taking situation, they made philosophical reflections about their risk-taking. This does not therefore exactly constitute a narrative of a risk.

These stories will be analysed separately.

The analyses of the narratives were performed using the software Sphinx Lexica.

#### 4. *The results:*

Topics quoted in the risk stories:

TOPICS	PUPILS AT SE- CONDARY SCHOOL (14 15 )	STUDE NTS (19 23)	STUDEN T IN A TOURIS M COL- LEGE (21)	STUDEN T ON WORK BASED COURSE (21 22)	SALARIE D YOUNG LADY (23)	PUPIL AT HIGH SCHOOL (19)
SMOKING OR TA- KING DRUGS ON THE SLY	3 BOYS 1 GIRL					
CHEATING IN AN EXAM	2 GIRLS	1 BOY				
TAKING RISKS WITH MODES OF TRANSPORT	1 GIRL			1 GIRL	1 GIRL	
ASKING A GIRL TO GO OUT WITH HIM		1 BOY				1 BOY
STEALING IN A SHOP	1 BOY					
BEING INVOLVED IN A FIGHT				1 GIRL		
BEING INATTENTI- VE IN CLASS		1 BOY				
LEAVING A PARTY WITH A DRUNKEN STRANGER			1 GIRL			
TAKING RISKS IN THE MOUNTAINS				1 GIRL		

The asterisks indicates the people (13) involved in the first analysis. Those not indicated by an asterisk will be analysed later (cf. meta-analysis)<sup>2</sup>.

This table shows us that the most quoted topics of risk-



taking are the consumption of tobacco or drugs (4 pupils). This constitutes forbidden behaviour, especially for the youngest subjects because it gives them a feeling of guilt and can be damaging if it results in punishment (unlike the older subjects for whom such behaviour is more commonplace). The risk-taking is more obvious for the younger subjects.

The other main topic was cheating in an exam (3 people). This topic has two different meanings depending on the academic situation of the subjects and depends on whether they are secondary school pupils or university students. In the first case, being caught means that their parents will be told with the result that they will be punished and their parents might lose their trust in them. In the second case, the risk involves more serious consequences because the penalty is that they will not be allowed to take any exam for the next 5 years.

The last topic we want to consider is taking risks with transportation, such as cars or mopeds. The use of vehicles is a great source of risk-taking among young people. Road accidents are one of the major causes of mortality among young people. It should be stressed that when we were performing this research, a campaign for the prevention of road accidents was being conducted in France. This might have influenced the young people's choice of risk topics.

On the whole, we can see that the chosen topics were recent events, and that the subjects' concerns are consistent with their age: cheating in an exam, taking a risk with a means of transport, going out with a girl. None of the young people, when individually interviewed, chose a story that had taken place in their childhood. This phenomena can be explained by a minimisation of the feeling of risk-taking over time: smoking is a very risky occupation for a 14-years-old young person but it seems less risky a few years later. In addition, according to Fischhoff and al. (1981), the risks which are objectively the least dangerous are overestimated while the risks which are objectively the most dangerous are underestimated. On the

other hand, in the group discussion, the young people mentioned risks they have taken during their childhood more frequently.

These risk narratives allow us to identify the different meanings of the concept of risk for these young people. From this, we can propose an initial outline of the definition of risk for young people.

*4.1. The concept of risk for young people:*

FOR THE GIRLS, IT IS AN INITIAL STATE OF LACKING SOMETHING AS WELL AS OF OBLIGATION THAT TRIGGERS THE ACTION, WHEREAS FOR THE BOYS IT IS THE DESIRE TO ACHIEVE A GOAL	- I HAD NEVER DONE IT BEFORE (TO SMOKE).- WE DID NOT HAVE ANY MONEY.- THERE WAS A LATIN EXAMINATION, I HAD NOT LEARNED MY LESSON.- I HAD TO GO TO RENNES FOR A FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY.- WE WANTED TO BURST!
UNCERTAINTY IS STRONG.IT IS RELATED TO THE LACKOF CONTROL WITH RESPECT TO EVENTS.	- THE UNPREDICTABLE FACTOR WAS THE OTHER DRIVERS.- THE TEACHER KEPT LOOKING ALMOST ALL THE TIME. AT ONE MOMENT I THOUGHT HE SAW ME BUT I AM NOT SURE.- I COULD HAVE BEEN REPORTED TO THE TEACHER.- I WAS NOT SURE- I COULD HAVE BEEN SENT OUT.
THE COSTS AND BENEFITS ARE CLOSELY INTER-LINKED.	- WE COULD HEAR THE OTHER BOYS SCREAMING «BE CAREFUL», AND ME, MATHIEU AND ARNAUD, THREW AWAY OUR CIGARETTES AND WE PRETENDED TO URINATE, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE THE SUPERVISOR HAD SURPRISED US. - I MANAGED TO GET THROUGH THE CLASS WITHOUT BEING CAUGHT CHEATING BUT MY ENGLISH HOMEWORK WAS ANYTHING BUT FINISHED.
THE ACTION IS REWARDED BY A FEELING OF RELIEF RATHER THAN A REAL STATE OF SATISFACTION.	- FINALLY I ARRIVED HOME - I FORGED MY MOTHER'S SIGNATURE AND THE TEACHERS BELIEVED IT - I THINK WE WERE LUCKY. - REALLY AND TRULY, I ALWAYS WONDER WHETHER HE SAW ME OR NOT - FIVE YEARS LATER, MY PARENTS STILL DON'T KNOW. -I GOT AWAY WITH IT (I.E. CHEATING) EVEN THOUGH THE TEACHER LOOKED A BIT SUSPICIOUS SOMETIMES.- IT WASN'T A VERY PRAISEWORTHY RISK, NOT AT ALL AND IT DIDN'T GAIN ME VERY MUCH IN THE END

In this table we find an illustration of the definition of risk (Joog Van der Plig, 1995):

«the probability  $p$  of the negative event or the negative consequence times the negative value or the negative purpose of this event or this consequence. »

\* Students of narrative define the initial state of a story as a state of «lacking something = dissatisfaction» which requires action and the transformation of the initial state into an opposite final state.

Unlike popular stories with a happy ending, we observe that the final phase rarely reverses the initial phase. The «feeling of lacking something» \* is not cancelled out at the end of the story. Action (risk-taking) does not bring any reward. Subjects congratulate themselves on being lucky. That explain why girls, more than boys, often end their stories with a piece of moral advice:

#### 4.2. *Textual and narrative analysis of individual stories*

The **narrative** analysis below involves 13 of the 17 texts on risk-taking (see appendix 1: risk stories). Our sample thus includes 4 boys and 9 girls.

To perform this analysis, we subdivided the texts into three sections: initial phase (description of the circumstances and the problem), transformation phase (description of the events, related to the problem, leading to a change in the situation), final phase (description of the subjects after transformation phase, and, very often, conclusion on the risk-taking itself).

#### *The narrative framework*

INITIAL STATE	TRANSFORMATIO	FINAL STA-	
	N	TE	
VIRTUAL	REAL	ACTIONS VE-	
		RIDITION	
HAVE TO DO WANT	ABLE TO DO KNOW	DO ACTIONS	EVALUATION OF

TO DO FEELING OF LACKING SOMETHING, DISSATISFACTION: BIRTH OF PLAN TO TRANSFORM INITIAL STATE IF THERE IS AN INSTIGATOR (THE «RECIPIENT») OTHER THAN THE HERO OF THE STORY: CAUSE TO DO MANIPULATION OR PERSUASION

HOW TO DO FEELING OF ABILITY (PHYSICAL, INSTRUMENTAL, COGNITIVE) TO IMAGINE THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE STATES. ABILITY

AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE INITIAL STATE PERFORMANCE

THE FINAL STATE SANCTION

Moreover, we performed a comparison of gender and age (less than 16 y. o., more than 16 y. o.) in order to identify potential differences on these 2 dimensions.

#### 4.3. Pronominal forms

We notice a high level of use of «I» (87), «it» (34) «they» (43), and to a lesser extent «we» (11). The numbers indicate the total overall use of these pronoun over the entire sample.

#### 4.4. Personal pronouns: differences between genders (expressed as a percentage by column):

	INITIAL SITUATION		TRANSFORMATION		FINAL SITUATION		TOTAL	
	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY
I	59.4	-	53.8	16.7	64.7	16.6	57.6	11.8
IT	18.7	-	25.6	11.1	17.6	-	22.2	5.9
WE	18.7	62.5	15.4	61.1	14.7	66.66	16	58.8
YOU	-	-	-	5.5	-	-	-	8.8
US	3.1	37.5	5.1	5.5	2.9	16.6	4.2	14.7
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

IN %

As we can see, girls massively favour pronoun «I» (57.6 %

of the total number of pronouns against 11.8% among boys) while boys prefer «they» and «we» (73.5% against 20.2% among girls). The pronoun embracing a group of people («they» and «we») are primarily used by the latter while girls prefer to write in the first person.

The pronoun «he» is also used by girls (22.2% against 5.9% among boys). It often represents an «accomplice = helper» (a boyfriend, a friend...) or an opponent (a relative, a teacher...). In this case, the pronoun «me» follows the pronoun «he». In other cases, «he» or «it» indicates an obligation or an action (it's raining, it's dark, it must...).

4.5. Personal pronouns: differences in age (expressed as a percentage by column):

	INITIAL SITUATION	TRANSFORMATION	FINAL SITUATION	TOTAL				
	N	N	N	+ 16 Y.O	- 16 Y.O	+ 16 Y.O	- 16 Y.O	+ 16 Y.O
I	35.71	53.84	47.72	46.15	52.94	60.86	46.05	52
It	-	23.07	22.72	23.07	17.64	13.04	17.10	21
We	35.71	23.07	27.27	21.15	23.52	21.73	27.63	22
You	-	-	-	1.92	-	-	1.3	-
Us	28.57	-	2.27	7.69	5.88	4.34	7.89	5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

IN %

This table highlights a more significant use of the pronoun «I» and «he» in the older pupils (especially girls). On the other hand, the pronouns «we» and «us» are used in similar ways by people aged under 16 and people aged over 16 years old.

We can see that the girls more often use the pronominal forms «me, my» (I) while the boys use «our».

4.6. Possessive pronouns, difference between genders (expressed as a percentage by column):

	INITIAL SITUATION		TRANSFORMATION		FINAL SITUATION		TOTAL	
	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY
THEIR	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.1	-
MY	100	-	96	60	100	50	85.1	44.5
YOUR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11.11
OUR	-	100	4	40	-	50	2.1	44.5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

IN %

4.7. Pronoun complements: difference between genders (expressed as a percentage by column):

	INITIAL SITUATION		TRANSFORMATION		FINAL SITUATION		TOTAL	
	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY
ME	23.8	-	12.9	28.6	8.3	33.3	16.1	20
US	47.6	-	32.2	-	66.7	-	45.2	-
YOU	23.8	40	35.5	28.6	16.7	33.3	25.8	33.3
HE	4.7	60	9.7	14.3	8.3	33.3	9.7	33.3
TOTAL	-	-	-	14.3	-	-	-	6.7
IN %	-	-	3.2	14.3	-	-	3.2	6.7
ME	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

IN %

We can conclude by saying that girls tend to use singular forms to recount their experiences of risk in contrast with boys who tend to stress group activity in risk-taking and thus use plural forms of the pronoun.

For girls, the hero of the story is only one person while for boys it is the group.

4.8. Compatibility of the pronouns «I» and «we» (examples with the lemmatized text)

GIRLS (I)

INITIAL PHASE: EXTRACTS OF THE ANSWERS ON THE LEMMATIZED TEXT: AGREEMENTS OF

THE WORD 'I'

I TO BE ON ST-MALO AND I TO HAVE TO RETURN ON REINDEERS FOR THE ANNIVERSARY.  
LIKE EVERY FRIDAY EVENING I TO MOVE TOWARDS THE DEEP ZONE FOR APERITIF.  
I TO WANT TO BE BEAUTIFUL I TO BE THUS TO RUN IN A LONG DIAPHANOUS DRESS  
I TO HAVE LEFT IN MOUNTAIN WITH A FRIEND  
TO TWO THIRDS OF THE RISE, I TO FEEL UNABLE TO GO FURTHER  
TO FORCE TO CONTINUE WHEREAS I NOT TO HAVE MORE FORCE  
I TO HAVE THE FEELING PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY TO HAVE EXCEEDED ITSELF AND I TO FEEL INCREDIBLY PROUD AND TRUSTFUL  
THE DAY OF MY EXAMINATION I WAS TO RETURN TO ME IN LOUDÉAC IN THE MOPED.  
IT PROPOSED TO ME TO SMOKE, I HAD NOT DONE IT YET  
THIS IS WHY I FOUND MYSELF ONLY WITH A FRIEND WITHOUT.

**Boys (we)**

TRANSFORMATION PHASE: EXTRACTS OF THE RESPONSE ON THE LEMMATIZED TEXT:

AGREEMENT OF THE WORD 'WE'

ONE TO SEE TEN METER FOUR SEES HAVING TO MAKE MANY  
TIME ONE TO BE USED FOR TAKING CONDITION RISK RISKS TO MULTIPLY  
ONE TO SEEK TO FIND SHIT TO BURST EVENING CELEBRATES  
EVENING TO CELEBRATE ONE TO DRINK TO ROLL STICK  
ONE MONEY STORE TO STEAL PACKAGE FIRE ARTIFICE FIRST TIME ONE TO STEAL STORE TO PUT FIRE ARTIFICE BAG TO ARRIVE CASH CLERK  
ARNAUD STATEMENT 22  
ARNAUD MATHIEU ONE TO THROW CIGARETTES TO MAKE PRETENCE URINATE SUPERVISOR LATE  
ONE TO DISTINGUISH PAPER PROFESSOR TO SEE UNTIL MOMENT  
TO LIMP ONE TO HAVE TO GO 5 KILOMETRES  
TO KNOW ONE TO BE ABLE 6 CAR CONSIDERING CAR TO ENSURE 5  
ONE TO KNOW TO MAKE  
ONE TO DRINK DRIVER NOBODY TO REACT WORLD STATEMENT OH THERE WORLD STATEMENT OH YES  
ONE TO MAKE WAY GO LONG TO MAKE NIGHT RAIN ONE TO ARRIVE BOX OUTWARD JOURNEY

#### 4.9. Verbs:

A study of the verbs is of interest because many of them constitute the lexical universe of the pronouns.

In French, «to be» and «to have» are auxiliaries for the past and the future tense. To make our analysis as precise as possible, we eliminated all the compound forms and retained only the infinitive of the verb. Thus when considering the verbs «to

be» and «to have», we ignored their use as auxiliaries.

The most frequently used verbs are: «to be, to have, to do, to take, to go, to arrive, to say, can, to see, must, to decide, to ask».

The pronoun «I» occurs more often with the verbs «to be, to have, must, to do, can, to see».

The pronoun «he» is most prevalent with «must, to do».

«to have, to say, to go, want, to be, to steal» are associated with the pronoun «we».

4.10. Verbs: differences between genders (expressed as a percentage by column).

	INITIAL	TRANSFO	FINAL	TOTAL				
	SITUATIO	RMATION	SITUATIO					
	N		N	BOY	GIRL	BOY	GIRL	BOY
TO BE	17.8	12	12.0	17.8	22.5	-	17.1	13.4
TO HA-	7.7	12	3.7	6.7	8.7	16.7	6.4	9.7
VE								
TO	3.9	4	6.8	2.2	6.2	-	6.1	2.4
MAKE								
TO TA-	0.8	-	5.7	-	8.7	-	5.1	-
KE								
TO GO	3.9	8	3.1	-	-	8.3	2.9	8.5
TO AR-	0.8	16	2.1	4.4	2.5	8.3	1.9	8.5
RIVE								
TO SAY	1.5	-	1.6	8.9	3.7	8.3	2.1	6.1
TO BE	1.5	-	3.1	2.2	2.5	8.3	2.7	2.4
ABLE								
SEE	0.8	-	3.7	-	1.2	-	2.4	-
TO HA-	2.3	-	2.1	2.2	-	-	1.9	1.2
VE								
TO BE	0.8	-	1.0	-	1.2	-	1.1	-
NECESS								
ARY								
TO	-	4	1.0	2.2	-	-	0.5	2.4
WANT								
TO	0.8	-	1.6	-	-	-	1.0	-
KNOW								



TO	0.8	-	1.6	2.2	1.2	-	1.3	1.2
DRINK								
TO DE-	0.8	4	1.6	-	-	-	1.1	1.2
CIDE								
TO ASK	-	-	2.1	-	1.2	-	1.5	-
TO	2.3	-	0.5	-	1.2	-	1.3	-
LEAVE								
TO	1.5	-	0.5	-	1.2	8.3	1.1	1.2
PASS								
TO RE-	1.5	-	1.0	-	1.2	-	1.5	-
TURN								
TO	2.3	-	-	-	1.2	-	1.1	-
LEAD								
TO BE-	-	-	1.6	-	-	8.3	0.8	1.2
LIEVE								
TO	0.8	8	-	4.4	-	8.3	0.3	6.1
PREVEN								
T								
TO RE-	-	-	1.6	-	-	-	0.8	-
MAIN								
TO	0.8	4	-	2.2	1.2	-	0.5	2.4
LEAVE								
TO	0.8	-	1.0	-	-	-	0.8	-
CONTIN								
UE								

We obtained these percentages by dividing the number of occurrences of a verb by the total number of verbs. For this analysis, we selected only the verbs which occurred at least 3 times.

According to the data presented in this table, girls use «to be, to have, to do, to take» more often while boys more frequently employ «to arrive, to prevent, to go out, want».

«To be» is followed by complements (ill, capable, composed...) describing the situations or characters in the stories.

Most of the time, «to have» refers to a state (envy, fear, self-confidence... *est-ce qu'il faut ajouter que ce* corresponds to «to be» in English? Ex: *j'ai peur* - I'm frightened (YES) while in other cases it is used to express possession (having money, having problems...).

In French, these two verbs are auxiliaries to form the past tense. In order to make our analysis clearer, we have eliminated the verbs «to be» and «to have» when they appear as auxiliaries.

The verb «to do (or to make)» yields no additional information because our subjects used it in a polysemous way. This verb is extremely frequently used in the transformation phase.

The high level of presence of the verb «to take» is due to its strong association with the word «risk».

Girls very often use the expression «taking a risk» preceded by the pronoun «I».

«To go» is always followed by another verb: to know, to pull, to arrive, to go out, to do, to be, to find...which involve an immediate future.

The forms «must, to have to, to want to» are use at the beginning of the transformation phase so the narrator can justify his or her future risk-taking. In this way they imply that the risk was imposed by the situation and attribute it to an external event. In the final phase of narration these verbs are no longer used

The verb «to be able to, (or can)» is used in the transformation phase and implies physical, instrumental and cognitive abilities (Diguer 1993).

#### 4.II. Verbs of modality: «duty» and «desire» among genders:

INITIAL PHASE: EXTRACTS FROM CHARACTERISTIC ANSWERS THE ANSWERS ARE GATHERED ON THE BASIS OF THE METHODS' OF THE VARIABLE 'SEX' (LEXICA SPHINX) SEX = MALE:
---

NO. 4 ONE DAY WITH BUDDIES WE WERE AT A VILLAGE FÊTE AND *we wanted*\_TO HAVE LOTS OF FUN. WE THOUGHT OF ALCOHOL BUT *we wanted*\_SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

NO. 6 WITH A BUDDY *we decided*\_TO MAKE SOME SMALL FIREWORKS.

NO. 7 IN SEPTEMBER THE SCHOOL HAD ORGANISED AN OUTING WITH X. THE DAY ARRIVED AND ALL THE PUPILS LEFT FOR S.. AFTER WALKING FOR A FEW HOURS, WE ARRIVED IN S. ARNAUD HAD SENT A MESSAGE AND EVERYONE WAS AROUND. THEN ARNAUD, MATHIEU AND ME, *we had the same idea go and have a smoke in the woods*. ALL THE OTHERS HAD PROMISED TO WARN US IF A TEACHER ARRIVED.

SEX = FEMALE:

NO. 1 THIS WAS ON 27 DECEMBER LAST YEAR. I WAS IN ST-MALO AND *I had to go back to Rennes* FOR A FRIEND'S BIRTHDAY.

NO. 2 THIS FRIDAY EVENING LIKE EVERY FRIDAY EVENING **I TO MOVE TOWARDS THE DISCO «DEEP ZONE» FOR THE APERITIF OF FRIDAY**. *God knows why* THIS EVENING *I wanted*\_TO BE BEAUTIFUL I TO BE THUS TO RUN IN A LONG DIAPHANOUS DRESS WHICH TO THINK I OF BEING MADE PASS FOR FRAIL GIRL. NO. 3 THIS HISTORY REPRESENTS FOR ME ONE OF RARE THE MOMENT *when my understanding of the risk was not enough to calm down my enthusiasm* OF NATURE BEING POSED, TO SEE EVEN A LITTLE TOO MUCH *I don't usually take risks*\_I BE LEAVE IN MOUNTAIN WITH A FRIEND FOR A SMALL EXCURSION (FOUR HOUR) OF WHICH THE OBJECTIVE BEING THE TOP ARRIVE WITH TWO THIRDS OF RISE, *I felt unable*\_TO GO MORE FAR AND PROPOSE WITH MY FRIEND TO GRAIN WAY, THE RAIN HAVE MAKE ITS APPEARANCE. IT TO FORCE ME TO CONTINUE WHEREAS I NOT TO HAVE MORE FORCE. THE RESULT BEING WORTH OF IT THE SORROW, A SMALL LAKE OF MOUNTAIN DOMINATED BY A GLACIER TO AWAIT US. I TO HAVE THE FEELING MENTALLY TO HAVE PHYSICALLY AND EXCEEDED ITSELF AND I TO FEEL INCREDIBLY PROUD AND TRUSTFUL.

NO. 9 MY RISK OCCURRED DURING THE GREAT HOLIDAYS, MY BROTHER WHO HAD HAD IS DRIVING LICENCE, LENT ME HIS MOTORBIKE. *I decided to* PASS MY BSR TO BE ABLE TO LEAD IT. THE DAY OF MY EXAMINATION I WAS TO RETURN TO ME TO LOUDÉAC BY MOTORBIKE.

NO. 10 I TOOK A RISK, WE HAD AN INTERROGATION OF LATIN THIS DAY I HAD NOT LEARNED MY LESSON

NO. 11 *a friend from school proposed to me*\_TO SMOKE I HAD NOT DONE IT YET.

NO. 12 IT WAS IN OCTOBER ONE SATURDAY EVENING SPRINKLED WELL, AFTER A MEAL. ONE WAS TEN AND TO MAKE THE MEAL OF THEM FINISHED ABOUT MIDNIGHT. **\*\*TIME-OUT\*\*** ONE HIMSELF BE SAY ONE GO NOT OF REMAIN THERE ONE GO LEAVE PROBLEM IT THERE HAVE ONLY ONE PERSON OUT OF SIX WHICH BE LEAVE, WHICH CAN LEAD, BECAUSE IT HAVE NOT DRINK ONE HIMSELF SAY HOW ONE GO MAKE.

NO. 13 THIS EVENING I'VE BEEN LUCKY VERY ONE EVENING OF SUMMER ON THE OUTLET SIDE OF A NIGHT CLUB IT WAS HELD WAS TO BE IN THE FIVE HOURS THE PEOPLE WHO HAD BROUGHT US HAD ALREADY LEFT. THIS IS WHY *I found myself*\_ALONE WITH A FRIEND AND WITHOUT VEHICLE TO BRING US BACK HOME

In the initial phase boys use the verb «to want» with a col-

lective meaning: we wanted to, we decide to, we had the same idea and the action begins with a group: «with friends»...

Girls use «to have to» and «must» with an individual meaning. Their attitude to their own risk-taking is much more reflective and critical: I don't usually take risks, Although I understood the risk, I couldn't help wanting to...for example, No.13 mentions luck, thus indicating a persistent feeling of fear.

#### 4.12. *Verbal tenses:*

Most of the time, people introduce their stories with a present tense sentence. They then use the past to describe their risk experience. In their narratives, when the subjects question themselves about certain acts, they return at the present (ex: I don't know if he suspected that I cheated) Finally, in the final phase, when drawing a moral from their story, the subjects preferentially use the present, and sometimes the future in saying that they will no longer take this risk or that taking the risk has made them see things differently.

#### 4.13. *Nouns:*

In these texts, we observe the presence of various psychoactive substances (alcohol, soft drugs, tobacco), in particular as far as the younger subjects are concerned. This observation corresponds to what we stated at the beginning of this article, namely a high level of concern relating to risks associated with the consumption of tobacco and drugs. In addition, in several situations alcohol is a factor which intervenes to explain the act of taking a risk: I drank a little too much...

In addition, the youngest subjects fear the reprisals of the opponents (in particular parents and teachers) since it is they who can punish them if they are discovered performing the

prohibited action. The opponents are introduced in the transformation phase and it is often they who lend the element of risk to the story.

The accomplices (those who help) take various forms. Despite this, it is the buddies and the girlfriends who are most frequently cited. It can also be seen that the accomplices incite the risk-taking in the boys more often than in the girls. These are known as the recipients. One exception is a female subject who says: a girlfriend at school asked me if I wanted to smoke. I'd never done it before. Moreover, the senders first appear in the initial phase and continue to be present when the narrators use the pronoun «us» and they are often confused with the recipients since they generally profit from the risk-taking. This assimilation of sender and recipient is characteristic of the boys.

#### 4.14. Specific forms as a function of sex:

Whole lemmatized text: List words specific to subjects aged between 14 and 23 years

FEMALE		MALE	
ME	36 (*)	ARNAUD	6 (*)
TO TAKE 20 (*)	MATHIEU	5 (*)	
ON	17 (*)	US	17 (2.54)
RISK	14 (*)	TO ARRIVE	7 (2.54)
OR	11 (*)	ONE	20 (2.37)
CONVEY 10 (*)	PROFESSOR		
	4 (2.26)		
TO SEE	9 (*)	BUT	6 (2.03)
PROBLEM	6 (*)	TO SAY	5 (1.96)
MUCH	5 (*)	DAY	3 (1.91)
TO ASK	5 (*)	AND	19 (1.76)
TO LEAVE	5 (*)	«DU»	3 (1.70)
LITTLE	5 (*)	SMALL	2 (1.45)
TO RETURN	5 (*)	IN	8 (1.40)
WITHOUT	5 (*)	IN	7 (1.37)
THIS	22 (1.19)	ME	4 (1.36)
I	83 (1.19)	TO HAVE	8 (1.27)

IT	32 (1.17)	«DES»	3 (1.27)
«NE»	27 (1.16)	«SE»	5 (1.21)
NOT	25 (1.15)	ALL	4 (1.20)
WITH	12 (1.15)	THE	36 (1.19)
TO MAKE	23 (1.15)	DE	27 (1.14)
MY	43 (1.14)	EVENING	2 (1.13)
MORE	10 (1.13)	TO GO	3 (1.09)
C	9 (1.12)	ONE	17 (1.05)
EVEN	9 (1.12)	WITH	10 (1.04)
TOO MUCH	9 (1.12)		
WHO	17 (1.11)	THAT	8 (0.88)
TO HAVE TO	7 (1.09)	TO	
DO	BE ABLE 2 (0.85)		
BY	7 (1.09)	TO DRINK	1 (0.85)
THERE	13 (1.08)	LIKE	1 (0.85)

The table presents the words that are most characteristic of each method of the variable SEX. 60 words are quoted. The words with a frequency lower than 5 (for at least one of the categories) are not listed. Only the first 30 words appear for each category. The words are classified in order of decreasing specificity.

The female vocabulary is characterised by the use of the words «I-to take-risk». The reference to the «problems» is clearer here.

The boys more often quote the noun «friends» and the verbs «can» and «to drink». The specificity of the word «Teacher» is more significant among boys. The teacher is primarily regarded as the person who punishes the prohibited act (drinking, smoking). However, this male specificity is not observed in the youngest subjects (see the table below):

#### 4.15. Reference to the teacher's authority:

GIRLS < 16 YEARS	BOYS < 16 YEARS
TEACHER (SPECIFICITY = 1.08)	TEACHER (SPECIFICITY = 0.91)

The reference to the character of the teacher for the girls attending secondary school primarily characterises the risk taken while cheating in class. Among boys, the teacher is the person who can tell parents about the use of an illicit product (alcohol, cigarettes).

*4.16. Topics in individual stories of risk written by subjects of less than 16 years of age (4 girls and 4 boys):*

Two broad topics of the risk are noted: the consumption of psychoactive products and cheating at school exams.

*4.16.1. Subjects relations to psychotropic substances with the psychotropic ones*

(extracts of the text lemmatized with the marked words)

SEX = female  
No. 11 (girl 14 years) a girlfriend of school to propose me TO SMOKE. I not to have to make not yet. I to accept even if to be to disgust.  
SEX = male:  
No. 4 (boy 15 years) one day with buddy one to be with a one and village fête to want to burst à fond. one to envisage of the ALCOHOL of the CIG but one to want something which to leave the ordinary one - therefore one to seek and one to find SHIT to burst itself the evening of the festival. the evening to celebrate it one to have to drink well and one to be to roll some stick that to have to be able to turn because a person of my being group subduing  
No. 7 (boy 15 years) in September the school to organize an exit with X the D-day to arrive all the pupil being in departure for saint-perforator. **\*\*time-out\*\*** Arnaud Mathieu and me, we have the same idea outward journey draw a CIG in the wood all the other we have promise to we prevent if a professor arrive - we here in the wood in train to draw our CIG very of a blow Arnaud we say listen to and one hear the other boy which we shout 22, and me Arnaud and Mathieu one throw our CIG and make pretence to urinate but it be too late the supervisor we surprise leave of there that it we say. **\*\*time-out\*\*** Mathieu him statement that we be in train of urinate and it report ah good now you smoke a CIGARETTE in urinate - a month pass we have course of history with the end of course the professor we call, me, Mathieu and Arnaud, and we prevent that a word outward journey arrive for prevent our parent for the CIGARETTE we have course of history with the end of course the professor we call, me, Mathieu and Arnaud, and we

prevent that a word outward journey arrive for prevent our parent for the CIGARETTE.

Boys consider alcohol, cigarette and marijuana to be objects of desire. In their eyes, risk-taking constitutes a search for these products. The only girl under sixteen who mentioned the consumption of cigarette presented it as the result of an obligation.

#### 4.16.2. Risk relating to the driving of vehicles

(lemmatized text)  
Sex = female  
No. 9 (girl 14 years) my risk to be to produce during large the vacancy, my brother to have to be to allow TO LEAD, to have to give its MOBILETTE to me. I to decide to pass my BSR to be able TO LEAD it. the day of my examination I to have to return to me in Loudéac in MOBILETTE. - it to be whereas my father to have to decide to follow me by CAR because it to want that I to take small road, instead of the main road, because of the CIRCULATION of the TRUCK. **\*\*time-out\*\*** I leave the first some time after my father me double for me show the road whereas it take already a good length of advance, I GAVE SPEED a little too before of arrive in a city and my father himself stop on the edge of the road in a turn me outward journey a little quickly, surprised, I be with two finger of return in the CAR of my father I the avoid of little.

Among the under 16-year-old subjects, one girl mentions the risk associated with driving a moped. She ends her story with a self-criticism: «since then, I've been very careful».

#### 4.16.3. The topic of cheating in class

(lemmatized text)  
SEX = female:  
**\*\*time-out\*\*** No. 5 (girl 14 year) during a control of ENGLISH certain exercise of this one me appear too difficult I ask with a neighbour on several exercise of answer with all end of field. the PROFESSOR rising the head almost all the time a moment I to believe well that it me to see but I was not sure. I to make mine make fall my pencil, to make some collect the small word where to be the answer. the PROFESSOR rising much the head, and certain response of my control being to remain empty because of that.  
No. 10 (girl 14 years) I to take a risk, to have an INTERROGATION of LATIN, this day to us I nothing to permanently learn how there -I to make ANTISECHES and I to put it in my case. In LATIN the PROFESSOR to



say to us to take a COPY for the INTERROGATION. I to open my case. one to distinguish my paper well the PROFESSOR nothing to see until at the time when it to approach me, I quickly to close my case. I to know not if it to see my ANTISECHES but this day there. I to be able to be to announce to the director, which my relative not to be content, it not to rely on me more, which to count much for me –this being for me good a LESSON, and now I not to start again more.

Girls under 16 are ashamed of their cheating. They are not satisfied with the result. They tell their risk stories in an emotional way and perform no rational analyses of them. Thus these accounts differ from those produced by the older subjects in the section on meta-analysis.

Only one boy (aged 15) mentioned risk-taking associated with stealing in a shop. He expressed not remorse at the end of the story: «We had a narrow escape».

4.17. *Risk topics in the individual stories written by subjects of more than 16 years of age (5 girls and 2 boys):*

4.17.1. *The topic of psychoactive products (lemmatized text)*

**\*\*time-out\*\*** No. 12 (girl 23 year) it be the following day, one himself be statement one be completely patient of make that a car capacity we return inside by the back or for a reason or for another have a shock of face it be the ALCOHOL which we with make take it risk there, the enthusiasm of leave, but even if the average age is of 23 not of problem with it level there one be still of kid nevertheless. in making one be completely *foutre*, enthusiasm, ALCOHOL, with fact that here.

**\*\*time-out\*\*** No. 13 (girl 21 year) have not enough of money for take a taxi we be quickly decide the ALCOHOL help with outward journey find a group of young person on the car park for sympathize and ask if the a or the a of between them have two place of free in one of car now that I there reconsider, I me ask still how I accept of assemble in the car which contain that of boy and which appear like me deceive of the ALCOHOL.

For the older girls, the risk related to alcohol is evoked in a highly critical manner. These subjects insist on their own responsibility (internal attributions).

#### 4.17.2. Topic of vehicle driving

(lemmatized text)

No. 1 (girl 21 years) in spite of the rain and the wind, I do take the CAR. **\*\*time-out\*\*** one there see not with ten meter out of the four way and I must make some many effort to remain concentrate because the visibility being almost no one and that the wind make that my small CONVEY himself off-set. the other problem the unforeseeable factor to be the other DRIVER that which to be able to lose the control of their VEHICLE for example and which to be able to cause an ACCIDENT in which I to be able to imply. the problem CONVEYS it being that each time it one to make use of it, one to take a risk, but under such a condition this being risk of multiplying. and fortunately it to remain only one risk since I to arrive at re-ideers without encumbering. **\*\*time-out\*\*** I very tire but whole - when I telephone à my family to them say that I well be able my grandmother fail fall of evil when it learn that I leave by CAR by some such condition climatic but I never be also afraid to me plant. **\*\*time-out\*\*** the problem being that like I take conscience that I be able to take the WHEEL without too much of risk in spite of the bad weather it of be necessary more the next time so that I me worry as much that say I have nevertheless the presence of mind to well calculate my blow and I take not some useless risk such s DRIVE drunk or too tired.

No. 12 (girl 23 years) it to be in October one Saturday evening sprinkled well, after a meal. one to be ten and to make the meal of them finish about midnight. there one to be to say one to go not about it to remain one to go to therefore leave problem it y to have only one person out of six whom to be, which to be able TO LEAD, because it not to drink. one to say itself how one to go to make - the box where one to have to go to be to 5 KILO-METER. it to be not much but it to be necessary. one to know that one to be able not to be 6 in the CAR considering that the CAR being to ensure for 5. one to know not how to make. and there Yohann my friend statement I to want to go in the trunk because I to be smallest, and it to drink blow. one to have all to drink much except the DRIVER, and there nobody not to react and everyone to saying oh yes one to make like that, the way to go not to be long then it to assemble in the trunk all in him to speak. it to be in the trunk. it to make night, it to rain and one to arrive box, any be well. **\*\*time-out\*\*** it be truth that one not have of problem - it be the following day, one himself be statement one be completely patient of make that a CAR capacity we return inside by the back or for a reason or for another have a shock of face and there that be it that one have make at this time there and then all in reflect it be the alcohol which we with make take it risk there, the enthusiasm of leave, but even if the average of age be of 23 year, not of problem with it level there one be still of kid nevertheless. in making one be completely foutre, enthusiasm, alcohol, with fact that here.

No. 13 (girls 21) this evening I to have there much chance all to be to un-roll one evening of summer at the exit of a night club it to have to be in the five hour. the person who to have to bring to us to be already to leave. it to

be why I be to find only with a friend without VEHICLE to bring back for us; it to make cold and to drink us a little too much to start a long way and which to seem to us in any interminable way. **\*\*time-out\*\*** have not enough of money to take a TAXI we be quickly decide the alcohol help to go find a group of young person on the CARPARK to sympathize and ask if the one or the one of between them have two place of free in one of CAR now that I there reconsider, I me ask still how I accept to assemble in the CAR which contain only of boy and which appear like me deceive to it alcohol my girlfriend lower on me with the back. I lengthily to hesitate to give my address to the DRIVER. at the beginning I to indicate to him the left direction right throughout the router I not to stop hearing vulgar insinuation and daring on my girlfriend and me really what to make fear especially compared to the rumour which OF CIRCULATING at the time; when to finally to be to arrive us at home, I to have to feel a relief like never before.

It is remarkable that no boys aged over 16 wrote a text concerning this risk topic. The older girls consider the risks associated with cars to be extremely important. As always, they are very critical of this type of risk-taking. They are also self-critical under such circumstances. Their narratives therefore resemble the «meta-analyses» below.

##### *5. Conclusion on the stories about natural risk:*

In most of the analysed texts, we can identify the classic narrative story structure starting with an unsatisfied state of mind (feeling like smoking, not knowing the answers during an exam, needing to go home...), followed by a second phase that alleviates the initial unsatisfactory situation and which corresponds to the unexpected events that go with the risk-taking (I went home with strangers who were drunk, I cheated).

Those unexpected events generate positive or negative consequences (being caught while smoking)

This is what we find in the final phase when subjects draw a moral from their story. For instance: I won't do it ***again***, that was really crazy, that enthusiasm, all that alcohol.

Subjects whose stories had a happy ending tend to minimise the risk or the feelings experienced. Because they escaped, the subjects who succeeded feel that they will have to take greater risks if they are to experience the same feelings.

Moreover, we can note that Weinstein (1988) describes as «non realistic optimism» the tendency of subjects (placed in the same situation) to perceive the risk as less important when they are the actors than when others are the actors.

For instance: all we could see was the feet on the road and I had to make an effort to keep concentrating because the visibility was so bad, and because the other drivers might have lost control of their cars and caused an accident in which I could have been involved. The problem with cars is that every time you use one, you take a risk, but in circumstances like these the risk increases.

This optimistic bias was more obvious during the group discussion.

*5.1. Stories that were subjected to a «meta-analysis»:*

This final analysis concerns the last 4 texts.

The actors in these stories performed a meta-analysis of risk-taking.

Indeed, in their risk stories they evoke the potential definitions of these situations, and what can be expected and, consequently, why they chose to accept or reject the risk.

All these texts follow the same structure: the subjects start with a brief description of their experience of risk-taking. They then say something about the risk in general. Finally,

they conclude their analysis by making a comparison of their own risk-taking.

We may well ask why these subjects wrote in such a way since the instructions seem to be relatively clear. It is because they are unable to place themselves in the spotlight, fearing that their personalities would be revealed to the others. Indeed these subjects insisted that their productions were to be kept anonymous.

### 5.2. *Pronouns:*

In contrast to the observations obtained in the first analysis, these latter subjects very frequently use I (52), me (7), me (23), my (11). This meta-analysis requires subjects to think about themselves. That is why the pronoun «I» predominates, even in the boys. In addition, It is used 24 times and appears primarily in association with reflexive verbs (there is, it is necessary...).

The pronouns You (in its sense of «One») and We are no longer used to describe the other people participating in the risk but to express general, global formulations (e.g.: from the moment you get up in the morning and until you go to bed at night...)

### 5.3. *Verbs:*

The main verbs are: to have, to be, take make be able

As in the above analysis, to take is very frequent because it is very often associated, on the one hand, with the noun risks and, on the other, with the verb to make. The second use generally implies being caught (*if I get caught, he'll give me a real telling-off and he won't think so well of me any mor...*, I'm taking the risk of getting caught...). These expressions reflect

the fear and distress caused by the risk. The omnipresence of this fear may perhaps limit the subjects' risk-taking and makes it genuinely difficult for them to tell their risk stories.

Finally to be able is associated with a large number of verbs (to have, pass, lose, gain...) implying the concepts of profits, cost and risk, probability of gain ( Yates 1992).

The only noun which occurs frequently and at a significant level is «risk» which, as we have already seen, is associated the verb «to take».

Since the number of subjects responding was low, we are unable to further develop this section at present.

#### *6. General conclusion about «risk stories».*

This study, which was conducted using a small sample is extremely promising because it seems possible to use it as the basis for the creation of a schema or script of risk stories. It makes it possible, moreover, to highlight differential behaviours: boys seem to be more tempted to take risks when they are in group, while girls tend to report individual experiences of risk-taking.

In addition, one of the major differences between the narration of risk-taking and the meta-analyses is that in the first situation, people explain why they took a risk in terms of obligation or necessity, while, in the latter case, they state that they take risks in order to obtain an advantage, an improvement or a benefit.

Moreover, these last four subjects seem to assess the risks in any given situation well. This slows them in their action. One of them even concluded that he had given up taking the risk. In contrast, in the first group of stories of risk, people were

acting in the heat of the moment and did not have the time or resources to be able to analyse the consequences of their future actions.

**A more detailed analysis involving a larger sample would make it possible to identify whether these differences reflect different personalities:** some presenting a more internal locus of control: I am responsible for my acts and I do not take risks; while others might exhibit higher scores of externality: I do not have an influence on the situation and do not feel responsible for their risk-taking. The external situation gives them a justification for their act.

## 7. ANNEX

Complementary approach: A thematic analysis of group discussion about risk

Population: 3 boys and 1 girl from 16 to 20 years

### 1. SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE GROUP DISCUSSION:

THE GROUP DISCUSSION MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR THE «I» REFERRING TO THE SPEAKER TO PLAY DIFFERENT ROLES:

I = HERO;

I = WITNESS;

I = VICTIM;

I = JUDGE (OR ASSESSOR);

I = ADVISER

WHEN THE HERO OF THE STORY IS THE «I» OF THE NARRATOR, THIS PRONOUN CAN REFER TO THE PRESENT I (NARRATIVE) OR THE PAST I (STORY).

THE INTERLOCUTORY SITUATION EMPLOYED HERE IS THAT OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN FRIENDS.

### 2. «OTHERS» AS «HEROES» OF THE RISK:

«OTHERS» WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE GROUP: THEY ARE PRESENTED AS ODD, THEIR BEHAVIOUR IS DUE TO THEIR PERSONALITY. THEY ARE NOT MODELS THAT SHOULD BE COPIED.

«OTHERS» WHO ARE NOT PRESENT AT THE TIME OF THE DISCUSSION BUT WHO ARE CONSIDERED TO BELONG TO THE GROUP OF FRIENDS: THEIR RISK BEHAVIOUR IS EXCUSED. THEY ARE NOT THE OBJECT OF INTERNAL CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS.

«THE OTHER SELF» (I.E., THE CHILD ONE USED TO BE): THE HERO IS THEN CONSIDERED AS IRRESPONSIBLE SINCE HE WAS NOT AWARE OF THE RISK. AWARE-

NESS OF RISK COMES WITH AGE AND THE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS. THE DISCOVERY OF RISK IS ACCOMPANIED BY SPECIFIC EMOTIONS (FEAR, DISTRESS ETC.) WHICH SEEM TO BE ABSENT DURING CHILDHOOD. WITH AGE, RISK GENERATES A STRESS WHICH IS RELATED TO THE LACK OF CONTROL OVER EVENTS.

### 3. SELF AS HERO OF THE RISK:

THE SELF-HERO ACTS BECAUSE HE HAS A «TASTE FOR RISK». THE «TASTE FOR RISK» (GOÛT DU RISQUE) INTEGRATES BOTH THE ACTOR'S PERSONALITY AND MOTIVATION.

SELF IS ABLE TO CONTROL THE RISKS; «OTHERS» REPRESENT THE REAL SOURCE OF DANGER.

THE SELF-HERO SOMETIMES TURNS LECTURER TO SPEAK ABOUT THE RISK.

THE SELF-HERO CAN **RESIST** TEMPTATION. IN THIS CASE, IT WANTS TO TEST ITS CAPACITY TO RESIST.

### 4. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY OF THE GROUP DISCUSSION:

THIS APPROACH TO A DISCUSSION OF RISK BY SETTING IT IN THE CONTEXT OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN FRIENDS SHEDS LIGHT ON NORMATIVE AND PSYCHOSOCIAL INFORMATION ON THE ATTITUDE OF THE SUBJECTS *vis-a-vis* THE RISK

THIS METHOD HIGHLIGHTS THE BIAS OF PRESTIGE WHICH IS INTENDED TO PRESENT A GOOD SELF-IMAGE AND CONTROL IMPRESSIONS AS WELL AS THE EFFECTS OF IDENTITY AND GENDER (MASCULINE/FEMININE).

CAUSAL ATTRIBUTIONS ARE PRIMARILY INTERNAL (BASED ON INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS) WHEN THEY RELATE TO THIRD PARTIES (OTHERS) WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE GROUP OF FRIENDS. IN CONTRAST, WHEN THE EGO IS CONCERNED (THE SUBJECT ALSO BEING PART OF THE GROUP), THE RISK-TAKING BEHAVIOUR IS EXPLAINED:

BY CAUSES OUTSIDE OF THE CONTROL OF THE SUBJECT'S WILL (E.G. THE INNOCENCE OF CHILDHOOD);

BY THE PERSONALITY OF THE SUBJECT («THAT'S JUST LIKE ME!»);

BY THE SUBJECT'S OWN «TASTE FOR RISK».

IN THIS CASE, RISK-TAKING IS NOT PRESENTED AS A DELIBERATE ACT RESULTING FROM A CONSIDERED DECISION.

THE GROUP CONVERSATION MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO TOUCH ON A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS (ALCOHOL, DRUGS, SPORTS' RISK, PLAY, SEXUALITY...).

IN GENERAL, THE BOYS STATED THAT THEY FEEL IN CONTROL OF THE EVENTS WHICH THEY EXPERIENCE WHEREAS THE GIRL REFERRED TO HER PROTECTIVE ROLE (CF. THE WELL-KNOWN «LAY CARE SYSTEM»). THE MINORITY POSITION OF THE GIRL IN THIS DISCUSSION GROUP NO DOUBT REINFORCED THIS EXTREMELY FEMINE BEHAVIOUR (RINGED, 1996).

THE CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH SEEMS TO US TO BE A USEFUL COMPLEMENT TO THE INDIVIDUAL NARRATIVE APPROACH.

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## Germany<sup>1</sup>

### 1 *Methodology*

#### 1.1 SAMPLE (RECRUITMENT)

The sample was recruited by personal and professional contacts and self selection. Recruited respondents were asked to look for friends who fit within the description of the sample to participate in the interviews. Altogether a total of 20 respondents in the age range 16-22 were recruited. In the case of minors the parents were informed about the purpose of the study and were asked for written consent.

#### SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Group 1 consists of nine respondents, group 2 of eight; for some characteristics see Table 1. The mean age for Group 1 is 17 years, nearly half of the participants are female. For Group 2 the mean age is 19 years and 75% are female. With the exception of one participant in Group 2, who is from Switzerland, all are German. In both groups all are presently visiting *grammar* school.

Table 1: Characteristics of the interviewees

<sup>1</sup> dr. Gerhard Bühringer (INSTITUT FÜR THERAPIEFORSCHUNG IFT, münchen - germany). the pilot study was planned and carried out with the support of Jutta Künzel, Eva Maiwald, Anneke Reese and Dilek Türk

	GROUP 1 (N=9)	GROUP 2 (N=8)	INDIVIDUAL 1	INDIVIDUAL 2	INDIVIDUAL
3					
SEX					
MALE:					
FEMALE					
5					
4					
2					
6					
I					
I					
I					
AGE	17 (16-17)	19 (18-20)	21	22	17

In addition three risk-experienced respondents were interviewed individually. Two of them are older than the participants of the groups (21 and 22); they passed a medium degree of school education. One has a low level office employment, one is working in the catering trade. The third one (17) is visiting a secondary school. Two are German, one is an Italian, living since many years in Germany (see Appendix 4.3).

## 1.2 COURSE OF THE GROUP INTERVIEWS

The two groups on the one side and the three individuals on the other side were handled according to a similar interview scheme:

### Introduction and warming up (10 minutes)

First the interviewers introduced themselves, gave some information about the IFT and asked the respondents to introduce themselves. Then they were informed about the anonymity of the whole process, about the honorarium (EU 25.- for the younger group and EU 37,5 for the older group and the individual interviews). To avoid a bias in the following brainstorming about their risk perception nothing was told in detail at that moment about the purpose of the whole meeting.

### Brainstorming on the concept of risk and risk behaviour (5

minutes)

The respondents individually received a sheet of paper with the following question: «What comes to your mind related to the term «risk» and «risk behaviour»? Please write down your ideas spontaneously without reflection». They had four minutes, then the individual sheets were collected.

Information about the purpose and the course of the interviews (5 minutes)

After the brainstorming the participants were informed about the purpose of the interviews (preparation of a scientific study) and the further course of this meeting (see below).

Filling out of questionnaires (20 minutes)

The students were asked to fill out a very short questionnaire on socio-demographic data (see Appendix 1) and the «sensation-seeking-scale» (SSS) by Zuckerman (1996) (see Appendix 2).

Group discussion on the term «risk conceptualisation» (50 minutes)

During the time the students needed to fill out the questionnaires, the terms from the individual brainstorming sheets were structured by the interviewers and written on two flip-chart pages. The terms could be organised according to «different types of risk behaviour» and «different kinds of motivation for risk behaviour». The group discussion was initiated by the interviewers based on one of the terms from the brainstorming sheets («no risk – no fun»). Major results of the discussion were written down by the interviewers.

Break (15 minutes)

In view of the length of the session and the need of the smokers for a cigarette (six of the eight people in the first course and seven of the nine in the second course smoked) a break was made.

Group discussion on the terms «risk perception», «risk evaluation» and «risk behaviour» (75 minutes)

To stimulate the discussion on the three terms a written standard risk story was given in two parts to each of the participants (Appendix 3). The content of the first part of the situation is as follows (text is shortened): «At a party you are offered a ride home in a car but you realise that the driver has probably drunken too much. But the severity of drunkenness is unclear». The first part of the story ends that he/she is asked to answer what he/she would do in this situation.

The interviewers structured the discussion between the respondents, if necessary, according to the following points:

What are the criteria for realising a possible risk situation (risk perception)

What are the criteria for deciding whether to accept the offer or not (risk evaluation)

Factors which influenced the decision process (external factors)

What are interesting / positive risk situations, which are seen as neutral or negative (risk behaviour).

After the discussion of the first part of the story, the second

part was handed out: «you took the offer as a passenger and realise during the ride that the driver probably has drunken too much. He drives very fast in the city, makes strange movements, doesn't see traffic lights and so on». The respondents again were asked what they would do in such a situation.

The following discussion of the interviewees was again structured, if necessary, according to the mentioned aspects.

Finally the discussion was directed according to other risk behaviour and their positive or negative value / image (e.g. sexual behaviour, own driving experience, drug taking, and so on). The participants were especially asked to concentrate on the topics «acceptable and non-acceptable risk behaviour».

At the end the interviewees were asked to discuss, especially for high risk behaviours, what could be done to prevent the negative outcome of risky situations. To stimulate this discussion the students were asked to imagine themselves as parents and would have children in the age of 12/14 to 18.

Altogether the two meetings took about three hours each.

### 1.3 COURSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The individual interviews with the three risk-experienced respondents were structured according to the following scheme:

Short introduction of the interviewer and the interviewee, information about data protection, and the honorarium.

The next steps including the brainstorming and interview on «risk conceptualisation» were carried out in the same ver-

sion than the group interviews

Discussion on the topics «risk perception», «risk evaluation», «risk behaviour»

In the individual sessions the dangerous risky situation of the interviewee was interviewed in detail. The interviewer concentrated the discussion on the three mentioned topics, in addition he was asked:

Did you realise, that it was a risky situation, what were the hints?

Under what conditions would you have decided in another way?

Did the experience of the risky situation change your future behaviour?

What could be done to avoid such dangerous risk situations (including the question what would you do as a parent with his children)?

The interview took about 1,5 hours.

#### 1.4 EXPERIENCES WITH THE INTERVIEWS

The experiences in the two group interviews and the three individual interviews can be summarised as follows:

It was rather easy to motivate the respondents to participate in the interviews. This was not only caused by the honorarium, but also by the natural interests of the interviewees about this topic and the curiosity about the work of psychologists.

It was easy to carry out the group interviews and the individual interviews. The students participated very actively and the task of the interviewers was not to stimulate the discussion but only to structure it from time to time according to the interview guidelines. Only in the group of younger people there were three out of nine who tried some obstruction. But this did not have a major influence on the further course and outcome.

Because of the cancelling of a group of three young workers shortly before the interview it was difficult to get other workers with the same age in time. As a consequence, pupils are over-represented in the two group samples, but not in the individual interviews. Further on because of that reason (loss of previously scheduled participants) the mean age in group 2 is too young (19 instead of 20/21). The younger group does also not include respondents in the age range 14-15. Therefore one has to be carefully to generalise the results from the group discussions for the whole age range from 14 to 22.

The group discussions took about three hours, starting at five p.m. After the three hours the participants were rather exhausted and a bit tired. Therefore we did not carry out the planned additional individual interviews after the group interviews. We thought, that enough information was collected during the group interviews, especially as we additionally asked about the influence of friends (influence of the group) on individual risk evaluation and decision making.

In the analysis of the interviews it was sometimes difficult to differ between risk concept, risk perception and risk evaluation.

All in all the interviews were very rewarding. Altogether the experiences were very positive and it can be concluded that the targets of the pilot study were reached in terms of getting more information about the four risk-topics and related fac-



tors.

## 2 *Results of the pilot study*

The answers of the two groups and the three individuals are presented together, unless there are major differences which need to be mentioned.

### 2.1 CONCEPTUALISATION (WRITTEN BRAINSTORMING)

The terms of the brainstorming sheets can be structured according to two topics, type of risk situation and motivation for risk. Concerning the *concept of the type of situations to be seen as risky* the analysis of the brainstorming came to the following results:

The interviewees perceive those situations as risky which are characterised by those behaviours with an acute, visible expectancy of positive experiences and thrills, but with the risk of some negative outcome, e.g. drunken driving with high speed by night, drinking alcohol in a social situation, using drugs in a dangerous situation, mountain climbing. The younger groups especially referred to risk situations in sports (skating, snow boarding, horse riding).

The mentioned risk situations all have a very positive value and image. «Neutral» risk situations, e.g. deciding after school for the job to be learned, changing a school because of the moving of the parents, are mentioned rather seldom.

Risk behaviour with possible long term negative consequences are mentioned rarely, e.g. tobacco smoking, sexual behaviour without condoms.

Another part of the written brainstorming comments are

concerned with the *motives for engaging in risky situations*:

Most of the written motives / characteristics of risky situations are subjectively highly positive, e.g. having fun («no risk, no fun»), push of adrenaline, positive tension, new experiences, eventful life.

Very few comments were related to negative outcome of risk situations, e.g. life threats, illnesses, panic.

Compared to the two groups, two of the three individual interviewees with risk-experience predominantly see the terms risk and risk behaviour in a negative way, and associate negative consequences, like anxiety, health consequences and so on. The third wasn't affected very much by her risk experience.

#### GROUP DISCUSSION ON THE RISK CONCEPT

The results of the group discussion following the brainstorming can be summarised in some central aspects:

The term risk has a very positive value and is predominantly related to situations with acute positive expectancies, e.g. new experiences, new challenges, acute sensations.

For the younger group this positive and one-sided concept is even stronger, which can be seen by following terms: «real fun comes only in risk situations», «challenging a risk situation gives you fun, the feeling of happiness, thrill». The elder ones differentiated a bit more. They don't accept the general term «no risk – no fun», they argue that risk and fun don't necessarily belong together, they would avoid life threatening risk situations even if they are associated with positive consequences (e.g. driving a car intoxicated and with closed eyes).

The older group of interviewees differentiate between «real» risky situations, which are e.g. life threatening situations on the one side, and risky behaviour, which is just not allowed, e.g. driving too fast (the danger is not seen in the risk of accident, but in the risk of being controlled by the police), betraying in school examinations, shoplifting.

Risky behaviour, which is just not allowed, is less seen as a «real» risk. But this differentiation has nothing to do with the subjective positive value, only with the evaluation of the amount of risk and the probability of engaging in the risky behaviour. The younger group named several values that can be put at stake in a risk situation: life, health, friendship, time and money were rated in this order to be most valuable. The more a certain behaviour endangers these aspects the more risky it was perceived to be.

Risk taking was seen as a behaviour you actively decide on whereas bad luck is out of your control. Daily, low risk (being robbed) is perceived as bad luck.

Situations and behaviours with long term negative consequences, e.g. health consequences of smoking, are not very relevant. The older ones know the risks, but they don't care. The younger mostly even don't mention them.

Risk is seen predominantly as consequences for the own person. They don't mention that their own risk behaviour might be risky for others too (e.g. drunken driving, sexual behaviour without condoms).

There are clear individual differences between the interviewees in terms of what is seen as risk and what is seen as positive or negative, challenging or not.

Two of the three interviewees with negative risk experi-

ences differ clearly in terms that they see risk predominantly negative, dangerous and life threatening, and mention nearly no positive aspects of the term risk.

## 2.2 PERCEPTION

The group discussion after presenting the risk story (part 1 and 2) can be summarised as follows relating the topic «perception»:

The older group of interviewees said, that did not perceive the extreme risk of certain situations like they do today when they were younger (13/14). In that age they did «really risky things» (e.g. drug use in the park till one loses consciousness, touching running subways).

They argue, that one has to experience many risk situations to be better able to perceive them.

They differ between situations which are life threatening and those who have only negative social consequences (traffic control during the first year where the driver's licence is only on parole).

Long term risks are predominantly not perceived as real risks.

Health and social risks especially if they will happen long away in the future, are perceived as less relevant than *severe* negative social consequences (e.g. losing the driver's licence on parole).

## 2.3 EVALUATION

There is a clear group influence in terms that they evaluate risk situations as acceptable if others do it also, especially close friends (e.g. a friend as a drunken driver is less risky than

an unknown person).

The influence of the group seem to be monitored by age (experience) and probably individual differences.

Some older interviewees argue that with increasing age they dare to say «no» to participate in risky situations, some still don't dare to do that. Asking parents for help in a risky situation seems to have gender-specific consequences. Females are more positively reinforced, males are not. Males seem to be expected to take higher risks than females.

Other external factors for engaging in risky situations are the availability of alternatives, e.g: if they come from a discotheque on the countryside, they would accept a drive in a car with a drunken driver with a higher probability, if there is no public transportation, if they have no money, if they don't dare to phone their parents.

In terms of external factors (23) there also seem to be some individual differences, probably monitored by age and experience. Some of them mentioned that they plan a social evening in advance and that they would not participate in a party were they would have problems to come back individually if all others are drunken. Some also mentioned that they arrange groups where one will not drink in the evening.

From the interviewer's point it seems to be that false beliefs lead to inadequate risk evaluations in critical situations. For example they believe that good food / enough food will reduce the risk of drunkenness while driving.

They don't know the relation of the amount of alcoholic beverages and the level of blood alcohol concentration. They do not accept «objective signs of drunkenness» by drivers as «real» critical situations. The group discussion made clear,

that their risk evaluation is partly underdeveloped because of a lack of experience (what does a blood alcohol concentration of 0,3 or 0,4‰ practically mean for traffic safety) but also of a lack of knowledge (e.g. the relation of the amount of alcohol and the risk of driving).

Positive experiences in past risk situations reduces the risk evaluation in future situations of that type (e.g. several experiences with drunken driving without negative consequences).

Situations, where the positive outcome is supposed to be influenced only by the own competence (even if that assumption is objectively wrong) are seen less risky in contrast to situations where external factors are seen as relevant. This is especially the case, if these situations have been mastered positively in the past.

Concerning some specific situations the following were evaluated as acceptable, low-risk-situations (!):

Using cannabis

Driving fast in the night

Driving over red cross lights in the night

Taking someone in one's car, if one is drunken, and the other knows that (it's then his own risk).

Drunken driving, if one knows that there is no police control

Drunken driving or driving with a drunken driver, if the distance is short or at least well known (but not on long dis-

tances)

It's also a less severe risk, if there is no public transportation available (being raped if hitchhiking, is seen as a higher risk by females).

Shop lifting, as nobody has a disadvantage / harm (the older interviewees see this different).

Altogether the evaluation of risk situations is not based on «objective» knowledge, but predominantly on personal experiences, and it is not stable in the understanding, that the similar risk behaviour is evaluated similar in all situations. Instead the risk evaluation is monitored by many external factors, like group pressure, possible alternatives to the risk behaviour, personal experiences, the amount of the kick in a positive outcome and so on.

In one group finally at the end of the discussion on risk evaluation, the sentence «no risk – no fun» was changed to «have fun, choose your own risk».

#### 2.4 BEHAVIOUR

Some risk behaviours have a high positive value and thrill:

Drunk driving

Driving with closed eyes at night

Driving too fast

Passing a red light

Crossing a street as late as possible

To come as closely as possible to a running train

Parachute

Using illicit drugs

Gambling.

The mentioned risk situations are seen even more positive when carried out in a group of friends.

The interviewees mentioned that there are some risk situations which in all cases have a negative outcome and therefore have a less value, e.g. tobacco smoking. Some others mentioned drug taking, but not only because of the addictive risk, but because of unknown compositions.

There are also some risk situations which have no positive or negative value, e.g. deciding one's future job, moving to a new school, apartment or city.

## 2.5 PREVENTION

We asked interviewees what could be done to reduce the negative consequences of risk situations for young people, e.g. traffic accidents, HIV-infection, drug dependence or substance use related accidents and diseases. To make it more concrete we ask them to imagine that they would have children in the age between 14 and 20: what would they do in terms of the prevention of negative consequences?

The major comment was that young people have to make their experiences to be able to recognise and evaluate risk



situations.

Parents and other responsables should set clear rules and regulations, which might limit the behaviour repertoire of young people, but they must leave an elbowroom for a free decision making and risk behaviour experiences.

Parents should by no means give up their parent role as an educator and should not take over the role of a maid / buddy, e.g. behaving like a similar young person.

Parents should also punish young people in situations of extreme risk of loosing one's life, e.g. touching a high-speed subway.

Some said that young people should be helped to increase their competence to evaluate risk situations and to behave adequately in such situations.

Some of the interviewees were rather pessimistic in terms of effective preventive measures.

Those interviewees with experience in risk situations were in general much more strict and consequent in terms of clear educational regulations.

### 3 *Conclusions and Hypothesis*

#### 3.1 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

The group and individual interviews brought up some major results and conclusions:

The risk-concept of most interviewees is highly positive, associated with interesting and thrilling experiences and espe-

cially with fun. The risk itself is in most cases not of high value, but the positive consequences associated with a successful mastering of the risk situation.

Most of the positive outcomes are associated with short term risk situations, e.g. positive feelings after drug taking, sensation during high speed driving, adrenaline pushes.

Long term risks (e.g. diseases as a consequence of alcohol use and tobacco smoking) are mostly known by the older interviewees, but they don't care of and they don't have an influence on their behaviour. The younger don't even think about long term risks, legal risks are taken into account purposely.

The concept of «probability» (of negative consequences) is not very well developed, even in the older group. If one experiences one, two or three times no negative consequences (e.g. driving under alcohol) the principle risk of drunken driving, which they know and which they have been informed in the driver's school, is subjectively reduced. That means, the statistical risk, which is in every situation the same, is subjectively reduced because of experiences without negative consequences.

The evaluation of a risk situation (e.g. driving under alcohol) is also influenced by many external factors, e.g. group pressure, knowledge of the driver, distance to one's home, availability of money for taking public transportation, availability of public transportation.

The interviewees have a bad knowledge of facts about the correlation of certain alcohol intake and the reduction of the drivers' functioning (e.g. reactivity, perception of sudden risk situations).

The effects of punishment on their behaviour is not very clear. On the one side, especially the younger people argue that there is no fun without (even dangerous or forbidden) risk behaviour. On the other side, especially the older respondents, e.g. in the first year of their driver's licence, which is specifically restricted in Germany, argued that the probability of police control in fact does monitor their behaviour.

In all two groups there were some interviewees with high poly-risk behaviour, which were nearly not influenced by any existing sanctions. They use «recreational» drugs intensively, drive regularly under heavy influence of alcohol, do constantly acute risky things, e.g. working on the electric system in a household without turning off the electricity. These people argue in the last question about the possibility to prevent dangerous risk situations that they could not be prevented and that young people have to go through this situations. These poly-risk takers were a specific sub-group in the two group meetings and did argue and behave different to the other group member.

### 3.2 CONSEQUENCES FOR THE MAJOR STUDY

From the pilot study I would suggest to concentrate in the main study on the following aspects:

We have to study risk situations with a high emotional value and relevance.

We have to concentrate on risk situations which are underestimated by young people, partly because of a lack of knowledge (e.g. the influence of alcohol on driving behaviour).

It seems to be very important to clearly find out the factors which increase or decrease the probability of entering a risk situation or not (risk evaluation).

The group influence, probably a personality factor like sensation seeking and a lack of education of competencies for risky situations and the instrumental value of the behaviour seem to play a major role.

Probably it is helpful to include a test on the knowledge of important facts concerning risk situations.

There seem to be individual differences in evaluating the same risk situation. Therefore it is important (1.) to work with the same risk situations in the major study for all participants, and (2.) to include some hypotheses about the factors which monitor individual differences (e.g. sensation seeking, positive or negative outcomes of risky situations).

It might be helpful to differentiate between (1.) engaging in a risky situation as a function to reach something else which is important (e.g. drunk driving in order to come home after a party) and (2.) risky situations to gain experiences / thrills (e.g. closing eyes while driving). In the first case the risky situation is not important per se and has no positive value.

### 3.3 FIRST CONSEQUENCES FOR PREVENTIVE ACTIONS

From the pilot study we would derive the following consequences:

Risky behaviour is an integrated part of adolescence and probably an important factor for gaining life competencies and self assertiveness. It can not be our goal (and it would not be successful) to strive for a «zero level in risky behaviour» in prevention. Our goal should be (1.) to enable young people to perceive and evaluate risk situations and (2.) to increase their competence to master risk situations.

One should differentiate between «neutral», functional risk behaviour to reach something else and risk behaviour as an

own value to gain positive emotions / experiences.

Young people should be trained in the following aspects:

learning to understand and to calculate risky situations

learning to experience under safe conditions the possible negative consequences (e.g. driving under alcohol in driving simulators)

to increase the competence and the self-efficacy to master risky situations.

It seems also necessary to implement in education guidelines for parents that any activities (e.g. avoid risky situations, to analyse or master them adequately) should start in the early childhood, before the puberty.

### *Appendix*

SOCIO-ECONOMIC QUESTIONNAIRE  
THE SENSATION-SEEKING-SCALE (SSS)  
STANDARD RISK SITUATION FOR THE TWO GROUPS

PART ONE

You are at a party. People are nice, you feel good and it is rather late when you decides to leave. Probably you have to wait on the bus for a rather long time and may be that you then can't reach your underground. A friend makes you the offer for a ride home with his car. You has realised that he has drunken beer during the evening. Not too much, but more than one bottle.

You think about the risk to take up his offer although he is not absolutely sober. What are you going to do?

## PART TWO

Let's assume that you take up the offer. During the ride you realise that your friend has probably drunken too much. He drives very fast in the city, makes strange movements and does not see traffic lights. What are you going to do?

### 4 *Individual interviews*

#### 4.1 INTERVIEW 1

#### 4.2 INTERVIEW 2

The participant is a 21 year old man, Italian, living since many years in Germany. He is working in the catering trade. Sometimes he is also working as a bouncer in several clubs that are presently very «in» in the scene of Munich.

He is born and grown up in Sicily. His parents had a restaurant in Sicily, later on in Germany. He was brought up in a strict but also loving and understanding way. Especially his father played an important role for him. Although he was rather strict, he talked a lot to him and always explained his decisions to his son.

#### MEANING OF RISK

He makes a clear difference between life threatening risks, and risks in the area of e.g. business or gambling. Whereas he absolutely avoids the first one, the second one belong to a full life («no risk, no fun»).

#### RISK AND PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The refusing of risks for his own life lead to the question about dealing with risks for his health, especially risks connected with the use of psychoactive substances. He has a different risk assessment for legal and illegal drugs. Whereas illegal drugs are seen as very dangerous for health and life, alco-

hol consumption in a moderate way is seen as a very normal behaviour. To drink alcohol especially on parties, at social gatherings is an absolute common practice. Smoking is seen as more dangerous as drinking. The participant is a smoker since he is 15 years old, he smokes up to 60 cigarettes per day. He feels addicted and it is a very serious problem for him, because his father died because of smoking.

He has already smoked marihuana, but it has had no effects and therefore it is not interesting for him. He knows a lot of persons and also friends who are taking drugs and who are already addicted. He does accept these people because it is their decision, but he never would take drugs. His father has told him, that in the case he would be addicted to drugs, he would kill him, because he does not want to see him suffer. He was very impressed by this threat.

#### RISK AND VIOLENCE

The participant is often confronted with violence because of his job as bouncer. If he does not allow a person to enter the club, the reaction is often aggressiveness. He always tries to solve the situation by talking and explaining the decision to avoid violence. He can accept violence as a mean to defend one's health or life, but he does not like to act in a violent way.

#### RISK BEHAVIOUR AND PEER INFLUENCE

He sees a high connection between peer pressure and the readiness to show risk behaviour. But he never joined these peer groups that for example made tests of courage. He preferred to be with older friends that had already left the age of these actions. But he always felt accepted by peers because he was a «good guy» and helped others.

#### THE EXPERIENCED RISK SITUATION

The participant has had a very severe road accident. It happened on a rainy evening in the winter. The participant has

had a very exciting and confusing talk with his girl-friend. She finished with him. When he left, he was in a mood that was a mixture from sadness and aggressiveness. He was absolutely sober, because he never drinks alcohol when he is going to drive a car. He went by car to the restaurant of his father, where he worked at that time. The restaurant was in another town. He knows the route from the town where his girl-friend lived and the restaurant inside out, because he has gone this route by car for a long time nearly every day. The only difference to the rides before was except his mood, the fact that he has got a new car several days before and he was not enough acquainted with it up to now. He drove too fast (160km/h on a country road). In a bend he went into a skid, the car turned over and fell down the embankment. He lost consciousness and gained it back only after five days. Besides the severe concussion he was hardly injured, the car was totally damaged. It was like a wonder, he could also be dead. His life was saved by his special safety belts for sport cars. But if there would have been a front-seat passenger in his car, these person would have had no chance to survive the accident.

#### RISK PERCEPTION AND RISK EVALUATION

He was completely surprised by the situation. Despite his high speed, he has seen no risk, because of his very good knowledge of the route. He first realized the danger when he was already going into a skid, and he also realized that now his life was in danger.

#### CONSEQUENCES FOR BEHAVIOUR

He made some changes of the external factors. He bought a new car, that was not as he had before a sport car, but a car with high security standards and a limited speed. So he is forced to drive much slower.

When he gives other persons a ride on his car, he drives very carefully, because he does not want to endanger them.



He is now more often careful also in other situations and then often thinks about the risk situation and he knows that life can be finished very quickly.

He tells his friends about his experience in the hope that they will learn from this experience.

#### PREVENTION OF RISK SITUATIONS

He suggested the following preventive measures

Information about consequences of the risk behaviour, also in a very drastic and deterring way.

Making own experiences is the best way to avoid risks in the future.

Strict bringing up by the parents

Not too much liberties for children, but more protection by the parents until the children have left the most dangerous ages and are a bit more mature (when they are about 17 years).

#### 4.3 INTERVIEW 3

The participant is a 17 years old women. She is visiting a secondary school.

#### MEANING OF RISK

Risk is everywhere. It is a part of life in every area of life. It requires decisions that are always connected with the uncertainty whether they are right or wrong. Risk is always connected with danger. That can be a danger for health or life, but mostly the danger to be confronted with different kinds of negative consequences, e.g. social consequences like a break-up of a friendship. But risks are not at all negative. Sometimes

it is necessary to take a risk, to make ones own experiences or also to be successful.

There are justifiable and unjustifiable risks. An example for a justifiable risk is the last journey of the participant. Together with five friends, all aged under 18 years, she was away in France. She considers the fact that six minor girls are away in another country as a risky action. Unjustifiable risks are risks that are a threat for one's own life or that are a threat for other people as for example taking illegal drugs or to behave in a risky way in the traffic.

#### RISK AND PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

A moderate consumption of alcohol is absolutely normal and is not seen as a risk. The same is true for tobacco smoking, if one considers other persons (non-smokers). The participant is a smoker, but despite of this she sees more risk in smoking than in drinking alcohol. „Smoking is more risky, but drinking alcohol is worse, because of the lost of control. For the risks of taking illegal drugs one has to make a difference between hard drugs and e.g. cannabis. The participant has already tried some joints at the age of 15 because of curiosity, but with disappointing effects.

#### RISK BEHAVIOUR AND PEER INFLUENCE

The influence of the peer group plays a very important role. One is afraid to make a fool of oneself if one does not show the wanted behaviour. The warning of the parents has no effect, because one knows that if one does not act in the way the parents want, it does not really matter, because they always will love her child. But the same is not true for the peers. If one is not able to gain their acceptance, than it could be that one gets the role of an outsider.

#### THE EXPERIENCED RISK SITUATION

With the age of 14 she was in her summer holidays in a

children's holiday camp. A lot of sporting activities took place at the camp. She was especially interested in baseball. She does not play baseball herself, but she liked to watch the baseball matches. One reason for this preference was a boy, that played in the baseball team, she has felt in love with. So, at one of his matches, she and her friend watched the match from a rather near distance to the field. She wanted to be seen by the boy she admired. During the match, one of the players reached back with his bat, and because she was standing too near at the field, he hit the bat directly in her face. She immediately has lost her consciousness. She had to suffer for two years from her injuries. All of her front teeth were knocked out and her jaw was broken. It took nine operations until she looked as she has looked like before the accident. She had severe psychological problems because she felt rather ugly.

#### RISK PERCEPTION AND RISK EVALUATION

She knows that she was standing too near by the field. But that was her intention, because she wanted to attract the boy. Therefore she could not stand among the other spectators but wanted to stand in an exposed position. She did not think about any risks and she was completely surprised by the accident.

#### CONSEQUENCES FOR BEHAVIOUR

The experience led to nearly no behavioural changes. One reason for this is, that it was a very special situation, that will hardly happen again. The feeling, that she has to be more careful does only relate to sporting activities. The experience does not have any consequences on her behaviour in other areas of activities. The only, rather important change for her is, that she now has more understanding and sympathy for people that are disabled or disfigured.

#### PREVENTION OF RISK SITUATIONS

Making one's own experience is absolutely necessary.

Information is important to help to make the right decision in a risk situation.

Parents should not be too strict and forbid nearly everything, because then they are not credible.

It would be ideal, if the parents have made own experiences in situations that are relevant for their children and they could tell them about these experiences.

## Greece<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

#### COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING IN THE PROJECT

The study *Young People and Risk Management* is a comparative European research programme in six European countries, namely France (Université de Rennes 2), Great Britain (Royal Edinburgh Hospital), Greece (KEKMOKOP Panteion University, Athens), Germany (Institute of Therapy Research – Munich), Italy (Osservatorio Permanente sui Giovani e l'Alcool) and Spain (Socidroalcol, Valencia). It is organized and sponsored by the Permanent Observatory on Youth and Alcohol (Osservatorio Permanente sui Giovani e l'Alcool) of Italy in Rome.

#### 1.2 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The objectives of the present project are:

To examine and analyze the conceptualization, perception and evaluation of «risk» and «risky behaviour» among youth population (focus groups) in different socio-cultural contexts.

To evaluate and standardize the methodology and research

<sup>1</sup> The Greek Research Team was composed by Professor D. Gefou-Madianou, Dr. G. Agelopoulos, Mr. M. Petrou (Ph.D. Student), Mr. V. Holloway

used in a qualitative ethnographic study in the different research centers, aiming at comparing the final data on «risk» between the European countries participating in the project.

The above data will constitute the basis for designing a major study on the «Determinants of Alcohol Risk Among Young People in Europe».

In this respect the present study constitutes the first phase of a larger collaborative European project.

## 2. *The concept of risk: anthropological approaches*

«Risk», as a concept has become a subject of anthropological inquiry during the last two decades. The anthropological focus on risk follows the development of an extended literature on this topic primarily in the fields of economics, management, psychiatry and psychology. These studies attempt to work with a number of ambiguous terms, the most common of which are: «risk», «misfortune», «accident», «fault», indeterminacy, chance, probability, uncertainty, rationality, faith, fate, risky behaviour, «adventure». This short introduction is an attempt to relate the anthropological approaches to risk with the previously established theories of risk analysis; in order to clarify the contribution of anthropology in this field.

### 2.1 THE RATIONAL CHOICE THEORIES

The focus on risk analysis has rapidly expanded mainly after W. W. II. Since the mid eighties, one of the dominant theoretical paradigms in the study of risk in the social, political and economic sciences is the «Rational Choice Theory» (RCT) developed by W. Nicholson (1985). According to Nicholson, the RCT is an attempt to understand human decision taking under uncertainty and relies on the concept of rationality. The RCT perceives risk as a purely mathematical *problem*, as the prediction of probabilities in a given situation.

What is emphasized in this approach is gain with regard to possible outcomes and the relative probabilities of gain and loss. In other words, the RCT perceives risk as an anomaly or a negative aspect of human life which can be mathematically predicted and possibly avoided.

Nicholson's arguments were initially developed to explain decision taking in economics. However, the RCT model was also transferred in the social and political sciences and still dominates risk analysis in some USA academic contexts. A classical example of ethnographies based on the RCT are included in the volume *Risk and Uncertainty in Tribal and Peasant Economies* edited by E. Cashdan (1990). The papers in this volume discuss subsistence strategies by using a version of the RCT and distinguish between «risk-averse» and «risk-loving» societies.

The RCT and similar theoretical paradigms based on the concept of rationality have established an understanding of risk which: (i) defines, recognizes and focuses the analysis on «risky behaviours», (ii) proposes a specific methodology in order to study risk and «risky behaviours» and (iii) offers prevention strategies to cope with risk among population groups with high rates of «risky behaviour». The most usually mentioned groups are the youth, the mentally sick and the professionals under continuous stress (e.g. pilots).

Although popular in management studies, the RCT has attracted a great number of criticism. Most of this criticism, as Malaby argues, is related with the reliance of RCT on «rationality» (Malaby 1997: 35). Further on this direction, it is possible to recall the well-established criticisms against Transactional and other rational choice theories in the social sciences and apply similar arguments in criticizing the RCT. The RCT also encounters significant problems in explaining the behaviour of persons of non-western cultures. In most of the cases, the RCT applies an ethnocentric distinction between rational «Us» and irrational «Them» which has evolutionary

underpinnings. The principal problem of RCT is, however, that by accounting only for the formal features of an activity, it necessarily entails a separation of this activity and its participant's decisions from the wider local socio-cultural context (Malaby 1997). This becomes evident in the study of specific «risky behaviours». Their definition, as Carbone argues, often lacks a serious epistemological background and disregards the ambiguities of the culturally developed possible meanings of risk (Carbone 1999). Furthermore, similar definitions of «risky behaviour» are based on moral evaluations and essentialised behavioural categories (ibid.). The definition problem inherited in projects which focus on «risky behaviours», effects their research methodology and their conclusions. The existence of «well defined risky behaviours» allows the researchers who follow this paradigm, to apply statistical analysis and reach conclusions. In most of the cases, such conclusions lead to specific prevention strategies. The extraordinary repeated failure of prevention strategies based on such a model, forced scholars to talk about the «boomerang effect» of these projects (ibid.) For many years, research on the effects of information campaigns and other prevention strategies among population groups with everyday risk experiences, proved the ineffectiveness or even the harmfulness of such methods (ibid.).

## 2.2 RISK AS CONSTITUTIVE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although not so popular among policy makers and management studies theorists, a number of other more critical and culturally oriented theoretical approaches on risk have been developed by sociologists and social anthropologists. Among the most important are Mary Douglas' work.<sup>2</sup> Douglas, a British anthropologist who also worked in the USA, was the first one to point out that risk is constitutive of social relationships rather than a result, of individual needs, as rational choice theorists argue. According to Douglas, «risk is defined as be-

<sup>2</sup> See annotated bibliography.



ing acceptable or not by society as a whole» (1992: 23). Her work has had a great influence not only in anthropology but in other social sciences as well. Douglas, in collaboration with other scholars, has also been involved in suggesting a critical understanding of prevention strategies (Douglas and Will-davsky 1982, Douglas 1986). According to Douglas, the focus on individual actor decisions belonging to population groups with high risk experiences, does not offer a fruitful approach to risk. Douglas' work has clear Durkheimian influences and often tends to underestimate the local or personal interests of the actors involved in risk.

M. Douglas' hypotheses were initially focused on non western societies. The sociologists Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck formulated parallel to Douglas' arguments for western industrial societies. However, a significant discontinuity in their analyses is that they are only applied to a modern western industrially developed social context.

For example, in his analysis of modern western societies, Giddens argues that since the eighteenth century these societies, aware of the uncertainty of the future, have attempted to predict and control risks by developing statistical techniques or assessment (Giddens 1991). Giddens therefore perceives risk a phenomenon embedded in western culture and in society.

The German sociologist Ulrich Beck considers risk as a structural element of industrial society (Beck 1992). Beck points out the side effects of rational modernity, which are the dangers existing due to the institutional bureaucracy of modern societies and due to their inability to control technology. Beck offers some directions for overcoming the escalating dangers of late modernity. He proposes political action aiming at the radicalization of rationalization through overcoming individualization.

Most of the anthropological research projects on risk in the last two decades, are based on the work of M. Douglas, A. Giddens and U. Beck. As Malaby explains, a common characteristic of the latest anthropological studies on risk in both western and non-western societies is to perceive risk as an attempt to situate the self in a social context. In other words, the focus is on the individual but risk is recognized as a socio-cultural phenomenon beyond individual choices (Malaby 1997).

### 2.3 RISK IN SOCIAL THEORY

To conclude, it is possible to recognize two major approaches on the study of risk. The first approach claims that risk is an anomaly which may / should be prevented. This approach is dominant in management studies and economics and perceives risk as an individual experience based on choices decided by the individual. According to the researchers who follow this paradigm, risk appears to be a conscious probability or the result of an unconscious fault. The prevention strategies based on this paradigm focus on high risk target groups which practice «risky behaviours».

The second approach stresses the need to conceptualize risk as a structural phenomenon embedded in society. Individual choices are not neglected but perceived in their socio-cultural context. Furthermore, actors are not always considered as fully conscious individuals and space is left for the influence of unconscious factors. Most of the authors who follow this paradigm are not engaged in a discussion of specific risk prevention strategies. Indeed, some scholars, as U. Beck for example, argue that the only solution is a radical political change which will limit the structural risks of present day societies. However, they also suggest that any risk prevention strategy should be addressed not only those considered to have «risky experiences», but the wider society as a whole.

## 2. 4 ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON «RISK»

The Greek research team has put an effort in the selection of the existing bibliography on the concept of «risk» and «risky behaviour». Since, at this point of the study, what mostly interests the research team is the clarification of concepts and their ambiguities, it was decided that the various theoretical approaches should be discussed and that an annotated bibliography should also be included in the final report.

1. BECK, ULRICH, 1992. RISK SOCIETY, LONDON: SAGE.

This book, originally published in German in 1986, has proved to have a major influence both in the sociological analysis of modernization as well as on the German Green movement. Beck focuses on two main subjects: reflexive modernization and the issue of risk.

The notion of reflexive modernization is based on an analysis of the consequences of modernity. Contrary to «optimistic» approaches to modernity which claim that the basis of the modern is located in rationality, Beck argues that there is also a darker side, namely the existence of risks and hazards that societies have never faced before. The dangers of scientific «progress» and development are not any more limited in time and space. To overcome this problem, Beck does not dismiss modernity altogether but suggests the radicalization of rationalization through overcoming individualization. Therefore, modernization must become reflexive. On the one hand, individual agency plays a significant role in reflexive modernization. On the other hand, reflexive modernization confronts and tries to accommodate the essential tension between human indeterminacy and the inevitable tendency to objectify and naturalize cultural productions.

To proceed the analysis further, U. Beck attempts an approach on risk as a structural element of society. And though

Beck focuses on Western societies, his arguments can be more widely applied. He shows that physical risks are always created and effected in social systems such as, for example, organizations and institutions which are supposed to manage and control risky activity. Thus, risks are directly related to social relations. The primary risk, even for the most technically intensive activities, is, therefore, that of social dependency upon institutions and actors, who may well be alien, obscure and inaccessible to most people affected by the risks in question.

2. BECK, ULRICH, 1998. *Politics of Risk Society*. IN JANE FRANKLIN, *The Politics of Risk Society*, CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS, PP. 9 – 22.

In this paper U. Beck returns in his previously ([1986] 1992) developed theory of risk society, to show how it conveys a new conception of a «non-industrial» society and how it modifies social theory and politics. Furthermore, Beck takes the position of his critics and explores the ideas which limit his previous analysis on risk. Finally, he points to the theoretical and political avenues that he wishes to see explored at a European level.

3. FRANKLIN, JANE, 1998. *Introduction*. IN JANE FRANKLIN, *THE POLITICS OF RISK SOCIETY*, CAMBRIDGE: POLITY PRESS, PP. 1 – 8.

J. Franklin argues that U. Beck's theory on the politics of risk society and A. Giddens' approach on the consequences of modernity express parallel views and need to be further developed towards a critical understanding of society. In the introduction of this collection of essays though not proposing any new theoretical approaches to the study of «risks». However, J. Franklin manages to offer a simple, clearly written overview of the papers published in the volume and to link them with the previously established discussion on risk.

4. GIDDENS, ANTHONY, 1998. *RISK SOCIETY: THE CONTEXT OF BRIT-*

Starting from the analysis of actual examples of life in the UK in the '90s, A. Giddens attempts to explain the effects of science and technical knowledge in modern society and the political responses available. Giddens argues that risk society is something different from postindustrial society. It is a society which is increasingly preoccupied with its future and issues of safety, both of which generate a notion of risk. The origins of risk society can be traced to two fundamental transformations affecting peoples' lives, which he names «the end of nature» and «the end of tradition». In such a society, risk is not any more an unexpected incident coming from the outside, but has «a manufactured» character. «Manufactured risk» is a risk created by the very progression of human development, especially by the progression of science and technology.

5. DOUGLAS, MARY, 1966. PURITY AND DANGER. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS OF POLLUTION AND TABOO, LONDON: ROUTLEDGE AND KEGAN PAUL.

The first book of M. Douglas which examines issues related to risk and presents an anthropological approach to human cognition. It is based on the assumption that all religions and societies have rules of purity, neglect of which is punished by risks of various types. The main argument is that humans pay attention to a particular pattern of disasters, treating them as omens or punishments. Douglas focuses on the mutual adaptation of views about natural dangers and views about how society works. Most of the analysis was based on ethnographic material coming from non Western societies.

6. DOUGLAS, MARY, 1992. RISK AND BLAME. ESSAYS IN CULTURAL THEORY, LONDON: ROUTLEDGE.

This is a collection of essays on the theme of risk and blame which have been separately published before over a period of five years. Douglas develops a programme for studying risk and blame which follows from ideas originally analyzed in her previous book *Purity and Danger*. The first essay is an attempt to contribute to an anthropological approach on the cross-disciplinary discussion of how danger is politicized and how the perception of risk is culturally produced. This essay, together with the last one in the volume, are probably the most crucial texts, in order to understand M. Douglas' theoretical and methodological views on risk. The remaining five essays argue for a more holistic approach on risk by using a variety of examples, from law and order issues to problems of cross-boundary communication. The essays in part two, mainly focus on the relationship between institutions and individuals in their attempt to cope with risk, danger and other relevant beliefs. Douglas posed a number of methodological questions, and she attempts to provide an alternative critical approach by rejecting the blanket categories of «risk», «health» and «danger».

7. DOUGLAS, MARY, 1994. *RISK ACCEPTABILITY ACCORDING TO THE SOCIAL SCIENCES*, LONDON AND N.Y.: RUSSELL SAGE FOUNDATION.

This report originally developed as an attempt to present a literature review on social influences on risk perception. The chapters examine the moral issues in risk acceptability and the emergence of risk studies as a distinctive subdiscipline in the social sciences. It also analyses the perception of risk, the relationship between choice and risk, as well as the notion of natural risks. Finally, the interrelationship between credibility, rumor transmission and social control of information are discussed, and the concepts of «risk seeking» and the «safety first» ideology in business contexts are introduced in an attempt to explain the problems related to the structure of organizations, institutions and risk prevention.

8. DOUGLAS, MARY AND WILDAVSKY, AARON, 1982. *RISK AND CUL-*

This book builds upon M. Douglas's previous work *Risk and Blame* but extends the discussion over industrial Western societies and the «new awareness of technological dangers». The theoretical contribution is still focused on the social influences of the development of perceptions about risk, danger, and probability and risk acceptability.

### *3. Methodology*

#### 3. 1 THE OVERALL METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

The project methodology was decided and planned by the European Partners of the Observatory during the Paris meeting in 22 – 23 October 1999. This included the following groups:

2 «normal» groups and 3 youngsters with risky behaviour

Age range 14 – 22 years old divided into 2 groups:

- 8 people 14 – 17 years old (school group) / 50% men, 50% women / 3 socio-economic levels / students, drop outs

- 8 people 18 – 22 years old (school group) / 50% men, 50% women / 3 socio-economic levels / employed, unemployed

3 people with risk experience with clear negative consequences, such as

Alcohol or drug abuse

Road accidents

## Violence

This approach suggested that the group interviews should come first and the individual interviews afterwards.

### 3.2 THE GREEK STUDY METHODOLOGY – GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Greek participation to the project was designed to have a more anthropological perspective. Its approach is qualitative and ethnographic with an effort to include participant observation. Therefore, despite the fact that the project methodology required group and individual interviews, the Greek study has also included a description of «ethnographic places» (field sites), that is, communities, neighborhoods, campuses and cities, where the young people being interviewed, live. The field sites studied are the area of Gazi in Athens, the area of Korydalos in Athens, Panteion University campus in Athens, and the University campus in the city of Florina, northern Greece. The group with «risky» behaviour came from the wider city of Athens.

The age groups were formulated according to the general guidelines of the project methodology and included 4 persons in the age category 14 – 17, and 17 persons in the age category 18 – 22. An effort was made to select different field sites in order to fulfil the criteria agreed in the general methodology of the study (socio-economic level, student – non student identity, employed – unemployed status). In addition, two extra criteria were included, namely the ethnic background of the populations studied and the rural – urban (center – periphery) variable. These extra criteria were chosen in order for the groups to represent different socio-cultural settings where «risk» may be perceived differently.

None of the age groups was representative. The sampling issue was not a question, given that the methodology chosen was strictly qualitative (i.e. ethnographic).



The main tools used in the study were the following:

participant observation which preceded the interviews

interviews with young people

in depth interviews (limited number of informants)

collection of socio-demographic, cultural and historical data on each of the field sites

in depth discussions with key informants in each field site.

Young people were interviewed both in groups and personally. Group interviews always preceded the personal discussions. The open ended set of issues put forward in the individual discussions is described below.

### 3.3 KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED IN THE PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Personal interviews constituted the last stage of the research project and followed the discussions and contacts which the researcher had with the peer group and other people in the fieldwork site. All interviews are conducted in the fieldwork site, in places arranged according to the interviewee's convenience. The researchers avoided the use of tape recorders and all field notes are hand written. Detailed descriptions of each interview was prepared at a later stage and all records kept, were identified by pseudonyms.

Each interview includes a life history of the interviewee and a short description of his/her everyday schedule.

At the beginning of the interview the young person was asked to generally describe what s/he understands by the term

«risk». Then the interviewee is requested to explain what s/he considers as «risky» in his/her life. The interviewee is also asked to specifically explain what s/he perceives as «risky» in others' behaviour. Following this question, the interviewer we ask him/her to give a list of ten examples of risky behaviour, which after being described to be ranked, starting from the most risky and ending at the less risky one. The interviewee was given a paper to write down these ten examples.

Having established a background information on perceptions of risk, we ask the interviewee:

to recall and report on risky behaviours s/he may have experienced in his/her life,

to recall, describe and explain risky behaviours s/he may have experienced during the last 12 months and finally

(iii) to recall, describe and explain risky behaviours that any of his/her family members or friends may have experienced in their lives and/or more recently.

The next area to be investigated had to do with risky behaviours experienced by each young person during the last 12 months. More specifically, we asked the interviewee to develop on:

whether s/he knew in advance or not, that the behaviour s/he was engaged in entailed risk, and

how and why s/he decided to be engaged in a risky behaviour after all.

In case s/he was not aware in advance of the possible risks,

s/he was asked to recall and develop on:

when exactly (the actual moment) did s/he realized that s/he was involved in a risky incidence / situation / behaviour,

what were his/her reactions, were there any second thoughts about the incidents?

Were there any major changes in the young persons attitudes, beliefs, lifestyles and

feelings, following the risky experience.

The final topic which was brought up during the interview was the issues of whom the young person trusted enough to discuss his/her risky experience. More specifically, we were interested to know and therefore asked the young person to develop on:

who these persons were, and

what and when they discussed about the risky experience.

#### 4. *Groups and locations: ethnographic background*

##### 4.1 SELECTION OF GROUPS

During fieldwork five «natural» groups (that is people who were peers) were identified. A total of twenty one (21) young people who composed these groups were interviewed, both in groups and in person. The following table presents the groups according to age, gender and field site.

FIELD SITE	GENDER	AGE
GAZI, ATHENS	2 MALES	

2 FEMALES	14 – 17 YEARS OLD	
FLORINA UNIVER-		
SITY,		
FLORINA, NORT-		
HERN GREECE		
	4 FEMALES	18 – 22 YEARS OLD
PANTEION UNI-	2 MALES	
VERSITY, ATHENS		
1 FEMALE	18 – 22 YEARS OLD	
KORYDALOS,	2 MALES	
ATHENS		
2 FEMALES	18 – 22 YEARS OLD	
RISK EXPERIENCED	3 MALES	
GROUP, ATHENS		
2 FEMALES	18 – 22 YEARS OLD	

#### 4.2 LOCATIONS

The five field sites (locations or communities) selected are the following.

##### 4.2.1. A RISK COMMUNITY: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF GAZI, ATHENS

Gazi neighbourhood is located south of the center of Athens, about one and a half Km distance SW of Acropolis, and belongs to the municipality of Athens. The area was named after the gas supplement installations build in 1857 to provide the Greek capital with gas. The gas supplement installations operated in this area for 128 years. About four hundred workers lived with their families next to the complex of buildings used by the gas company. A number of other factories (such as the Kampas Wine Distillery) gradually moved in the area and attracted more workers. The area has some of the typical characteristics of a late nineteenth century labour class urban suburbs.

Since the late 1980s, all factories build in the area have seized to work. The gas company buildings have been reconstructed into an industrial park. However, the houses next to the old factories still remain. Gazi area is one of the very few neighborhoods of Athens which have retained the red tiled roof houses not allowing the construction of 5 – 7 floor build-

ings. This is the reason why recently the area has undergone a rapid transformation. A number of investment building societies as well as wealthy artists have recently started buying the nineteenth century built houses of the area. It is expected that in a few years time, the area will be occupied by bars, cafes and luxury «traditional» restaurants or Chinese take away canteens.

Since the early 1970s Muslims from Thrace, the Greek region next to the Greek - Turkish borders in the NE, have gradually started moving in Gazi due to economic reasons. These Muslims are Turkish speaking, Muslim Gypsies and very few Muslim Pomaks (Bulgarian speaking Muslims). Some of the community members argue that this limited migration movement was indirectly «encouraged» by some state authorities in order to minimize the presence of Muslim populations in the Greek - Turkish border area of Thrace. The excessive migration movement ceased in the late 1980s. About 12,000 Muslims live in Gazi today and they compose the clear majority of the neighbourhood. The 1985 PASOK government of A. Papandreou attempted to follow an assimilation policy targeting the Muslim community of Gazi. A number of Muslim men were employed as porters in some of the state owned banks of Greece. These men, who are considered to be the wealthier in the community, secured loans from the banks under favourable conditions and bought houses in Gazi. The rest of the community suffers from extreme unemployment.

The jobs available in the 1970s are not open any more, since the nearby factories moved outside the area. Some families returned to Thrace but the majority had no alternative but staying in Gazi. During the last decade, a great number of Muslim men have been employed in the construction of the new Athens underground. The recent completion of works in the subway forced 50% - 60% of the Gazi Muslim men into unemployment. High birth rates, unemployment, extreme poverty (some households lack electricity altogether or do not even have enough income to pay their electricity bills) and an

increased tendency to engage in illegal activities in order to survive, make up the present day community life.

In addition to the above mentioned conditions, the sensitive relationships between the Muslims and the remaining Christians Orthodox populations in the area should also be kept in mind. This tension was especially evident during periods, such as the Greek - Turkish crises in the Aegean in 1987 and in 1996 which proved very scary and frightening for the Muslim population in the area. The situation became even worse when a Greek extreme right wing nationalist group established an office in the area. During fieldwork, the Muslim population reported that at the same period (1996), groups of Greek left wing supporters organized «patrols» in the neighbourhood to protect them from the right wing extremists.

This tension between Muslims and Orthodox Christians should also be understood under the underlying competition of the two groups for the same resources (state employment, loans, better education for their children, etc.). From their part, the Orthodox Christian Greeks living in the area complain that Muslims buy houses based on favourable loans from the banks. There is no doubt that the assimilation policy offered better job opportunities to the Muslims during the past decade. In 1997 the local primary school was turned into a multicultural school. The school has 18 teachers and 159 pupils. The curriculum of the school changed towards a more multicultural perspective based on a programme developed by Athens University. It is likely that from the next academic year onwards, Turkish language courses will also be introduced in the school. The school staff members and the head master are the most popular persons among the Muslim community. However, the Orthodox Christian population of the area complains that the multicultural school focuses more on the needs of the Muslims and disregards the needs of Orthodox Christian children while Muslims argue that the high school teachers discriminate their children. A very small percentage of boys graduates from the high school and a very limited

number of girls continue their high school education.

Two local Muslim organizations exist in Gazi. The most popular one is considered to be «pro-Greek» while the other one is considered to support Turkish nationalism. Both societies are actively engaged in an attempt to attract the attention of Greek politicians and Greek political parties in order to find a solution to their problems. The local leader of the «pro-Greek» oriented society has been an MP candidate for the ruling party (PASOK) and because of this some accuse him of having established patron - client relations with specific MPs.

Community life is clearly gender segregated. Young Muslim women are expected to get married before the age of 16 - 17 years old. Some marriages are arranged and in some cases families travel to Thrace in order to find a spouse for their children. Especially during summer months, the majority of Muslims travel to Thrace to meet relatives and friends. Young people socialize in various places all over Athens, while the most popular place inside Gazi is the Youth Club, run by the Municipality of Athens, which is usually full with teenagers playing games, getting Greek and Turkish dance lessons and listening to music.

All the above, make both Muslims and Orthodox Christians in Gazi not optimistic for their future. The area is depopulated and investment building societies have started buying the nineteenth century houses. They can not see any serious attempt by the state to solve their serious problems. Some argue that there is no other alternative but to move back to Thrace or in other places in Attica. Others have decided to struggle in order to keep the community alive.

#### 4.2.2 TIME AND PLACE IN THE FLORINA REGION: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

The prefecture of Florina, which occupies 1,924 Km<sup>2</sup>, is among the less populated and predominately rural areas of

Greece. Its population does not exceed 50,000 people.<sup>3</sup> The area shares borders with Albania to the East and with the f.Y. Republic of Macedonia to the North. It is considered to be among the most provincial peripheries of Greece and this is well illustrated in the economic and social infrastructure of the region. Similarly to the rest of NW Greece, this is a high-land region with a lot of snow storms and low temperatures in the period from October to April. Although it is true that EU funding and the establishment of a new electric power station have recently contributed to the economic development of the area, Florina still remains one of the poorest prefectures of Greece. The villages of the area undergo significant changes in their economies. This region is among the very few places of Greece where various forms of alternative tourism develop rapidly.

Florina city has a population of about 15,000 people. All public services and the greatest part of trade activities of the area are concentrated in the city. This is an area which has suffered major disasters and experienced significant population movements during the Balkan Wars, World War I, World War II and the Greek Civil War (1946 - 1949). These events still have a great influence on the feeling of security of the local population. The developments of the last decade (war and break-up of former Yugoslavia, political changes and instability in Albania, war in Kosovo) have increased a sense of insecurity among the inhabitants of the area. A special «borders' police force» was recently established and its units were allocated on the Greek - Albanian frontiers. It has also been announced that the military forces in the area will increase in the near future.

<sup>3</sup> According to the 17 March 1991 national census, the prefecture of Florina has a population of 53,147 persons. About one third of this population lives at the city of Florina. National census results in Greece tend to overestimate the number of the real population living in rural areas. This is due to the strategy of many persons, imposed by political initiatives, to return to rural areas during the days of national census.



Everyday life of the city is strongly based on networks of a «face to face» society reproduced in time and space. For example, the city has an exceptionally lively intellectual and cultural life although this is only partly related to the presence of the University Campus. There are two major local cultural organizations, which regularly publish their own periodicals. There are also exist a number of other cultural institutions such as, for example, the Modern Art Museum. The Orthodox Church of Florina is involved in many aspects of social policy issues of this rural society. The power of the previous very well known local bishop and the network of charity organizations he has established during the last thirty-five years is impressive and affects almost all aspects of life.

A significant proportion of the city's population (about 15%) is composed by students who study at the local Technical School (T.E.I.)<sup>4</sup> and the three Departments of the University of Salonika located in the city. The establishment of a small campus with three Departments in Florina during the '80s, is mainly related with an attempt to contribute to the development of the local economy. Students of the three University Departments (Department of Pre-school Education, Department of Primary Education, Department of Balkan Studies) are mostly women<sup>5</sup> while the student population of the T.E.I. is composed by both men and women in almost equal numbers.

About half of the student population come from Northern Greece while the rest is coming from all over Greece and Cyprus. The student community does not have strong links with the city. A small number of religious students build up rela-

<sup>4</sup> The T.E.I. are higher education technical schools. These institutions are similar to the UK Polytechnics of the '70s and '80s.

<sup>5</sup> This is mainly due to the Education Departments (which as a rule attract more women) and since the third more recent one (Balkan Studies) has more male than female students.

tions with the local Church and religious organizations. Students usually live in flats they rent or in rooms provided in one hotel which functions as a Students Residence Hall. They socialize inside the Campus, in their flats or rooms and in a limited number of 3 - 4 bars around the center of Florina. Bars are usually open from 8:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. during weekdays and until early morning during Fridays and Saturdays. These bars serve drinks, play loud music and their customers are almost exclusively students. Most locals frequent in their own bars. The majority of students who study in the city are disappointed because they failed to get a position in a more well established University Department in one of the major cities of Greece (Athens, Salonica, Patras), therefore their entrance through the National Exams at the University at Florina is considered as failure.

#### 4.2.3. PANTEION UNIVERSITY: THE ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences is one of the five Universities located in Athens. The University was established in 1927 as a School of Political Sciences and accepted its first undergraduate students in 1930. Panteion currently has about eight thousand students in nine Departments: the Department of Sociology, Psychology, Social Policy and Social Anthropology, Mass Media and Communication, Political Science and History, International Relations and European Studies, Law, Public Administration and the Department of Economics and Development. The University campus is composed by three large buildings located in Kallithea, an area not far away from the center of Athens. The majority of everyday contacts of the academic community take place in these three buildings and in the two pedestrian roads.

Panteion University students belong to families of various social backgrounds. The only possible exemption are the students of the Mass Media and Communication Department who are widely considered to belong to upper middle class families. Although a significant proportion of the student population comes from outside Attica, the majority of the stu-

dents live in Athens. This fact influences student life, friendships and networks established. Students who grew up and studied in various high schools in Attica tend to continue socializing with friends from their schools or neighborhoods. Furthermore, the participation in student associations and societies has dramatically declined since the late '80s in Greece.

Based on an already established «Panteion student» identity, Panteion students usually feel highly of them selves. They claim that students at Panteion are more politically active than students of other Universities and that they are less attracted by the dominant youth life styles.

Regular bus services linking the University to the center and other areas of Athens allow students to live in areas far away from the University. However, it is true that most students who are not from Athens prefer to rent flats in a walking distance from the University. The area surrounding the University campus is occupied by a number of coffee places. These coffee places which are open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. give a special atmosphere to the area. The area is being rapidly transformed into a lively neighbourhood with stationary shops, photocopy centers, eating places and book stores.

#### 4.2.4 KORYDALOS: AN MUNICIPALITY IN ATHENS GREATER AREA

The area of Korydalos is located to the Southwest of Athens greater area, between Athens and Pireas (closer to the later) and has a population of about 110,000 persons. The city of Korydalos occupies an area of about 4 Km<sup>2</sup>. Until 1922 the area was part of a large estate owned by one of Athens oldest families. The need to organize settlements for the refugees of the 1922 Greek - Turkish compulsory exchange of populations, led to the development of the present day city. From 1922 to 1930 three thousands refugees from Asia Minor were settled in the area. The population of Korydalos was 9,690 persons in 1940, 15,125 persons in 1951, 47,335 persons in 1971 and 61,313 persons in 1981. Large communities of economic mi-

grants from the Aegean islands settled in the area in the 1950s and 1960s and gradually contributed to the development of Korydalos. The most distinctive characteristics of Korydalos is the existence of one of the country's largest state prisons in the area.

Korydalos is a rapidly developing municipality. A very large number of shops exist in all the main streets and Korydalos and turn it in the most important market in West Attica. In 1978 the ratio between shops and inhabitants was 76 inhabitants per shop and the current situation is 61 inhabitants per shop. Significant proportions of Korydalos' population are engaged in trade or work as officers and petty officers in the Navy. The majority of the inhabitants belong to middle class and have more than average incomes. Despite the high average income, the educational level of the population is among the lowest in Attica. For example, 10% of Korydalos' population has graduated from Higher Education institutions while the percentage in greater Athens area is 28%.

The state prison, which has offered jobs and has been a source of income to the local population, has expanded since the 1970s and today covers a large area of the municipality. The prison has expanded at the outskirts of Korydalos and today covers 13 hectares. The presence of the prison is not any more welcomed in Korydalos. Escapes and prisoners' uprisings cause anxiety to the locals. The large police forces located in the area attract tension and contribute to a feeling of constant insecurity of its inhabitants.

The area is also an entertainment center of the southwestern suburbs of Athens. Bars, cafes, restaurants and clubs attract a great number of young people from all over the Southwest Athens and Pareas. The wealth and development of the area as well as the existence of Athens prison, seem to be connected with the extended drug traffic that is said to take place in the four main squares of Korydalos and in the nearby streets. The local authorities of Korydalos in collaboration

with local authorities from nearby areas have established an information and day care center and have introduced programmes to prevent further development of drug traffic. However, the programme faces a number of administrative and financial difficulties and its future seems to be questionable. A number of young people we have talked with argued that the drug traffic is being encouraged by the unwillingness and / or inability of the local police force to solve the problem.

## *5. Content analysis: interviews and participant observation*

### 5.1 RISK CONCEPTUALIZATION

The conceptualization of risk was planned to be answered mainly by participant observation and it has been the most demanding part of the research process. Before engaging himself in participant observation, the researcher had to:

identify the groups (these had to be natural groupings)

the situations to be observed (natural settings, place, time)

meet with local informants and key persons in the community / locality, in order both, to select the groups and also to acquire other ethnographic data

establish trustful relations with the interviewees

be acquainted with the field site.

In other words, the researcher had to be «there», in the field, while young people live and experience everyday life and possibly talk about and respond to: the idea of «risk», «risky» behaviour or «risky» situations. The researcher is particularly interested in finding out the terminology (i.e. the ac-

tual words) young people use, in order to describe the above. These terms (words, phrases), may be known ones in the language spoken by the local community, may be «new» ones, or may be known terms with a different connotation.

An attempt was made to comprehend the conceptualization issue by:

participant observation of young people

information provided during the personal and group interviews

collecting ethnographic information on some socio-cultural and historical aspects of the locations studied so that the personal and group interviews and discussions could be evaluated in this context.

## 5.2 RISK PERCEPTION

The perception of risk was approached on the basis of the material provided by the personal and group interviews. As explained in the methodology, each interviewee was asked to give up to ten examples of risky behaviour, which s/he had to rank according to risk severity.

The outcome of this procedure showed that what young people consider to be the most «risky» behaviours are:

Use of drugs

Excessive alcohol drinking

Drinking and driving

Dangerous driving

Street violence

Sexual harassment

Driving without license

Hooliganism

Other risk behaviours included:

Sex without condoms

Unhealthy eating habits

Dangerous Sports

Attending football games between rival teams

Driving a motorbike without helmet

Competition in driving

Participation in criminal activities

Gambling

Participation in violent political activities

Night life

## Walking alone in remote places

### 5.3 «RISKY» BEHAVIOURS

As explained in the methodology, each interviewee was asked to report on any personal risk experience s/he may have had. The answers received from all the interviewees are briefly presented below:

Yael, female, 17 years old lives at Gazi. Risk experiences: experience death of a close relative due to excessive alcohol drinking, school absenteeism.

Serah, female, 17 years old lives at Gazi. Risk experiences: she got drunk and was brought home by others, participated in dangerous motorbike driving, school absenteeism, flying by airplane.

Mechmet, male, 17 years old lives at Gazi, having recently drop out from the High School. Risk experiences: dangerous motorbike driving and frequent traffic accidents, driving without a license, very frequent heavy drinking.

Vachtet, male 16 years old lives at Gazi, having recently drop out from the High School. Risk experiences: involvement in dangerous nightlife of various shorts and frequent excessive use of alcohol, driving without a license.

Jiota, female, 20 years old student at Florina. Risk experiences: sexual harassment, excessive use of alcohol, dangerous motorbike driving, dangerous nightlife, «life in the borders».

Kondylia, female, 20 years old student at Florina. Risk experiences: sexual harassment, «life in the borders».

Voula, female, 20 years old student at Florina. Risk experi-



ences: sexual harassment, dangerous nightlife, «life in the borders».

Katherina, female, 21 years old student at Florina. Risk experiences: dangerous nightlife, sexual harassment, «life in the borders».

Giorgos, male, 22 years old lives in Athens. Risk experiences: risk experience during military service (compulsory in Greece), street violence.

Katy, female, 19 years old lives in Athens. Risk experiences: illegally crossing state borders.

Evangelia, female, 20 years old lives in Athens. Risk experiences: driving while being drunk, traffic accidents.

Panagiotis, male, 21 years old lives in Athens. Risk experiences: dangerous car driving (speedy).

Elias, male, 20 years old lives in Athens, unemployed. Risk experiences: psychological problems.

Nickos, male, 22 years old lives in Athens, having recently drop out from the University. Risk experiences: systematic use of drugs, sexual contacts without condom, «addicted» to computer games, street violence.

Eleni, female, 21 years old student at Panteio. Risk experiences: use of drugs (hashish), dangerous motorbike driving, sex without condoms, street violence.

Jioannis, male, 23 years old student at Panteio. Risk experiences: use of drugs (hashish), dangerous motorbike driving,

dangerous sailing, street violence, hooliganism.

Manolis, male, 20 years old student at Panteio. Risk experiences: dangerous car driving, dangerous nightlife, street violence.

Stathis, male, 20 years old lives at Korydalos, unemployed. Risk experiences: dangerous motorbike driving, driving while being drunk, driving without license.

Maria, female, 18 years old lives at Korydalos. Risk experiences: dangerous nightlife and drinking alcohol, dangerous driving, walking alone during the night in a remote area.

Nikos, male, 21 years old lives at Korydalos, unemployed. Risk experiences: driving without a license, street violence, driving while being drunk.

Georgia, female, 20 years old lives at Korydalos, unemployed. Risk experiences: driving without a license, participated dangerous driving, participated in petty drug trade.

#### 5.4 RISK EVALUATION

The issue of risk evaluation was discussed during the interviews by asking young people to explain whether or not they knew in advance that the behaviour they were engaged in entailed risk.

The large majority of the cases reported that they did not know in advance that the behaviour they were engaged was risky. Some realized it during the actual incident and felt frightened while others recognized risk at a later stage. Depending on the severity of the risk episode, young people thought about it and took major decisions towards modifying

their attitudes, beliefs and behaviour.

Their evaluation was also influenced by other peer group members with whom they discussed the risky experience and shared their feelings.

## 6. *Final findings*

### 6.1 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

In the Greek study an attempt was made to correlate the concept of risk with the socio-cultural context of each location. For this reason, the specific five field sites were selected so that each one of them would provide a different group of young people as well as, possibly, a different approach to «risk».

Four locations / field sites were selected in Athens greater area, namely Gazi, Korydalos, Panteion University and the risk experienced group from various locations in the city of Athens. Each one of them has contributed differently to an expected socio-cultural variation.

First, the Gazi area allowed us to examine the ethno-cultural aspect in risk conceptualization and its influence on «risky» behaviour. The relatively recent settlement of Greek Muslims from Thrace at Gazi, along with the increasing tension related to identity politics in Greece (xenophobic and nationalistic attitudes) have transformed the already poor neighbourhood of Gazi into a highly «dangerous» area of constant tension. This is the reason why at the analysis above we call Gazi «a risk community».

Second, the municipality of Korydalos being at a stage of rapid socio-economic transformation provided an ethnographic example involving different kinds of «risk». The presence of the largest state prison of Greece and the well known

active youth gangs in the area, were considered factors which would make Korydalos a very interesting case study for the examination of «risk».

Third, Panteion University was selected as a field site so that university students would be included in our study. This was considered important given that Panteion University students have a history of active political involvement and a reputation of holding liberal attitudes towards behaviours widely considered as «risky».

Fourth, the risk experienced group was composed of young people with high social mobility and multicultural backgrounds, characteristics which reflect present day Athens.

Finally, the fifth field site, Florina, was selected due to its location near the Albanian borders and its semi-rural profile which turned it into a very interesting case study in comparison to the Athenian ones. The interviews conducted with students meant to offer a comparative basis to the Panteion students.

## 6.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

It has to be mentioned that all participants responded very well in the study and co-operated constructively. As it turned out, it was more difficult to recruit younger people in the study belonging to the age-group of 14 -18.

The main problem which came up during the research process was the time limitation especially as far as the ethnographic approach was concerned. The research team members felt that the time allowed to them to conduct the ethnographic study and the in depth interviews and discussions was extremely limited. This situation created some difficulties. It did not allow the researcher to be acquainted with the area well enough before starting interviewing young people, and it also

had an affect on the quality of the interviews. The interviews and discussions did not seem to have the «depth» which was desired and expected by the researcher. All researches felt that they did not have enough time in order to establish deep and trustworthy relationships with the interviewees and other informants.

### 6.3 MAIN RESULTS

The Greek study focuses more on the socio-cultural diagnosis of how young people perceive «risk» and less on the prevention of «risky» behaviour among young people, or on dealing with risk situations.

One of the major findings of the study is that risk conceptualization, perception, risk experience, behaviour and evaluation among young people are very much related to the socio-cultural environment. They are strongly influenced and in a way defined and controlled by it.

Furthermore, our study revealed the ambiguity expressed in the distinction between the terms «danger» and «risk» and concluded that:

Risk is embedded in young peoples' way of life.

It is a characteristic which allows them to be different from the adults.

It provides them the basis for criticizing the world and contest adult categories.

It is a structural component in their thinking (ideation) and communication with other young people.

The symbolism of risk is associated with: growing up,

making close friends, contradicting adults, contradicting the social system, gaining freedom, questioning family pressure, questioning institutional pressure (e.g. school).

It constitutes «rites of passage» to adulthood.

The older age individuals seemed to perceive and use the term «risk» in a more abstract way than the younger ones. The later can only express the meaning of «risk» through the use of concrete examples and actual behaviour.

The younger age group seem to use the term «risk» alternatively with the term «danger».

#### 6.4 CONSIDERATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON «YOUTH AND RISK»

As a result of the above findings, we suggest that more emphasis should be given to the ethnographic approach of «risk». This means that young people should be observed in their «natural» environments. Therefore, it is obvious that much more time should be allowed in order to establish a comprehensive approach.

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### 8. *Appendices – Risk profiles*

#### 8.1 PROFILE OF A RISK EXPERIENCED INTERVIEWEE. FIRST CASE: JIOANNIS

##### JIOANNIS LIFE HISTORY AND EVERYDAY SCHEDULE

Interview contacted by Dr. Georgios Agelopoulos at Pantheon University, Athens. The interview followed the group discussion with Jioannis, Manolis and Eleni. Jioannis welcomed this opportunity to discuss about «risk». He considers

this subject to be very important for the understanding of youth culture. Dr. Agelopoulos, Jioannis and Jioannis' girlfriend had established a good relationship since the previous academic year.

Jioannis is a 23 years old undergraduate student at Panteion University. He expects to graduate in June 2000. Both his parents and himself grew up in Athens. He has one younger brother aged 20 years old and a sister aged 15 years old. His brother studies Accounting and his sister is a High school student. Jioannis parents are of an upper middle class background. His father is a psychiatrist who recently received his Ph.D. His mother was a nurse but quitted her job some years ago. Jioannis has traveled extensively both inside Greece and in Europe alone or with his parents. The family has an outboard and sails to the Aegean islands every summer.

Jioannis graduated from the state High school of his neighbourhood. Until the age of 18 - 19 most of his peers were from the High school and the neighbourhood. It is obvious that these two categories of friends often coincided. From the age of 16 to 20, he actively followed the supporters group of one of Athens football teams. The football team of Egaleo belongs to the second national league and all its supporters come from the area of Egaleo, Athens where Jioannis grew up. Generally, Jioannis is a fan of sports, he is well fit and goes regularly to a gym. From the second year of his studies at Panteion (i.e. aged 20 years old) he gradually abandoned his previous peer group.

Jioannis works part time as a stage assistant in a theatre located close to Panteion University for the last five years. Although his parents provided with pocket money, he got this work to secure an extra income. This income was used to buy a motor bike. Part time working did not prevent him to be a good student and he plans to continue in postgraduate studies. For the last two years Jioannis has a girlfriend who is also an undergraduate student of Panteion University.

Jioannis still lives with his parental family. His weekdays schedule is usually organized around Panteion University. He follows some courses regularly and works in the evenings at the Theatre. He «goes out» during two or three weekdays and every Saturday. According to Jioannis, «going out» implies night entertainment and does not cover day meetings for coffee, lunch etc. His present day friendships mostly come from Panteion University although he still keeps some selective relationships with «boys from the hood».

#### THE INTERVIEW

##### (i) Conceptualizing and perceiving risk

It is easy for Jioannis to give a clear definition of risk: «every self-destructive behaviour, every behaviour which leads to deadlocks, which may provoke a «blackout»<sup>6</sup> is a risky behaviour». He explains that risk is always related with some kind of loss. «Talking of loss, he continues, does not only refer to death or being seriously and permanently injured. It may also refer to the loss of mental or psychological integrity». «For example, he said, someone may be alive but be lost because of drugs use...»

«Risk has to do with deadlocks, blackouts, with being absolute, stubborn and bull-headed» (he stressed the words *absolute, stubborn and bull-headed*). «The more we live at the edges, the more we become absolute and stubborn. Take for example the case of making love without the use of condoms or consider the case of smoking or think of night life experiences». Jioannis is a smoker but when he talks about «smoking» he refers to hashish consumption. He explains that he «smokes» almost once per month, although «smoking» increases during the summer months.

<sup>6</sup>Jioannis actually used the English word "blackout".

«Risk is located in the inability to understand the actual reality of the context of the behaviour. This is to say, that very often risk has to do with ignorance. They are crazy people who can kill you because you took what they consider to be their parking place. Someone has to be always alert to understand, to know the context of a behaviour».

When asked to provide and classify ten examples of risk, Jioannis comes up with the following list:

1. Violence
2. Driving under the influence of alcohol or/and drugs
3. Being engaged in illegal activities (such as getting in touch with someone in order to buy hashish)
  - 4(i). Hooliganism
  - 4(ii). Dangerous group of peers
  - 4(iii). Undesired pregnancy
  - 4(iv). Violent political activities (such as violent demonstrations, etc.)
  - 4(v). Ignorance in sailing
  - 4(vi). «the Night» (meaning night life)

Note: all behaviours from 4(i) to 4(vi) are classified as entailing the same degree of risk.

(ii) Risk experiences

Jioannis confesses that he has many experiences of risk in his life. He recalls three major incidents of street violence (fights), driving while being drunk, buying hashish, having participated in violent student demonstrations where clashes with police forces occurred, having been lost in the sea with his family outboard. When asked to describe some of these cases, he started from the three accidents he had during the last four years with his motor bike. Although none of these accidents was caused by him (i.e. he was not drunk), he considers these cases of being among the most risky and dangerous experiences of his life.

Jioannis continues by talking about his peers in the final years of the High school and his participation in a football team group of fans. It seems that some of his peers were used to «solve matters out» in violent ways. Jioannis recalls three specific cases when he was engaged in a fight. In one of these fights, he was having a coffee with two of his friends when a group of 15 other teenagers surrounded them demanding explanations over «a love story» (in Jioannis' terms this implies competition between two young men for the same woman). They managed to escape due to the ability of one of his friends in debating. However, for about half an hour they were kept with faces on the wall and asked to explain why one of them went after a girl. According to Jioannis, what he understood from this half-hour of verbal violence and the threat of immediate physical violence, was the ability of some persons to control and manipulate risk. In another case, Jioannis remembers being engaged in hooligan fights after the end of a football game between the team of Egaleo and another team from a nearby area of Athens.

Jioannis insists to talk about one summer incident. They were sailing together with his father and his younger sister in the Ionian Sea. They forgot to take the maps in the boat and they realized that a storm was coming. They decided to sail

towards an island they could see but it took them two hours to reach the land. Meanwhile, they storm reached them and they were lucky enough to escape the danger.

Jioannis has not experienced any risk during the last twelve months. «Now, I know the limits, he says...»

(iii) Risk experiences of family members and friends

He seems to be proud and also puzzled by the fact that his family «holds a tradition in risky behaviours». His patrilineal grandfather was a guerrilla during the W.W.II fighting the Nazis. Later on, his grandfather fought in the Greek Civil War (1946 - 1949) on the side of the left wing army E.L.A.S. He was captured by the royalist National Army and sentenced «three times to death» by a court Marshall. He escaped being executed when general amnesty was given to the political prisoners. As a student, his father participated in the students' 1973 Polytechnic uprising against the 1967 - 1974 dictatorship regime in Greece. He escaped being arrested when his mother took him at her house. Jioannis also recalls a number of incidents where some of his father's patients developed dangerous attitudes towards his father and other doctors. Regarding his sister, he claims that «my sister is too young to experience risk...»

When asked about risk experiences of friends and peers, Jioannis turns the discussion to his peers during the High School years. As already explained, they all had regular risk experiences. Jioannis knows a lot of people who still risk and some who gradually «turned their whole lives into a risky experience». He mentions previous friends that are now addicted to drugs, participate in petty crimes, or live dangerously «in the night». «I use to have bad influences... (silence)...but I turned them down...», he says.

(iv) Reactions to risk

«Whenever I experienced risk, Jioannis explains, I felt fear and stress, I was shacking all over my body. I came to the conclusion that risking is not my style, specially the violent risk experiences. I could not control myself. Sometimes I could not even feel afraid simply because I was not able to understand the danger involved in a situation. That is the worst: not being able to understand what is going on...» To clarify this point Jioannis recalls the case of being lost while sailing in the storm. He also mentions another incident when, in a summer excursion, some wild dogs attacked him and his friends. He remembers that he was not afraid and he did not reacted as his friends (they started running away). Later on, he understood that actually he did not realized the danger as quickly as his friends.

He admits that some times in the past he was not ignorant of possible dangers in a risk behaviour but he «... did not admit the dangers». «This attitude... (long silence) makes me feel better».

Jioannis always discusses his risks with those with whom he shared the experience. «This helps me to understand how others think», he argues. «I also discuss these experiences with my close friends and sometimes but not often, with my parents». He is reluctant to discuss every risk with his parents because he does not wish to make them feel worried about him.

At the end of the discussion, Jioannis stresses once more that «Now a days, I do not feel like taking any risks. Now, I know my limits».

## 8.2 PROFILE OF A RISK EXPERIENCED INTERVIEWEE. SECOND CASE: VOULA

### VOULA'S LIFE HISTORY AND EVERYDAY SCHEDULE

Interview contacted by Dr. Georgios Agelopoulos at Florina. The interview followed the group discussion with Voula, Jiota, Kondylia and Katherina. Dr. Agelopoulos knows this group of students since the last academic year. Last April they had dinner together with one of their lecturers at the Florina University. Dr Agelopoulos met them in late January at Florina to explain them about the research project. The girls welcome the invitation to talk about their risk experiences and were rather interested to see the similarities and differences between their experiences and the Panteion students experiences.

Voula is 20 years old and studies at the Florina Department of Pre-school Education of the University of Salonika. She grew up in Kalamata, a city with a population of about 70,000 people at the southeast area of mainland Greece. She is the only child of a middle class family and graduated from the state High school in her neighbourhood. Until the age of 18, most of her peers were from the High school and the neighbourhood. She keeps meeting these friends every summer and during the Christmas and Easter vacations.

Voula had never traveled to the North of Greece before her registration at the Florina Department of Pre-school Education. She wanted to study in an Education Department in one of the major Universities of the country but her results in the National Exams were not good enough to secure her a place in a University closer to her home city. She considers Florina a very provincial place and the experience of living 12 km from the borders is not pleasant for her and her family, which calls her every day by phone.

She lives alone in a studio flat which she rents at the out-



skirts of Florina. Most of her weekday time is spent with friends in the University or in the town. She is the most outgoing person from the group of students being interviewed at Florina. She goes out in specific bars and cafes, four to five nights per week. During the weekend, her evening entertainment continues until the morning hours. She travels to Kalamata every Christmas, Easter and in the summer holidays. She does not have a permanent boyfriend.

#### THE INTERVIEW

##### (i) Conceptualizing and perceiving risk

Voula argues that life in Florina does not leave much space for «risk». Voula, as well as the rest of the girls, consider Florina generally to be a safe place. The possible dangers due to the borders create a context for risk. Voula explains that the risk of living in the borders has a great influence on her feeling of insecurity. However, she admits that she has never encountered any kind of actual threat and therefore «risk» because of the border.

In order to conceptualize «risk» Voula, similarly to the rest of her friends, needs to talk about specific examples: drugs, alcohol, going out with strangers, dangerous driving, contacts with illegal migrants, long distance night travelling, life in the borders, activities that include the risk of being raped.

Voula stresses the issue of behaviour that includes the risk of being raped. She returned in this point numerous times during the discussion. She said that she had recent personal experiences. «During the night, every alley in Florina means «risk... I am so scared of being attacked by rapists...», she says.

When asked to provide and classify ten examples of risk, Voula comes up with the following list:

1. Any behaviour that includes the risk of being raped
2. Night life in places where there is a danger of being attacked for robbery
3. Life in the borders and related phenomena (presence of illegal migrants from Albania, presence of drug smugglers, etc.)
4. Drugs
5. Driving under the influence of alcohol or/and drugs
6. Dangerous driving
7. Long distance travelling during the night
8. Uncontrolled consumption of alcohol

(ii) Risk experiences

Voula confesses that «although Florina is generally a safe place» she has had many «risk» experiences during the last two years since she came as a student at Florina. She recalls a number of incidents of sexual harassment. In one case, she was returning home alone late in the night after a party. Three young men in a car took after her for about 15 - 20 minutes. She escaped because she managed to follow specific streets and alleys, which allowed her to have at least two meters distance from the car.

In another case she had a most immediate experience of risk. Voula refers to an incident that Jiota has also talked about in her interview. Voula is more descriptive and offers

the details of the situation. They had gone out with Jiota in a bar almost outside Florina. They had never been there before. The bar was empty and the only other people inside were the barman and three of his friends. They were locals and easily understood that Voula and Jiota were students. They started teasing them and offered them some drinks. «Things were not going well, Voula explains. We wanted to pay and leave but the barman was not accepting any money... We felt so scared... We stayed there for almost half an hour and they (the young locals) were becoming more and more demanding. They wanted to dance with us. I knew one of the locals. One night, while I was returning at my flat, I met him in the street. He was obviously drunk and started barking like a dog!» Voula explains that they managed to escape from the barman and his friends when a numerous group of other students came in the bar. They joined the students, explained the situation to them and they left the place all together. «We were not careful enough... both Jiota and myself did not realized the risk in advance...»

### (iii) Risk experiences of family members and friends

According to Voula, her parents are the kind of people who avoid risk. She thinks that it is very unlikely that her parents ever had a serious risk experience but she also admits that this issue has not been discussed in the family. However, she has close friends who... (long silence)... «had serious and unpleasant risk experiences during night entertainment». When asked to clarify what she means by serious and unpleasant risk experiences, she makes clear that «it is other people's stories, we should not discuss them». «Anyway, she continues, I refer to something bad...»

### (iv) Reactions to risk

Voula once more turns the discussion to the harassment incidents. She argues that she was not aware in advance of the

possible risks. She realized the risks during the incidents. «I felt afraid, terrified, I became totally alert!», she explains.

She discussed all these incidents with her close friends. She also discussed them with her parents when she went back home to Kalamata. «I do not wish to discuss these things in the phone with my parents, she says. They will be terrified. I prefer to tell them what happened in a face to face communication».

These risk experiences forced Voula to clearly change her strategy towards nightlife. She bought a mobile phone and she always keeps it in her bag. She never goes out alone and friends always accompany her. «A friends company», according to Voula refers to *a group of at least three persons* (she stresses the number three). Sometimes she prefers to sleep in one of her friend's room at the University Residence Hall instead of walking back home alone during the night.

### 8.3 PROFILE OF A RISK EXPERIENCED INTERVIEWEE. THIRD CASE: SERAH

#### SERAH 'S LIFE HISTORY AND EVERYDAY SCHEDULE

Interview contacted by Mr Michalis Petrou, Ph.D. student at the Department of Social Policy and Social Anthropology, Panteion University, Athens. The discussion took place at the Cultural Center of the Gazi area and it followed the group discussion with the rest of the teenagers at Gazi. Serah enjoys to talk about herself and the discussion lasted for about two hours.

Serah is the twin sister of Yael, aged 16 years old. Their father is a prominent figure among the Gazi Muslims and the chairman of one of the two Muslim societies of the area. The family migrated from Thrace to Gazi when the two sisters were 9 years old. Serah's family is considered by other Muslims at Gazi of being «a progressive Muslim family». This is

evident by the fact that Matchithe and Yael are the only Muslim girls from the whole area of Gazi who study at the final two years of the High School. Most of the girls of her age among the Muslims of Gazi are married and start a family. Serah is a good student although she has faced serious problems in the Greek language courses. Most of her peers are from the High school and the neighbourhood. She meets these friends at home, at the Cultural Center of Gazi and at the school. Every summer the family visits relatives and friends in Thrace and Serah has a chance to meet friends she was close to as a child.

Matchithe wants to study at the Police Academy in order to join the special police forces. She intends to take advantage of a special positive discrimination law which establishes favourable entrance requirements to Higher Education Institutions for all non-native Greek speakers living in Greece.

#### THE INTERVIEW

##### (i) Conceptualizing and perceiving risk

In order to conceptualize «risk» Serah needs to give specific examples. Drug use and drug trade «are the most dangerous thing in life», according to Serah. «Drugs are dangerous not only for those who use them but also for those who are influenced by such kind of behaviours», she explains. She does not accept a distinction between «soft» and «hard» drugs and argues that someone who is emotionally sensitive and uses «soft» drugs such as hashish may, in a difficult situation, find drugs as a solution. This may lead him to «hard» drugs.

Contacts with criminals is also a risk experience according to Serah. When asked to clarify this point, she mentions the case of the special police forces who have an everyday contact with criminals.

«Some kind of sports may also imply or be associated with danger», Serah argues. Serah does not distinguish between danger and risk and uses both words alternatively. Talking of dangerous sports, Serah gives examples of Bungee Jumping from a bridge or a high residential building. However, she confesses that she would like to try once a very dangerous sport in order «to control her fear and live the experience of failing from the air». Driving fast with a motorbike is something that Serah has experienced and considers risky. However, she considers this as something different from «dangerous sports».

Finally, Serah considers flying (by airplane) to be a «very dangerous thing». She only took one flight from Athens to Alexandroupolis, Thrace. Although she knew in advance that she was going to feel scared, she took the flight in «an attempt to control her fear».

Having given the above mentioned examples of risky/dangerous behaviour, Serah argues that there are also more personal kinds of risks. «Under certain circumstances, I felt frightened of being emotionally stressed». To clarify this point, Serah explains that she is frightened of causing harm to her self due to the failure of a love affair.

When asked to provide and classify ten examples of risk, Serah comes up with the following list:

Use of drugs

High speed driving

Flying with airplane

Emotional stress

## Getting drunk

Peers who live dangerously and may influence someone's progress in her studies

### (ii) Risk experiences

Serah had an immediate experience of risk when she had to fly to Alexandroupolis, four years ago (see above). Although she was accompanied by her family, she could not forget the incident.

The most recent risk experiences she has had during the last 12 months, are related to alcohol consumption and school absenteeism («going for coffee instead of going to the High school»). The case of alcohol consumption seems extraordinary given the prohibition of alcohol consumption among Muslims. It seems that Serah was not well aware of the consequences of drinking alcohol and got easily drunk. She had to be accompanied at her house and she felt humiliated by the explanations she was forced to give to her father. Her father understood her ignorance on alcohol consumption and advised her to avoid drinking.

During the current academic year Serah «went for coffee» instead of going to the High school «2 - 3 times». She considers these experiences as rather dangerous for a number of reasons. First, she missed some courses and she is worried that this will have future consequences. Second, she ran away with a group of friends who were driving powerful motorbikes. They drove far beyond the speed limits and «went for a coffee» away from the school. Serah explains that she felt «a sense of freedom on the motorbike» but she was well aware of the possible risks and dangers.

(iii) Risk experiences of family members and friends

People from her «family environment» (i.e. extended family) and some friends have been involved in risk behaviours. Serah recalls one incident when a family member got drunk in a family feast and had a heart attack.

Quite a few of Serah's friends use drugs and drive dangerously. Such activities, as well as heavy drinking, always take place during night entertainment.

(iv) Reactions to risk

Serah has had a mixture of feelings every time she experienced risk. When she got drunk she felt shame and was humiliated in front of her family and specially in front of her father. When she was with her friends driving the motorbikes, she felt «a sense of freedom» accompanied by a strong feeling of attraction for the motorbike. In the case of the airplane flight, she knew in advance that she would feel scared but during the flight she was «both frightened and exited by fear». «There was a kind of acceptance of fear, she says».



*1. Definition of risk among the spanish youth*

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Any study dealing with the consumption of alcohol by young people should be based on the learning of their main characteristics, among which the knowledge of their attitudes and behaviors, especially those including risk, as well as how they live the emotion of risk-taking. This knowledge can be useful also to prevent behaviors which can result into health damage.

It is not easy to identify those who are in a particular moment of their life in situations of risk and, at the same time carry on risky behaviors. As far as young people and their origins are concerned we can refer to Wilson and Nagoshi's findings (1998) about individuals with direct relatives with certain risk of alcoholism, positive family history. These boys could present characteristic of personality (neuroticism, dysfunctions of adaptation, decrease of the socialization, inability to take personal responsibilities in front of the problems) that could predispose them to consume alcohol in a risky way.

In the classification of the types of alcoholics, Cloninger et

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish research group was formed by: Dr. Miguel Angel Torres, Mrs Consuelo Ricart, Ms. Montserrat Rebolida, Ms. Raquel Valdés.

al (1988) informed about the association between the Type 2 and the seeking of strong and new sensations, the low perception of risk involved in what they are carrying out and scarce identification of the risk of dependence. The group with the highest number of people with altered features of personality, presented a percentage of risk of alcoholism of 75%. For this it was advised that the health professionals and researchers thought in terms of risk probability or of high and low risk. Summarizing: the Type 1 and Type 2 of the alcoholics differed from the sensation seekers in personality dimension (high level = impulsive, explorers), avoidance of damage (low = not inhibited, unworried), the dependence regarded as a reward (low = independent, socially isolated).

Regarding the factors that can turn risk behaviors into a future alcoholism, it is necessary to study those behaviors in the adolescence that can appear close to this kind of consumptions, especially during the development process. Zucker and Fitzgerald (1991) determined what factors develop in adolescence: 1. In the adolescents the antisocial behavior and the aggressiveness are linked to excessive consumption of alcohol. 2. Difficulties in getting success in adolescence was frequently detected in fellows that later on became alcoholics and who presented low results at school, lower profit in the secondary education, school skipping. 3. The boys that have ended being alcoholics had interpersonal deficits which diminished their relations with the others, they are less dependent, less considered, presented a lower acceptance of their independence, an early abandonment of their homes, more indifference towards their parents and brothers/sisters, as the adolescents and with more easiness to pass to the action and to develop risky behaviours.

## 2. *Risk taking behaviors*

### 2.1. DEFINITION OF THE METHODOLOGY PROPOSED IN THE MEETING OF PARIS. COMMON ASPECTS IN THE 6 COUNTRIES

The most important objective is the need to work with a comparable model that should be applicable in anyone of the 6 countries that participate in the project. For this proposal, all the participants will have some material, so that when they meet, they already have a more precise idea of which the best way of dealing with the matter.

One of the crucial points is the use and the configuration of a final product. Finally the agreement was that the first step should be the development of a pilot study, also trying of picking up a wide variety of personal situations. It is indispensable to carry out a good pilot study to have the information for a later qualitative analysis.

It was suggested that the focus group should include some youths that had already experienced situations of risk in order to know the ways and steps toward the decisions of taking their risk behaviors: Do they know or do they understand toward where they go when they run a risk? If it is yes, Why do they decide to take the risk or to act adventurously? A descriptive approach can help people to chose to know the threshold of its own risks, and the factors that can influence it (internal, external, psychological, biological). Risk is considered physiologic among youths, it belongs to the condition of being young and it is not pathological. The idea was launched because this work could become a tool of quick and periodic monitoring of the tendencies and the changes with a relevant report every three years.

It was also stressed the need of keeping in mind also the cultural aspects and not only the cognitive ones. This could happen through an ethnographic approach such as the participated observation of the same group during a given period

that would allow to understand the way which the youths express themselves and behave in relationships with the others. It was also decided to start a review of what was done in this field.

What should be analyzed as risk knowledge/conceptualization, perception, evaluation and behaviours? It should be understood that the risk is a part of being young. The difficulty should be pointed out of interviewing adolescents that decide not to talk with the interviewer. The final proposal is to analyze groups of 8-10 people (focus groups) and to have also individual interviews to the same participants. It was decided to reduce the time of interviews to two hours maximum. The remaining time can be used for individual interviews.

The group should be stimulated, animated, as well as provoked with questions, slides, pictures, movies and presentations of theoretical or personal histories to analyze together in group the topic risk. The stimuli should be carefully selected to cover a wide area.

The final proposal is the following:

2 groups of normal youths and 3 youths that presented experiences of risk.

Age range 14-22 years divided in two groups

8 people between 14 and 17 years (school group) (50% boys and 50% girls) of 3 socio-economic levels (students, medium class and lower class)

8 people between 18 and 22 years (50% boys and 50% girls) of three different socio-economic levels, employees and

unemployed.

3 people with experiences of risk with clear negative consequences, such as,

abuse of alcohol or drugs

road accidents

violence

The approach will include:

the two groups interviewed first

the individuals interviewed later

Contents of the pilot study

SOCIAL PRESSURE  
PERSONALITY  
CULTURAL FACTORS  
SOCIAL MODELS      CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE RISK  
PERCEPTION OF THE RISK  
EVALUATION OF THE RISK  
RISKY BEHAVIOURS      SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION  
EXPERIENCE OF RISK  
AREA OF RISK  
CONTEXT

We should try to obtain a common history as a tool that should be presented at the end of the focus groups in a neutral way. The word risk should act as a stimulus to the group at the beginning. The groups should develop a series of ideas, free associations or other techniques, but the histories will

have to be different as the three groups are.

It should be presented in the following way:

1. Methodology

2. Risk

2.1. Conceptualization

2.2. Perceptions

2.3. Evaluation

2.4. Risky behaviour

3. Conclusions and appendix and 3 profiles of interviewees who experienced risk. Group discussion and the tools used.

3. *Focus groups operative and methodological aspects*

3.1 RECEPTION AND PRESENTATION

Presentation of the objectives and modalities of the meetings.

Presentation of each participant to the group and analysis of the expectations of the meetings.

Collection of social data, as well as each participant's personal history.

### 3.2 OBJECTIVES

Constitution of the group as *Working Group*.

### 3.3. TOOLS

Personal card with the personal information

## 4. *Approaching of the reason of the meeting. the representation of the risk.*

Collection, by means of associations of ideas, of the image of the risk, firstly at individual level, later on in group (individual work and group work).

Individual redefinition of the image formed in the previous sessions.

### 4.1. OBJECTIVES

Observation of the different meanings of the word «risk».

Comparison of the opinions of the participants individually, in order to evaluate the influence of the group on the individual points of view and level of autonomy.

### 4.2. TOOLS

Grill for the answers that have been collected in the three previous sessions.

## 5. *Phase: deepening in the word. the representation of people that carry out risky behaviours*

To design an ideal standard character and the contextuali-

zation of the scenarios (work in subgroups of 30 minutes)

Comparison of the choices, the participation focus and divergent elements (plenary discussion of 30 minutes).

Description of the psychological features of the characters designed previously (singular work of 20 minutes)

Group discussion in depth on the individual opinions.

#### 5.1 OBJECTIVES

To point out the representations of people that live risky and their environment.

To underline the distinctive elements of those who act adventurously, keeping in mind their external and interior aspects.

#### 5.2 TOOLS

To make a collage that represents a human figure in its environment.

Questionnaire to answer the open questions proposed by the organizer of the group.

### 6. *Phase: the personal experience. the perception of risk*

Description of a situation of risk experienced by the participants or by some people close to them.

Sharing the different situations, selection of the most significant story to be used in the working group and analysis of



the different factors involved.

Selecting the alternative strategies (actions, behaviours) able to modify the course of the events.

#### 6.1 OBJECTIVES

Focusing of the basic causes (static aspects) and motivations (dynamic aspects) of the situations analyzed.

To point out the perception of individual or collective factors, either the predisponents or the precipitating.

To underline the elections and priorities of the elements that have been more emergent.

To choose the modalities able to prevent the situations of risk.

#### 6.2. TOOLS

Individual card to describe an episode in function of «what, who, when, where and how»

### 7. *Phase: conclusions and ending*

Short final summary of the experience lived with the group.

#### 7.1. OBJECTIVES

To provide the meeting with a new way of thinking from the group and the individual points of view about the risk.

To provide a space for the reflection to obtain a conclusion of the experience.

## 7.2. METHODOLOGY

We have followed a series of common aspects, just as it was indicated in the proposal of the meeting of Paris. Also, for each group that we investigate we have selected three groups with the asked characteristics, just as they were indicated. In each group we have followed these steps: Conceptualization of the risk, perception, evaluation, behaviors of risk. Later on we will be able to arrive to a series of conclusions that vary with regard to each one of the groups.

### *8. General information on the spanish groups*

To carry out the commended work, we decided to include people that worked previously with young of the certain characteristics. These people were the following:

Mrs Consuelo Ricart. Teacher of E.S.O. (Obligatory Secondary Education).

Ms. Montserrat Rebollida. Psychologist, working with groups of young people.

Ms. Raquel Valdés. Psychologist, working with people that are in treatment for problems of alcohol and drugs and carrying out programs of prevention especially on drugs addiction.

Dr. Miguel Angel Torres. Psychiatrist, working with people with problems of alcohol and drugs. Supervisor, reporter and analyst of the diverse investigated groups.

The group of 4 people met to discuss the methodology proposed by the Osservatorio, as well as to thoroughly study the proportionate definition of risk for the Dra. Carbone and collaborators. The working group also defined the groups to investigate, the ages, the characteristics and the centers and

places where to get the sample. We had two discussion meetings and agreed on the methods to use, how to investigate each group, keeping in mind that the meetings would be followed by the supervisor's intervention in each group and later on by the analysis of the data, the summary and the conclusions of each group to obtain a series of determinants of the word risk and of its meaning for each member of the groups.

Each group coordinator had the absolute freedom of work: they elaborated their own questionnaire and working systems, according to the approaches proposed initially thus obtaining the different concepts of risk.

It was not easy to obtain a clear concept of the word risk also because the interviewees always related it with concrete behaviors.

8.1. THE GROUP OF THOSE THAT EXPERIENCED RISK, WITH NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES (ABUSE OF ALCOHOL, ROAD ACCIDENTS, VIOLENT ACTIONS).

The work has consisted in carrying out structured interviews.

Three of those interviews were carried out in a school of a municipality near Valencia (Turís, 10.000 inhabitants). Two boys and a girl between 14 and 16 years were interviewed, as well as a boy and a girl of Torrent (65.000 inhabitants, in the boundaries of Valencia city, 750.000 inhabitants) between 18 and 22 years. According to the protocol of the work all of them had carried out risk behaviors or had taken a risk, such as abuse of alcohol or drugs, road accidents and violent behaviors. The last two youths are in treatment because of the consequences of some of those behaviours.

## *9. Information about the risk*

### 9.1. CONCEPTUALIZATION

The interviews to the youngest show a general perception of risk as danger, the attainment of behaviors the consequences of which are considered as negative. The other two interviewees show very similar perceptions of risk as in the other three cases: the risk is perceived as the setting in march of behaviours with negative consequences already known in advance.

The survey was composed of the following aspects:

Name (coded)

Age.

Sex.

Number of siblings and position among them.

Residence place.

Economic conditions.

Last concluded course of study.

What is risk in your opinion?

How do you believe that people perceive the risk? And how do you perceive it?

How would you evaluate the risk? In your opinion, up to

where risk gets to?.

Which are for you risky behaviors? Why?

Which were your experiences of risk? Fights, abuse of alcohol or drugs, road accidents, etc.

What did you risk by carrying out those behaviors? At the moment you carried out those behaviors, did you think of the consequences?.

Where did you carry out those behaviors? When? With whom were you? Was it any special hour of the day?.

Did anything especially influence you when you carried out those behaviors? Did you feel any type of pressure (people, atmosphere, etc.)?

What characteristics you believe that describe your personality?: Introverted/extroverted; sociable; cheerful; leader; «I let the others push me»; vulnerable; approval necessity, etc.

Do you believe that the cultural atmosphere in which you live influences you when carrying out those risky behaviors? Why? How is the environment you live in?

What people do you admire? Tell me some character to which you would like to look like. What do you admire most in that character? Why?

Language: simple, complex, fluid, interrupted, etc.

Cultural model: Between rural and urban, middle class or

low class

Communication type: aggressive, passive, assertive.

#### 10. *Risk perception*

The perception of the risk among the youngest interviewees seems to demonstrate that for each people this perception it is different. They don't define clearly which is their perception.

For the older interviewees also was very difficult to define risk perception. We could conclude that each fellow has a different perception of what a risky behaviour is.

##### 10.1. EVALUATION

If by evaluation we consider the thoughts youth had regarding their risky behaviour:

two of the youngest interviewees think of the consequences involved in carrying out their respective risky behaviors, but always after having performed them. The other interviewee of the group of the youngest thinks of the short term consequences and says he is ready to cope with them. He tries to muffle those consequences but he keeps on carrying out behaviours considered as risky.

The more aged interviewees refer that they think of the consequences. One of them explains that immediately before starting the behavior they try by all possible means to find and consider the positive consequences rather than the negative ones. This brings him to keep on with this behavior.

The other interviewee always thinks of the negative consequences he could face due to his risky behaviour and this brings him to refrain from starting the corresponding behav-

ior.

#### 10. 2. RISKY BEHAVIOR

The risky behaviours mainly reported in the interviews to the three younger interviewees are fights, rush or dangerous motorbike driving and abuse of alcohol and tobacco.

The risky behaviours carried out by the older interviewees are mainly high speed driving, drugs consumption, alcohol drinking.

#### 11. *Results of the group of people with experience of risk*

Mean age: 20 years.

Sex: 3 men, 2 women.

All they had two siblings, excepted one having 3.

Economic family condition: Middle class and Low-middle class.

Studies: courses from 8th of basic to 3rd of High School.

Definitions of risk:

«Risk is danger, the things that damage you»

«To do things that can come out bad and create problems»

«To do something dangerous, to do things beyond the limits»

How do you believe that people perceive risk? How do you perceive it?

«The older people have more responsibilities, therefore more risks to run, more things involving a risk»

«I perceive the risk when I don't say things that could come out bad. For example, going to some place and not telling my family where»

«Each one sees dangerous things in different acts»

«Everybody perceives the risk more or less in the same way, but there are more brave and daring people»

«I cannot imagine the world without drugs. I don't know what the others think, but I believe that they are «blind» to the risk»

How would you evaluate the risk? Where do you think risk can get to?

«Risk is danger, I don't know how it can be measured, I get up to where I believe I can»

«For me the risk is when you get close to the limit. Once you find your limit; you don't repeat the behavior»

«It arrives until you put in danger your personal, family, social life, etc.»

«The risk can arrive until the end, until losing everything, until falling to the lowest point of your life»



Which are for you the risky behaviors? Why?

«The drugs are dangerous, they harm you»

«To discuss with the professors, they can expel you»

«To fight, you can receive a blow and this harms you»

«Tobacco and alcohol, they are also dangerous»

«I don't consider as risky behaviors neither the fights nor the vehicles. I don't consider them dangerous»

«Alcohol and tobacco would be dangerous, but only if you abuse of them»

«The drugs are bad, they hook you and you cannot leave them and you pass it very bad, according to people's stories»

«The bulls can plunder you»

«Risky sports; you can fall; I would be unable to do it»

«Taking drugs and alcohol, because they have negative consequences for me»

«Risky sports because you can even lose your life»

«The drugs, because they put in danger your life, your family, everything in general.»

Which has been for you your experience of risk? fight,

abuse of alcohol or drugs, road accidents, etc.

«Abuse of alcohol, although I only do it in New Year's Eve, parties, etc...»

«Abuse of tobacco, I smoke every day, a package of tobacco, 20 cigarettes»

«Driving my motorbike at high speed, although for me it is not good»

«I had accidents. I run my motorbike into a van and had many falls»

«I use drugs and abuse of alcohol»

«The road accidents for excess of speed»

«I used drugs»

«Fights and rougns in bars because I were drunk»

What did risk by behaving that way? At the moment you performed them, did you think - a lot or a little - of the consequences?

«You take a risk the hide, what happens is that when you do it you don't think of the consequences, only when you fall, etc.»

«When I abuse of alcohol I run a risk if my mother sees me and quarrels with me»

«I think of the consequences, but always after carrying out the action»

«I always go with a group of friends to the cross circuit and we compete to see who dares more»

«We think of the consequences, for that reason we go prepared (helmets, kneecaps, mooring hawsers, etc.)»

«You think of the consequences, but you look for an excuse to carry out the action. That's the other face of the coin»

«I think of the consequences for my family, I think of what is costing me to behave well and what a risk takes a consumer»

Where did you carry out those behaviours? When? With whom were you? At what time of the day especially?

«I am always in the street, with my friends, when I have the motorbike because my parents have not punished me for school reasons»

«Always when I am with friends, on Saturday nights, at parties. Also when we join in friends' house when they are alone»

«In the cross circuit, although also in the street, with friends, in the evening when we leave the school»

«When I was alone it was alcohol consumption. When I was with people, the consumption of drugs and when I was alone it was the speed»

«When people speak about drugs I feel desire for it. There-

fore I try to avoid this people and the situations in which drugs are the subject»

Did anything influence you especially when you carried out those behaviours? Did you feel any type of pressure (people, atmosphere, etc.)?

«I have two or three friends that also have motorbikes and they do it»

«The friends with whom I go are older than I and they smoke and drink»

«In the school I join people who smoke and drink litronas (liter of beer in Spanish)»

«I changed friends because they often were involved in fights»

«I have the motorbike since I joined a new group of friends»

«You look at everything in a different way according to the atmosphere in which you are»

«Speaking about drugs the atmosphere influences a lot, but I don't know exactly why. I feel nervous and that drives me to consume»

Which are the characteristics that in your opinion can better describe your personality? (introverted/extroverted, sociable, cheerful, leader, «I let myself being involved», vulnerable, approval necessity...)

«I am shy most of the times, although I am sociable. I have many friends. I sometimes let myself being involved, but I don't need the approval of anybody»

«I am open, sociable, I maintain relationships of equality, People can't easily influence me»

«I believe that I am cheerful, nice, sociable, extroverted»

«I am quite extroverted, I like to make me noticed, mainly when I do things well, I like them to be known»

«I let people influence me a lot. I am very sincere, very open, extroverted, I go beyond everything, I am very unworried»

Do you believe that the cultural atmosphere in which you live influences you when carrying out risky behaviours? How is the atmosphere you live in?

«When I do something I look for amusement. There are 5 or 6 friends of my age. We are always in a «dive» or in an old house abandoned where our parents don't know where we are, because they would not allow us to go. The Guardia Civil (Spanish Police) sometimes enters to see that we are doing»

«I believe that it doesn't influence me. We usually meet in the recreational centers, in the streets, near the cemetery, in the bar, in discos, in the of surroundings... with some more older friends with cars»

«I believe that where you live influences you. I cannot imagine how could it be or how I would act if I lived in another place and I joined other people»

«Yes, if already you are bad for yourself and you join bad people, you have problems with the family... everything leads you to behave like that»

«It influences, I cannot say whether a lot or a little, but it influences. Young people that leaves from a party and consume synthetic drugs. They try to avoid all this because they don't trust in themselves»

Which people do you admire?. Tell us some character to which you would like to look like. What do you admire most in that character? Why?

«I would like to resemble my cousin because he is a farmer and he has good time working. I like a lot working in the fields because it is a very calm work»

«I admire my parents, they give me everything. They work, they have money to give me whims. I would like to be like them, to have money and power to buy things, I am very capricious»

«I admire Alex Crivillé, motor world champion, he knows how to take a risk to the maximum, beyond which it is impossible, he knows where he can get to»

«To my father, because it is a very hard-working man, very tenacious. If he wants to do something he does it, he doesn't leave it down. My mother is very tolerant. My girlfriend was able to leave the drugs without the help of anybody, by her own means»

«To my sister and my brother-in-law, because they are healthy, they live very well and they have helped me a lot. I fell an «healthy envy for them»

All of them are very assertive and have always facilitated the communication

## 12. *Risky behaviours in the group of normalized older people*

### 12.1. METHODOLOGY

The used methodology was dynamic and participating in each of the phases.

In the *reception and presentation* phase, it was performed a dynamic game of introduction of each component of the group and the expectations about the meetings that were going to take place were evaluated, after having explained the general goals.

For this phase a short individual questionnaire was developed in order to collect the social and private data of the members of the group. It included the following areas:

Personal data (names, initials, date of birth, age, sex and civil state)

Studies/job (studies performed; if they worked at any time: past jobs and current job)

Current residence (with whom they live)

Family data (relationship, age, civil state, level of studies and profession)

Group of peers (number of people forming the group, their sex and leisure places).

In the phase of representation of the risk the group was

given material for writing the answers to what they regard as the image of risk. The answers were individual and afterwards they were put in common with the possibility of changing the answers given.

In the phase of the representation of those who carry out risky actions, they worked in two subgroups of four people each. They were given material to write down the conclusions regarding the prototype of people living adventurously. Then there was the selection by the group of each subgroup. To end this phase they individually worked out the description of the psychological features which then were discussed in group.

Regarding the phase of risk perception they were given material so that they individually described a situation of risk that they or some close person had lived, in function of the following questions:

What situation is it?

Who carries out it?

When does it happen?

Where does it happen, in what place?

How does it happen?

The different situations were shared and one of them was chosen to be worked on more thoroughly in group. Finally, they discussed in group about the factors that could modify the course of the events of the previous situation.

In the phase of conclusions and end, each participant of the group summarized shortly the contribution of this brief expe-



rience.

Material was elaborated with the individual and collective contributions of the youths gathered during each one of the different phases of the study.

For the following phases the groups were given references to the risk representation, representation of people who carry out risky activities and risk perceptions.

### *13. Risk*

#### 13.1. CONCEPTUALIZATION

The image that the youths of the group associate with risk is in relation with the following ones:

To put one's life in danger

Sex without contraceptives

To drive drunk

To enter in a cage of lions

To go in the wrong direction in the highway

To play with loaded guns without security

To go driving absent-minded

AIDS

Drugs

Alcohol

Bad companies that try to influence you

High speed driving

To experience unknown things

To go for a walk alone down the street in full night (for female)

Speed

Knives

Sports of risk: rafting, jumping from bridges... etc.

Amusement

Doubts

Danger

To take decisions

### 13.2. PERCEPTION

As for the profile of people who carry out risky activities, the following answers were obtained:

They don't think of the consequences of what they do

Young people, adolescents

Insecure, risky, easy to influence

Young people in the «awkward age» (puberty)

Fearsome, insecure, insolent

There is not an exact age

Resolved, daring people that like to discharge adrenaline and to discover new things

Impulsive, insecure

In the puberty, because they begin to experience new things

They are not afraid of anything, they don't stop to think

People that don't like to think twice what it can happen if they do something and that like to live the present. They only think of the sensation of the moment and not the consequences

Unconscious, speedy people

They need to run risks to amuse themselves and to pass it well

Imprudent, they like to experiment

Unhappy, they don't like life

Immature

Winning people, because if one doesn't take a risk he will always be the same and never wins

Open and positive people who think that any kind of success always involves taking a risk, because if you don't do anything nobody gives you anything

Regarding the experiences of risk the answers were the following ones:

To speculate in Stock Exchange (Bourse)

Driving the car absent-minded

To go too often alone (for girls)

To drive a car without license

To take a bath in a lake when drunk

To smoke marijuana or sniffing some line of cocaine

To go to a disco in the boundaries of the city after having had dinner and

drunk alcohol

To work in a mine.

### 13.3. EVALUATION

The situations perceived as risky were the following ones:

Commanded events (Christmas, events of the town, etc.)

Situations in which they drink or use drugs

When meeting friends

Parties, when leaving home

Free time situations

Using drugs, excessive drinking, driving drunk or under the effects of

narcotics, practising sex without protection

There are two situations: the voluntary ones and the fortuitous ones. The voluntary ones are when you take a risk on your own decision; the fortuitous ones happen without you looking for them.

Risky behaviour

The places that were perceived as risky, either lived by themselves or by some person close to them, are detectable in different contexts:

Areas of bars or discos

Lakes, sea or swimming pools

Highway

Solitary places, boundaries of the city

Mines and quarries

With respect to the factors that facilitate the risk situation taking place, the following ones were pointed out:

Not to calculate the consequences

Not to react on time

The shape of the person

The unawareness

Thinking only about passing the moment well

Imprudence

Low level of security

#### 13.4. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics of the group, we summarize them in the following charts:

AGE	NUMBER	%
18 YEARS	1	12,5
19 YEARS	4	50
20 YEARS	1	12,5

21 YEARS	2	25
22 YEARS	0	0
TOTAL	8	100

It is observed that the average age is 19,5, oscillating among the 18-21 years. The most represented are the 19 year olds.

SEX		
	Nº	%
MEN	4	50
WOMEN	4	50
TOTAL	8	100
STUDIES		
	Nº	%
PRIMARY	1	12,5
BASIC	4	50
HIGH SCHOOL	1	12,5
DIPLOMATURES	2	25
TOTAL	8	100

The average level of studies is the Basic General Education, while at the moment the survey was on two people were attending Medium schools (Managing Sciences and Tourism).

CURRENT WORK		
	Nº	%
EMPLOYEES	5	62,5
UNEMPLOYED	3	37,5
TOTAL	8	100

Most of the members of the working group was employed, mainly in two working fields: commerce and peons of factories of tiles. The other three people were students.

Two people of the group had never worked.

CURRENT RESIDENCE		
	Nº	%
PARENTS	7	87,5
COUPLE	1	12,5
TOTAL	8	100

Most of the interviewees, except one live with their parents.

STUDIES OF THE  
FAMILY OF ORIGIN

	FATHER	MOTHER		
PRIMARY	4	25%	6	75%
HIGH SCHOOL	1	12,5%	0	0
MEDIUM STUDIES	3	37,5%	2	25%

Data referring to the family economic level were gathered through the information they gave about their parents and sibling's level of studies and profession. All the relatives had got, at least, the certificate of Primary Studies.

Most of the parents were working, either the father or the mother.

#### GROUP OF PEERS AND PLACES OF LEISURE

	Nº	%
PUBS	7	87,5
DISCOS	4	50
COFFEE HOUSE	5	62,5
CINEMAS	7	87,5
POLISPORTIVES	2	25
PROMENADES-WALKING	1	12,5
OTHERS	1	12,5
TOTAL	8	100

It was also proved that most of the members of the group usually went out with a numerous group of friends, around 10 friends, oscillating between 8 and 35 people. The favourite leisure places are cinemas and pubs, followed by coffee houses and discos.

Questioned about what they regard as risk, most of them link it with the amusement (practice of certain sports, night exits, go to drink...) and with negative connotations, i.e. it supposes a danger for those to who are in that situation given that they doesn't calculate the consequences of their acts.

It is interesting to point out that males have the idea that risk doesn't have to be something negative, since it can in their opinion be useful to get advantages and take decisions that allow this person to grow and mature. They give the example



of a friend that plays in Bourse and, after several losses of money, he meditates and stops investing money.

The greatest risk is for them all that of falling in the world of alcohol, drugs, violence, sex without protection... etc. and it happens in the stage of adolescence that they locate between 13 and 15 years. They refer that it was at that age that they were more easy to be influenced by other people (group pressure). Also, they link it with impulsive people, easy to influence, who don't measure the consequences at half or long term, but only at short term: «they live the moment»

Regarding learning, they point out that many of their fears are learned. For example walking in the outer part of the town or the city all alone. They consider it as a risk because of the various aggressions and deaths that have been reported by the media. Through their own experiences or those of people close to them, they have also learned how to evaluate different situations of risk such as undesired pregnancies, legal problems of fights, alcoholism in family... etc.

They think that everybody has often to face situations of risk because they believe that it is not only the situation that produces danger, but rather the evaluation each person makes of it, although they had previously pointed out some situations that are quite common for all.

Among the different situations of risk that they described, one was selected to be worked upon more thoroughly. It was the story reported by one of the boys about the incitement to smoke marijuana or sniffing some line of cocaine by some friends of him. It was noticed that this happened in the weekends in the discos. His friends invited him to taste it because they said he looked «down» and it could be a good way of amusing. His reaction was aggressive, even to a physical aggression. The reaction of the rest of the group was studied by means of technique of role playing and the following things

were observed:

some openly declared that they didn't want to consume it;

others sustained that, in addition to not consuming it himself, he could also convince his friends to stop to do it by reasoning that it is not necessary to take substances to amuse oneself and pointing out the relevant negative consequences of this kind of those consumption (in relation with friends, family, studies, money...);

he could get away from those friends and look for other people to stay with.

In brief, they believe that risk is always outside, in the street and that, depending on the attitude that we take in front of it, the result will be one or another. They also refer that for many people risk is a way of life, their own philosophy and they respect them, although they also ask for the respect of their decisions.

As conclusion, it is worthy to point out the excellent collaboration of each one of the participants who thanked heartily for being asked their opinions to be taken into account when developing programs addressed to them.

#### *14. Appendix (collection of information)*

Here follows in the appendix the survey questionnaire worked out and applied by the working group and as far as the concepts of risk is concerned.

What do you associate with the word risk?

To go driving absent-minded;

AIDS 2 answers;

Drugs 4 answers;

Alcohol 4 answers;

Pills;

To go lost in the life;

Bad companies that try to influence you;

Speed 3 answers;

Amusement;

Doubts;

Danger;

Taking decisions;

Risk appears when performing an action that results in something you lose something else;

To put life in danger;

Unsafe sex;

To drive drunk;

To enter a cage of lions;

To drive in the wrong way in a highway,

To play with loaded guns without security;

To have an accident;

To have knives;

Guns;

Motorbikes;

To experiment with unknown things;

To go for a walk alone or to be alone in the middle of the night;

Going out with people that are unsuitable to you.

Would you add or would you change something of the previous question after listening what your partners said?

No 4 answers;

Sports of risk;

Use of drugs 2 answers;

Alcohol;

Unsafe sex 2 answers;

Describe your prototype of people that carry out risky activities.

Young people in the «awkward age (puberty)»;

Those who are in the puberty because they begin to experiment new things;

Those who need to run risks to have amusement and to feel good;

Risky people are winning people, because if one doesn't take a risk he will always be the same, he will never win anything;

Those who don't think of the consequences of their acts;

Young people, adolescents;

The unhappy people who don't give life its value;

People who don't like to think twice what can happen if they do something and who like to live the present, the moment and only think of the sensation of the moment and not in the consequences;

There is not an exact age. Resolved and daring people like to discharge adrenaline and discover new things.

In what situations do you think they carry out those risky activities?

In particular days, Christmas, town holidays, etc.;

When taking drugs, drinking too much, driving drunk or under the effects of narcotics, practising sex without protection...

When going to parties;

When meeting friends;

There are two situations: the voluntary ones and the fortuitous ones. The voluntary ones are when you take a risk on your own decision; the fortuitous ones happen without you looking for them.

In free time;

In signalled dates, parties...

Drinking or using drugs;

Specify the psychological characteristics of the people you described previously (how they are, how they think, their personality...)

Fearsome, insecure, insolent;

They are not afraid of anything, they don't stop to think;

Imprudent, they like experiencing;

Open and positive people. They think that in order to get to any success they always have to take a risk, because without doing anything nobody gives you anything;

Insecure, risky, easy to influence;

Immature;

Unconscious, speedy;

Impulsive, insecure;

Describe a situation that you consider of risk for you or for some person that you know, following these questions:

What situation is it?

To walk alone for too a long time;

Some boys decide to take a bath in a lake when drunk;

To smoke marijuana together or to sniff some line of cocaine;

To go to a disco in the boundaries of the city after dinner and to drink alcohol;

To speculate in Stock Exchange;

To work in a mine;

To drive car without license;

Going absent-minded driving;

Who does carry out it?

Me;

Adolescents and young of 18 to 22 years;

Two friends;

A group of friends who think the pubs in the city are insufficient to satiate their euphoria and they need something greater;

A friend;

The miners;

Me;

Me;

When does it happen?

When I want to think;

One weekend whenever in Summer;

In week-end;



In Friday or Saturday night;

Whenever have money;

Every day;

Any day of the week;

Any day;

Where does it happen, in what place?

It can be in my house or in any place of the town;

In a little lake, near town;

Discos;

In the areas of bars or discos;

At home, in the bank, Internet;

In the mines and quarries;

In the highway;

In the highway;

How does it happen?

I leave for the boundaries of the city all alone;

They enter in the water, begin to swim, they have diminished reflections and they drown;

«Take it, taste it, I see you're down, this will amuse you... I always finish by saying no and with tension and aggressiveness;

I don't measure the consequences;

Buying and selling values;

Working;

When not having as much experience with the car as other more qualified people or to have more experience;

Not reacting on time;

Regarding the previous situation, what factors do you believe made its happening easy? (the characteristics either of the person who performs the action or of the environment)

My form of being because I'm an independent person;

Their unconsciousness, and the fact that they went intoxicated and under the effect of narcotics and nobody was sober or lucid;

I only think of passing it well;

This person wants to multiply money but for achieving this he takes the risk of speculating in Stocking Market, putting himself in the possibility of remaining without anything. He

doesn't calculate the consequences;

The imprudence, the low security;

My audacity;

The misleads;

*15. Definitions of «risk taking behaviors»*

15.1. GROUP OF SCHOOL AGED YOUNGSTERS

SAMPLE. - A group of twelve youths between 15 and 16 years. Students attending the fourth course of the ESO (Compulsory Superior Education) following a program of curricular diversification in Alaquás (25.000 inhabitants) in the surroundings of Valencia city.

The participants were six girls and six boys and their socio-economic level was medium and low-medium.

The attendance to the sessions was irregular with an average of ten students for session and varying the presence of some of them.

1st session

1st phase: presentation

Report of personal and private life

2nd phase: presentation of risk (what does risk mean?)

«What is risk in your opinion?»

Visualization of images of a movie (*Histories of the Kronen* - a picture of the youth life in Spain). To express by means of association of ideas the different opinions of what risk taking behaviors are.

#### Results:

What is risk for you?. Individual answers.

Risk is something that can be dangerous and disturbing. As, for example: «to do something that your parents or tutors don't let you do without letting them know»

To do something bad or prohibited that can damage you or somebody else.

«To have unsafe sex»

To do or to carry out actions that involve some danger of death. To put in danger your life doing stupidities. To get drunk and to drive a car. To take drugs and to become an addict.

Risk is to do something the consequences of which you don't know

Risk is when you do something dangerous that can harm you.

Risk is something that can happen or put you in troubles. There are people who take a risk by driving a car maybe drunk so they run the risk of having an accident, also involv-

ing other people in their car. And you can also risk that your parents punish you and you escape from home.

It is when you find something exciting and you want to do something that you have hardly ever done.

It is to do something that you wouldn't dare to do. You like to do jumping from bridges (puenting in Spanish) and you don't dare and at the end you jump.

It is to do something that others can plunder you or to gamble something and to lose it. For example to walk for a scaffold without a rope or anything else, there is the risk of to fall and to kill you.

To put you in danger or to do something that can harm you.

To have an exciting or dangerous experience. To do something dangerous or daring.

Looking at a tattoo: «If you do this you can catch something such as AIDS «but now they make them with needles that are only for you, they put your name on them and some places they give you them so that you take them home. In this way if you want to repeat the tattoo you have only to take your needle and they use it to continue the work». I would to make me one»

### *Group work*

Information is exchanged and the different opinions are debated. The following opinion of the group is collected:

«To do something bad that shouldn't be done because it

can harm you and damage the others.

If you practice sex with your girlfriend, she can become pregnant, or take the AIDS...

To do something that you don't dare because you know it is bad.

It is something dangerous.

Although it doesn't always harm you, for example, to throw you with parachute or the firemen work.

It is something that makes your adrenaline going up, exciting»

*Redefinition of risk. Individual work.*

Of the ten participants of the session, four say that «risk is danger», two say that «it is danger and it is everything» and the rest don't redefine risk.

*Word associations*

RISK:-everything-danger-terror-door-horrible-blind-dog-fright-value-anger-cowardice-audacity-relaxing-exciting-adrenaline.

*2nd Session*

*3<sup>rd</sup> Phase: representation of people that carry out risky behaviours.*

Description of an «ideal standard» of a risky human charac-

ter and his environment.

Work out a «collage» that symbolizes the human figure at risk and his environment.

*Results:*

Work in subgroups.

Subgroup 1 give the following description: «These people run the risk of... some of dying drowned, others of being murdered, and another hunger. These people have a selfish character (they want to kill). And to people that are drowning those that are ashore they are also selfish because they don't help the one in the water». They choose the word dared to define the character of the figure of risk.

Subgroup 2 say that the image they developed have an aggressive, violent character, and doesn't think of the consequences he can cause the others. He loves risk, drives drunk and doesn't care about his dresses and his hair (he doesn't comb himself). He goes dirty, he doesn't care personal hygiene. A member of the group said that he was passive.

Subgroup 3 to the question «who is him?» answers that he is an alcoholic who has an high risk of falling in an ethylic coma. Answering the question «How is him?» They say he is aggressive when he drinks and he doesn't control what he does. When and where? In a bar and when he drinks.

*Comparison of the choices. Work in large group.*

The descriptions of the three subgroups are put in common and they comment each one of the collages. All seem to agree on the violent and aggressive character of this figure, in tex-

tual words «they are violent and aggressive», and on the consumption of alcohol as the starting element of these behaviors «he behave this way when he drinks»

As divergent elements were only detected the ways of managing aggressiveness through violent acts such as «a war» or «behave like a beast in a football match»

### *3rd Session*

Description of the psychological features of the characters described previously through open questions

Individual work.

### *Results:*

The answers are the following:

«He is somebody impatient that loses control very easily, He is restless and excitable. He adopts that behavior when he feels like»

«He is aggressive, he doesn't respect the norms and he acts this way when he goes to parties»

«He is aggressive, he loses control, he acts violently. He acts this way when he has his guns–weapons - (he refers to his collage).

«Referring to yesterday's movie. He is excitable, impatient and dominant; he does what he wants to do. He acts this way when is with his friends»



«He is aggressive and also impatient. He acts in a dominant way and with tension». Answering the question «When or under what circumstances he carries out that behavior?» he says: «When he gets bored or he doesn't have anything to do perhaps he drinks also in parties or in any place»

«He is not controlled, he gets easily excited and he doesn't respect the rules. He behaves risky when he drinks and becomes nervous»

«He is aggressive, he acts in a violent way when he drinks a lot»

«He loses control, he is unworried, doesn't respect the norms and is tense. He acts with aggressiveness. When? when he quarrels or he is in disagreement»

«He is incautious, he acts without using his head, he gives everything the same importance and behaves crazily. When? when he wants to detach himself from home or when he does something to amuse himself»

#### *4th Phase: risk perception*

Telling about an experience.

#### *Results:*

«One night in my town somebody wanted to attack me and I fight with both because otherwise I wouldn't leave alive. I became very nervous and, after I saw that they were not able to take anything I felt satisfied but they broke me one arm. I behaved this way because I lost my stirrups».

«I liked somebody, and we were a friend and I. It happened

three years ago in another town. Well, I felt a little nervous about my parents catching me because I told them that I left to the pool of my town and I left to other town with some friends. There were not consequences because my parents don't still know it»

«I left a town to a capital in bicycle without my parents knowing it. I wanted to have good time and I wanted to do it. I left with some friends, we got lost and we could not communicate with each other. I was afraid and was tense; at the end they caught me and quarrelled me»

«It was last year during the trip at the end of the course of study. I felt like going up to the attractions in a Thematic Park. I felt excited, adrenaline went up and I enjoyed it very much»

«I went two years ago to Eurodisney during the Holy Week. I went to the attractions. There was one that put you downward and went very quickly. I did it to get amused and I felt excitement and fear. I repeated it again»

«During the trip to a thematic park at the end of the course of study we went all friends together. We very much wanted to go because we had seen it in the TV and in reports, I did it for amusement; I felt excitement and fear».

«The anger brought me to behave this way because he deceived me with another person. I and two more people were implied. It was in summer in my town. I felt satisfaction and relief. It produced me pain. «Why»? «A friend of mine had a problem with his girlfriend and she deceived him with another boy. My friend is a little nervous, he went to look for the boy and he gave him a small beating. The boy left the girl and my friend went out with her again».

«Some friends will leave to Madrid after Fallas (Valencian fireworks) without their parents knowing it.

«A friend got drunk this weekend, and it was very bad. But his friends began to hitch him by telling him to hit someone and that if he didn't do it, it was because he didn't have balls (courage). So at the end he went to ask the boy his glasses and as the other refused to give them he beat him»

#### *4th session*

Choosing the strategies able to modify the course of the events.

Large group.

Looking at some videotape images.

Group discussion.

«Not to do the goat and to go carefully»

«Not to do superfluous things»

«To go with caution»

«Not to go around under the effects of alcohol»

«To think the things well before doing them»

«To respect the rules and norms»

«Not to drink a lot»

«To control your actions»:

«Not to make the kid»

«Not to try to shine before the friends»

«Not to abuse in consuming some substances»

«To control what you do, to think the things well before doing it, and to go carefully in the life»

«Not to do the things if you are not sure they can be well made»

«To have caution and to do things with knowledge and not lightly. Not to let you influence by evil tongues»

«To think things twice before acting, to be more sober when you take a decision»

Reflection:

They refuse to meditate.

## *16. Discussion among the groups*

### 16.1. CONCEPT AND SITUATIONS OF RISK

coincident aspects:

group with behaviors of risk:

Risk is danger, the things that damage you

«To do things that can come out bad and create problems to you»

«To do something dangerous. To act in a limitless way»

Use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs (as the most frequent aspects).

To be involved in fights.

Risky sports.

Rush driving.

Group of normalized more aged youths:

To put life in danger

To drive intoxicated.

Drugs, alcohol.

Rush driving, speed.

Risky sports.

Use of knives and fights.

Group of school youngsters

Risk is something that can be disturbing or dangerous.

To do something bad or that it should not be made or that can harm you or someone else.

To carry out acts that can put the others in danger.

Risk is to carry out something that you don't know the consequences of.

To drive intoxicated.

To do something exciting.

To do something you wouldn't dare

To practice sports of risk.

To put yourself in danger by gambling on something and losing it

#### 16.2. EXPERIENCES OF RISK LIVED BY THEM OR SOME CLOSE PERSON

Group of those who experienced risks

Abuse of alcohol, tobacco, consumption of drugs.

Rush motorbikes driving.

Excess of speed.

Fights and quarrels due to being drunk.

Group of more aged normalized youths

To consume alcohol until the intoxication.

To drive car recklessly.

To smoke marijuana or to consume cocaine.

Group of young students

To get drunk.

To leave house without permission.

To be involved in fights.

To look for strong emotions in parks of attractions.

#### 16.3. PEOPLE THAT CARRY OUT RISKY BEHAVIOURS

Coincident aspects

Young people in the puberty.

Those who need to run risks to enjoy and to pass it well.

The winners who take a risk.

Those who don't think of the consequences.

The unhappy ones who don't estimate life.

The imprudent people who like to experiment.

The impulsive and insecure people.

The impatient ones.

The aggressive ones.

Those who drink a lot.

The incautious ones.

Those who are not controlled and get easily excited.

#### 16.4. SITUATIONS IN WHICH RISKY BEHAVIORS TAKE PLACE

In the holy feasts, holidays.

Situations in which they drink or use drugs.

When going out with friends, in the street.

In free time.

In areas of bars or discos.

In the highway.

Lonely places and boundaries of the city.



## *17. Conclusion*

The people interviewed are enough aware of what risk means to them, who are the youths that risk more, how they perceive the risk as an attitude and what behaviors lead to carry out acts in which danger is always present. Among the behaviors more perceived as dangerous we found consumption of alcohol and drugs, dangerous driving, unsafe sex, etc.

The situations where more frequently risky behaviors take place are detected in the holy feasts, the street, the bars and discos, the highway, leisure and free time, etc.

Finally the group of younger students settle down a series of rules allowing to avoid the complications linked to risky behaviours, resulting from their discussion in group.

They are also able to describe the youths who live more dangerously and perform actions bearing an high level of risk.

The final summary could be that in the youths we analyzed, the risk and the risky decisions or the risky behaviors are innate and part of them. This explains why, although there are levels of control, it is easy for them find themselves performing risky behaviors with unpredictable consequences.

## United Kingdom<sup>1</sup>

### *1. Introduction*

Adolescence is a time when personal identity is being formed and is a period of experimentation, seeking new sensations, and taking some risks. A variety of motives for experimenting with psychoactive substances such as alcohol and the lure of intoxication have been advanced including rebellion, sensation seeking, identifying with the adult, providing pleasure, satisfying curiosity, facilitating social bonding, attaining peer status, or as an escape/coping mechanism. From this perspective drinking is a functional behaviour. Surprisingly this perspective has often been overlooked in education, health promotion and other preventive measures.

Room 1999 has pointed out «that the prevention literature pays too little attention to the collective and symbolic aspects of drinking and intoxication». Drinking is often done in groups and is incidental alongside another social activity, dancing, partying, clubbing, sport, music etc. Many of the harms associated with drinking relate to the consequences of intoxication including large numbers of deaths and permanent disabilities in youths due to accidents or violence related to drinking. It has been estimated that amongst the global burden of disease and disability alcohol accounts for 5.1% of the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bruce Ritson, Alcohol Problems Clinic - Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Edinburgh.

life years prematurely lost and 15.6% of the burden of disability (years lived with disability) (Murray and Lopez 1996).

There have been a number of reviews of drinking amongst young people in UK and some of these are described briefly below. It is evident that the majority have reported survey data which outlines drinking habits, attitudes and experiences. Very few have examined the meaning and functional significance of drinking and intoxication or adopted a more qualitative approach to understanding the experience of young drinkers. If harm reduction strategies are to prove any more effective than they are at present then a better grasp of the significance and attraction of intoxication needs to be attained.

The relationship between alcohol, youthful deviance and disorderly behaviour has received a lot of attention in recent years, lager louts, alcopops, soccer hooliganism and alcohol as a prelude to illicit drugs have all been popular concerns within the media. It is therefore surprising that during recent decades there has been relatively little change in the overall per capita consumption of young people. This reflects the general stability in drinking amongst the British population, with the UK remaining in the middle order of European Community countries as far as alcohol consumption is concerned. Nonetheless youthful drinking is a common significant factor in teenage delinquency, accidents, unprotected sex and social and psychological harm. The typical evolution of drinking amongst young people is usually experienced first in the home under parental supervision in the early teens and then in the 14-17 years age group, alcohol use moves from the private to the public sphere and from the family to peer orientated drinking, often in licensed premises or before that in parks and in friends' houses. Alcohol use increases with age, Sutherland and Willner (1998) found that 30% of 11 year olds drank regularly rising to 83% at 16 years old (regular was defined as drinking at least once a week for a period of more than three months). Although there is little difference in patterns of

drinking between girls and boys, young women's frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption often peaks around the age of 16. Young men's consumption continues to rise and peaks later in the 18s and early 20s.

Alcohol appears to be a gateway through to various other risk activities at this age, such as smoking, sexual intercourse and the use of illicit drugs. There is also some evidence that earlier drinking was associated with a greater tendency to misuse alcohol and engage in deviant behaviour than amongst those who started drinking at a later age, they were also more likely to become excessive drinkers later in life (Foxcroft et al 1995, Bagnall 1988) In a study of drinking in a sample of Scottish school children aged 12-15, 20% reported having drunk in the past week, the average amount drunk was 8.7 units and 19% had drunk less than 2 units. However, at the other end of the scale 14% had drunk 15 or more units (Goddard 1996). There is also some evidence that those who drank «designer drinks» were more likely to have reported being drunk. The view that consumption of designer drinks was associated with heavy alcohol consumption and drinking in less controlled environments leading to greater drunkenness, was largely confirmed by a study by Hughes et al (1997) in Glasgow.

The United Kingdom participated in the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (Hibell et al 1997). 7,722 students aged 15-16 were given a questionnaire. They were drawn from a random sample of schools across the United Kingdom. The response rate was 82%. In the United Kingdom substance misuse was higher than the average for all other countries. The proportion who had used alcohol during the last 12 months was higher than the mean for the total European sample, 90% compared to 80%. The proportion that had been drunk during the past 12 months was 70% compared to other countries where it was an average of 48%. The proportion of students smoking was the same as the average, many more UK students had tried marijuana (40%) compared with other countries and drug misuse in general was

significantly higher than elsewhere.

The lifetime prevalence rate for any alcohol use were about the same for boys and girls. The study enquired about lifetime, 12 months, and 30 days prevalence of getting drunk, as well as

a 30 day prevalence of binge drinking. The UK had a lifetime prevalence of 78%. Between 28% of British boys and 26% of British girls reported having been drunk 20 or more times in their lifetime. This contrasts with Italy where there are comparable figures of 6% and 2%, Greece 5% and 2%.

## *2. Reported consequences of drinking*

Students were asked «how likely is it that each of the following things would happen to you personally if you drink alcohol. There were 5 positive and 6 negative consequences, they were:-

feel relaxed

get in trouble with the Police

harm my health

feel happy,

forget my problems

not be able to stop drinking

get a hangover

feel more friendly and outgoing

do something I would regret

have a lot of fun

feel sick.

For each of these alternatives the students were asked to answer on a 5 point scale from «very likely» to «very unlikely» that a particular consequence would follow. In general the «positives» scored a higher percentage than the «negatives» suggesting that alcohol is more associated with positive than harmful consequences. This trend was particularly evident in the United Kingdom. Countries like the UK with the most positive expectancies also proved to be countries with the highest prevalence of reported rates of intoxication in this age group. *Therefore, it seems that young people in the UK have extremely positive expectancies surrounding alcohol and intoxication.*

Students were also asked about a number of problems that they had experienced as a consequence of their drinking. The problems were grouped into four categories, «individual problems», «relationship problems», «sexual problems», «delinquency problems». UK students reported a particularly high level of individual personal problems. These were «damage to objects or clothing», «loss of money or other valuable items», «reduced performance at work or school» and finally «accident or injury» which was the least experienced personal consequence, but in the UK this nonetheless accounted for 15%. Amongst «relationship problems», «quarrels or arguments» were the most common. Problems were most often with friends or parents. Sexual problems were not commonly reported. Unwanted sex was however reported by 17% of UK students and 13% also reported «unprotected sex». A scuffle or fight was the most commonly

reported act of delinquency, (22% in the UK) Trouble of this kind was more often reported in the UK compared with other countries (16% average). The report comments on the observed problems in the study by stating «most alcohol related problems amongst students are found in the United Kingdom and in Scandinavian countries along with Czech Republic and the Ukraine. With two exceptions, these were also the countries with the highest frequency of being intoxicated 20 or more times in a lifetime. Countries with the lowest number of alcohol related problems were found among the wine producing countries were the students usually show a relatively low frequency of intoxication».

Finally, students were asked about reasons for not drinking. The reasons most frequently agreed upon were some of the effects such as hangovers, dizziness and vomiting (91%), and risk of serious accidents (90%). It is noteworthy that the students in the British Isles although agreeing with the consequence of feeling of ill with hangover, did not support many of the other concerns such as accidents, or damage to health, nearly as strongly as their counterparts elsewhere.

### *3. Legal Requirements for alcohol and young people*

The Law in Scotland states that young people under the age of 18, but aged 14 or above, may at the licensee's discretion be in a bar but must not buy or drink alcohol. Young people under 18 but 16 years and over may buy beer, cider or wine provided it is for consumption with a bona fide meal in an area set aside exclusively for eating. Children under 14 and accompanied by an adult are allowed in a bar between 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. for the purposes of consuming a meal provided the licensed premises have children's' certificates. Despite these regulations there is great difficulty in enforcement.

#### 4. *Alcohol and crime in the young*

In a survey of 14-15 year olds in the North West of England, Newcombe et al (1995) found a close relationship between frequency and quantity of alcohol consumed and the number of deviant acts committed. Sutherland and Willner (1998) found that smoking and illicit drug misuse amongst 11-16 year olds was invariably correlated with alcohol use.

Police forces in the Edinburgh area have conducted a survey of under age drinking. 81% of the police inspectors who replied to the survey said that if there was a problem of under age drinking in the area, the problems experienced were disturbance (27%), noise (25%), vandalism (25%) and litter (23%). Attempts to enforce licensing laws had proved difficult and may lead to teenage drinking on the streets or elsewhere. Some Scottish regions have banned drinking in public places and introduced curfews for unruly young people (Graham L 1996).

#### 5. *Method*

The aim of this pilot investigation was to identify the contextual factors and individual and group dynamics which cause risky behaviour amongst young people and then to use this experience to elaborate a method for monitoring which allows international comparisons and forms a basis for preventive initiatives. These broader aims were supported by «the following executive aims» to explore:

the meaning of the term «risk» amongst adolescents and young adults

the perception of risk amongst adolescents and young adults



feelings and experience of adolescents and young adults relating to risk

avoidance strategies concerning risk in this group

definition, perception and prevention of risk

The method adopted has been outlined by Montinari et al (1999) and was adapted for local use. Unfortunately, it has not proved possible to complete all three elements of the investigation. This report describes two focus groups one with school age students (16-17) and the other with a group of young people aged 19-21.

#### *6. The focus groups*

The group of young people was self selected. All were students aged 19-21. They were given information about the project (see appendix). The duration of the group was 2 hours in the evening. Each group member gave an account of their own views about risks, which they or others had taken and the outcome. They did this before the discussion commenced (see appendix). The two group facilitators then introduced the meeting and then posed a sequence of questions adapting the format which had been used in Italy:

Reception and introduction

The image of risk

The image of the risk taker

Personal experiences of risk taking

The role alcohol plays in risk taking

Ideas for prevention and conclusions

Eight participants had volunteered to take part but only five came on the night. The following record of the views expressed is taken from the record made by one facilitator and edited after joint discussion between both facilitators.

The other focus group addressed similar questions but lasted only 50 minutes, participants were volunteers aged 16-17, 5 male and 5 female. The same facilitators introduced the group project, one posed the questions and one recorded the responses.

The 19-21 year old group will be called group A. The 16-17 year old – group B.

### *7. The Image or Concept of Risk*

In response to the question «What does taking a risk mean to you?» Group A identified a number of key issues involving a balance of the likelihood of harm against the thrill or pleasure involved. The adrenaline rush/high was seen as very important and of course some risks, which produced a high, were «relatively safe» such as going on a roller-coaster ride. They distinguished between those with a high probability of harm and those with a low probability of harm. Some distinction was made between risks that were understandable because of circumstances such as shoplifting when short of money, together with the same action undertaken simply for the thrill. Some felt that risk taking had to involve an event that has consequences for instance in being caught (legal/illegal) or with other damaging consequences. The probabilistic view of risk was also expressed and came into the equation by asking what were the chances of immediate or

long term harm and was the risk worth taking.

The younger Group B had similar concepts of risk. Concepts of risk involved going beyond a certain limit, putting yourself in danger, entering the «unknown». On other occasions it was seen as a balanced judgement of knowing that there was an element of risk but that it was worthwhile and you are «going to go for it anyway». Curiosity was a factor in taking a risk. Some felt that the bigger the risk, the greater the unknown consequences.

They expressed a view that risks were greater when you were in unfamiliar company. If you had friends/relatives around to protect you then behaviour was less risky. This was particularly the case with drinking.

Types of risk taking identified by Group A were drink/driving, not wearing seat belts, driving over the speed limit. Some saw speeding as not so risky and there was the view that a risk that was taken very widely and commonly in the population, was more acceptable than one which was rare. Drink/driving for instance is now generally seen as not at all socially acceptable, whereas speeding was not seen in this way. Societal and cultural differences were regarded as important and the role of advertising in promoting certain values encouraged certain forms of risks.

One participant said that «by definition young people take risks». This provoked a discussion about the view amongst the young that we «only live once» and «making the most of it». Looking more closely at this view, it seemed that many of the young people felt that youth was a time when there was an opportunity to take risk because the individual had fewer responsibilities particularly to others. As they grew older they would have a regular job and a family to support restricting their freedom to take risks hence the importance of seizing the opportunity to experiment when young.

Risk was mostly not seen as something that was thought about in advance of the action and particularly in relation to drinking was appreciated only in retrospect. The sequencing of the thought process came in for very careful consideration. Most felt that the idea of the action comes first, with justification for the risk coming later. Risk was only one consideration as part of the total and complex ideas making process. They did recognise that risk was not a single element but involved a lot of consequences and people.

The interval between a behaviour and its likely consequences was also examined particularly in relation to smoking where those who did smoke were well aware of the harmful consequences and had personal family examples of premature death in their experience. It was then pointed out that what started as risks become habits and then the element of risk seems to diminish. For instance if you go bungee jumping a lot, there is still the chance that it may cause harm, but somehow that concern lessens with experience.

Their conclusion was that young people think about the risk both in advance and afterwards and that some people are more impulsive and less conscious of consequences than others.

The younger Group B first described risks specific to the school environment such as shouting outside a teacher's window and taking the risk of being caught. There was an element of excitement about this which was taken as one example of a number of situations in which there was an «adrenaline rush» which was viewed as a positive aspect of risk taking.

They felt that when drunk people took stupid risks things «could get out of control» (example: sitting on a cigarette). The group described a particularly bad experience with tragic

consequences recently.

They believed that most people took the effect of alcohol into consideration in risk taking, and realised that it would make it more likely that they would do «stupid things». They worried sometimes about friends getting «out of control».

Other forms of risk taking included extreme sports such as rock climbing, white water rafting, bungee jumping – again the thrill was calculated and predictable. They differentiated between situations where the thrill was magnified but the risk controlled for example bungee jumping and others where there was always a risk which you minimised by your own efforts and skill such as mountaineering. In the latter circumstance there was a sense of personal achievement involved.

Smoking was seen as a risk but some liked it, and accepted the possible health consequences.. Some quoted elderly relatives who had smoked all their lives. They thought that smoking increased risk of harm but that some risks for instance of physical disease were there anyway.

#### *8. Good and bad risks?*

A distinction was made between risks that were seen by society as admirable but were nonetheless risky such as mountaineering, absailing, and those that had societal disapproval such as drug misuse, smoking cannabis (general agreement that this was not risky), getting drunk and so forth. The attitude of paramedical staff, accident and emergency and people in general the intoxicated young person had proved very different from the attitude to an unfortunate young person who might have sustained a head injury while climbing. This view was not always present but did seem to be quite general. Friends of a participant in Group A who had been present with a young woman who became unconscious through drink on three occasions and always needed to be taken to the

Casualty Department noticed the very dismissive attitude of the staff dealing with this, but in contrast another young man noticed a very caring response towards a drug overdose at a «rave».

A distinction was made concerning those who take risks on behalf of others, or to save others altruistic risk taking.

#### *9. Images of typical risk taker*

Both groups were asked «What characterises the typical risk taker and the image that this presents?». This provoked a number of anecdotes about individuals who drank very heavily, experimented with various substances, are promiscuous, engage in petty theft and were generally impulsive. The group agreed that although such young people had caused harm to other people including their families, they often had an admirable quality as well with a roguish disregard for convention.

Someone who is a regular risk taker appears to be unconcerned about what others think about them and is preoccupied with self gratification. This can seem attractive to young people.

Behaviour of younger people, teenagers, (particularly males), was often seen as attention seeking, taking risks walking on parapets of bridges, or harbour walls or placing bricks on railway lines for example. Although this was attention seeking it did attract some kudos.

It was acknowledged that risk takers may be more interesting, charming, likeable, exciting to be with, always having a good story to tell. This was thought to be less attractive if it caused harm or damage to others, this reduced the admiration significantly.

Group pressure was also a factor in risk with dares such as throwing stones at trains, playing chicken on the road, and it was felt that particularly for younger people there was a genuine lack of awareness of the consequences, so that throwing stones was seen as fun and exciting and something they had been told not to do, but that there was no real appreciation that they might cause an accident or kill the driver of a train. Failure to respond to a dare by taking a risk might lead to exclusion from the peer group.

It was recognised by some that there was pleasure to be found in smashing things and referred to other activities like scratching cars with keys on the way home from the pub. Was there an element of jealousy/envy also in this form of delinquency which also involved risk?

Other aspects of the person who takes risks was that they lack something in their lives and try to gain release by risk taking. The nature of risk taking also seems to vary from person to person and there were clearly reservations about generalising concerning the character of a «risk taker». The outdoors activities kind of person was thought not to take so many risks as far as alcohol was concerned but they might in sporting activities. They also observed that ravers had a concept of how to take drugs responsibly, using a known drug dealer, but all of this activity is still against the law and risky in another sense. They are thus taking precautions to minimise the likely harm from what is intrinsically a risky behaviour. Some referred to reducing risk by thinking of the consequences for their family, friends, study or their own well being.

#### *10. Views of Risk Takers*

Group B recognised that showing off was a stimulus to risk taking, particularly amongst younger teenagers trying to impress other people. They were ambivalent in their view of risk

takers - they saw them as people who were not afraid but equally did not know when to stop and did not consider other people's feelings including family and friends. Such individuals could be fun to watch and to be with up to a point. Some took no responsibility for the consequences of their actions and this was not admired.

There was no particular personality type associated with excessive risk taking although they felt the conservative inhibited individual would be less likely to take risks and those who did not seem to care about other people were more likely to do so.

A risk taker was often a fun person to be around. They recognised that sometimes it was a means of getting attention and status. They did not care what people thought or conversely worried too much about what other people were thinking. Someone excluded from a group might take risks to impress and become a member of the group..

#### *11. How does alcohol influence risk taking?*

The groups were then asked how the introduction of alcohol influenced risk taking. *Group A* agreed that when drunk risks are more likely to occur and drink boosted confidence. Some felt that getting drunk enabled the drinker to somehow get out of themselves and become a different person who was more lively and would take risks. This of course was in accord with the view that the risk taker possessed admirable qualities. They also recognised that drinking gave permission for this kind of behaviour and might not necessarily entail getting significantly drunk. Drinking to oblivion can become «a badge of honour» amongst groups of students who drink in a competitive way, for example drinking games and competitions. Round buying was seen as an important factor here.

«If you drink you become who you want to be». They rec-



ognised the different environments and different settings dictated what was acceptable drinking behaviour. The question of parental influence was examined in some detail. Most felt that it did not have much impact. Parents often did not know what was going on and it was better to recognise it for yourself when things were getting out of hand. One participant admired the way in which a parent had encouraged her to take responsibility for her own actions from an early age and learn to manage the consequences. She now knew when to «hit the water» as far as drinking was concerned. Some felt that parents were happy to know that their children even if under age, were drinking in pubs rather than in friends' houses or in parks. The only elements that seemed to have influenced underage drinking was the opportunity (e.g. proximity of pubs in rural areas). Parents coming down heavily on under-age drinking was not seen as at all helpful. Some also reported a tendency to alcohol problems in the family and the extent to which this influenced parental views about drinking. There did seem to be some heightened awareness of the risk but very little impact on behaviour.

All of the participants in Group A had moved away from the parental home. They recalled the «non-stop drinking» of their first year away from home which in retrospect seemed ridiculous but at the time it seemed necessary and a means of belonging to the group. Reference was also made to holidays in Spain etc at the age of 16 which always passed in an orgy of drinking. This was seen as being related to new found freedom and also occurred during a period of change in their lives which influenced their attitudes towards drinking and disinhibited behaviour.

Participants in Group B believed that alcohol removed inhibitions and made you feel you could do more, and take more risks. You also had less time to think about the consequences and past a certain point you could not of course remember what you did or where you had been. Drinking made you less worried about your behaviour.

Getting drunk was also a way of getting worries out of your system or to stop thinking about something. They reflected that on occasions they planned to get drunk when on other occasions drunkenness occurred as a side effect of having some «social drinks». They recognised that intoxication accentuated their mood – crying or laughing. The mood was much influenced by the atmosphere and the people around them.

#### *12. Problems associated with drinking*

In response to the question about what problems have you recognised as a consequence of drinking (not necessarily experienced personally) mention was made of hangover, «going too far and becoming oblivious to surroundings», «not being able to look after yourself». One member described a friend overdosing with alcohol, becoming unconscious and requiring resuscitation in hospital. This then caused problems amongst that group of friends and parents were involved. The friends were criticised for not taking steps to control drinking within their group. Eventually this behaviour prevented the friend from going on holiday because they were afraid of taking her, because of the consequences.

Both groups stressed that friends had an important role in helping each other avoid harmful consequences. One participant (Group A) described a girl who was very drunk and wanted to go to «lose her virginity» with an unknown man and was restrained from doing so by the rest of the group of friends. Another participant described a friend who at the age of 15 had got very drunk and had run across a motorway at night as a dare and was knocked down and killed. The others were horrified but it did not influence their drinking, if anything it increased it because of the distress caused. Similarly they have seen relatives dying as a consequence of drink, but that this had not influenced their behaviour. A group member who had worked in a bar said this experience gave him a different understanding of the consequence of drinking: he had

seen fights starting over trivial issues: and he had to restrain a large man from attacking a small woman because she had nudged into him spilling his beer. Some people were seen as getting very violent when drunk and the next day being distraught. In general they felt that alcohol was more likely to trigger violent behaviour whereas other drugs, particularly ecstasy did not do so. They felt people seemed to be more suspicious and argumentative when drunk.

The women in *group A* felt that groups of males (not necessarily young) were particularly threatening and obnoxious towards young women and girls. There is also mention of groups of young girls who would get very drunk and would become violent towards young men «perhaps because they had been victims themselves».

One of the most significant risks of getting drunk was of unsafe sex and sexually transmitted disease. Some felt that they were very aware of these risk and always took precautions whereas others were less consistent. The risk of pregnancy was seen as very «real» and immediate, it would affect the whole course of your subsequent life.

The younger group did not mention risks associated with sexuality but described situations where violence, muggings, accidents and reckless behaviour such as running down the centre of a road when drunk. There were also links between alcohol and illicit drug use.

### *13. Cultural influences*

The group acknowledged that different religions and different cultures would have a very different attitude towards drinking. They believed that the Scots and Irish were notorious for their drinking habits making drunkenness very acceptable. It was seen as something to help you to cope and was not widely viewed as causing problems. Someone arriving from a

different culture had resisted being drawn into the drinking habits of Scotland, but not all had done this and this had caused great difficulties, depression and anxiety e.g. a young man known to the group and coming from a Muslim/Arabic background had started to drink and then engaged in practices that caused him a great deal of subsequent distress including mental breakdown. This topic was not considered by Group B

#### 14. Prevention

Participants were asked about their views on preventing alcohol related problems of the kind they had described.

Both groups commented that conventional education was not thought to have much impact on behaviour.. Drinking was seen as «a hobby and part of the culture», binge drinking was the norm but also the form which proved particularly troublesome. *Group A* felt that young people were largely aware of the risks but saw youth as a special time in which to engage in this behaviour. Young people often believed they could indulge in a few years of excessive drinking before getting it under control and «settling down». Preventive measures were seen in terms of harm reduction; such as free buses or free taxis home from the pub; staggered or extended closing time to avoid the streets being flooded by drunks at a particular time. Pubs closing earlier would only mean people buying larger rounds before closing time or drinking at home. They felt that people were largely aware of the risk but saw youth as a special time in which to engage this behaviour. Having cafés opening longer might compete with the pub and there are now one or two cafés which are now open later at night which provide coffee but also alcohol; these did not seem to engender excessive drinking.

Clear distinction was made in Group A between occasions where one went out «to get drunk» and those where you were

simply going to the pub to socialise. The latter might end in getting drunk but it was not the initial intention. Getting drunk was seen as a form of escapism made easier by having nothing to do the next day. Attitudes such as «devil may care» and «leaving matters to fate» were seen as attractions of getting very drunk and throwing off constraints e.g. after the exams.

Group B were pessimistic about influencing drinking habits and problems of others but felt that being more permissive about drinking when younger would be helpful. They thought parents rather than friends should introduce young people to sensible drinking so that they understood for example the difference between half a glass of wine and half a bottle of Vodka. Understanding the risks was useful but saying simply that «drinking is bad» they felt was the wrong message because it tempted you to try. They felt that parents had a major role in influencing drinking habits.

They recognised that to a certain extent you could learn from bad experiences and having these experiences helped you to set limits and learn from your mistakes. They felt that it was important to get across that drinking was not dangerous in itself, it was excessive drinking that caused the problems.

They were doubtful about the impact of health education but thought that other young people might be more influential e.g. senior pupils talking about sensible drinking.

They emphasised the great ambivalence in Society contrasting lectures about not drinking with the way in which it is promoted so widely. One said «drinking in excess is bad, not alcohol that is bad» and it was seen as a very important part of social life.

They thought that alcohol was expensive in Scotland compared with countries like Spain. Going on holiday was often

an introduction to very heavy drinking. Finally, they point out that if parents said «don't drink» then it was much harder to approach them if you got into difficulties with drinking.

Both concluded that there were obviously positives and negatives attached to drinking and it was very hard to act against the drinking culture that you found yourself in.

#### *15. Comments*

No conclusions can be advanced at this stage but even the present information has generalised some questions and ideas. It should also be recognised that group A had a significantly longer session than group B. The latter was restricted because of the school's timetable and this inevitably made their comments briefer and less detailed.

In Scotland most boys and girls have drunk and experienced drunkenness by the age of 15. Although introduced to alcohol at home more intensive drinking is done out with parental supervision. Drinking in licensed premises before the «permitted age» is common.

Bout drinking and intoxication amongst young people and adolescents is a justified cause for concern. There is also little evidence of the efficacy of conventional education in reducing the harmful consequences.

Getting drunk and losing control is clearly seen as desirable and even admirable. Setting out «to get drunk» is recognised as functionally different from going out for a social drink and incidentally getting drunk.

Young people are aware of the harmful consequences sometimes from personal experience, but this rarely acts as a deterrent. Getting drunk is associated with escape from con-

straint and in a sense gives the young person permission to «act daft» and take risks. Friends support and reinforce this activity but also have some responsibility for minimising the risk of serious harm befalling their intoxicated companion. There was no evident expectation that control should come from parents or other external adult authority. Attempts to restrict were largely resented, but parental influence particularly as role models and sources of information was seen as important particularly by the 16-17 year olds.

The relationship between drinking and other forms of drug misuse including tobacco is cause for concern. These links are insufficiently recognised and may point to the merits of tackling substance misuse together in UK rather than adopting a substance specific piecemeal approach.

In Scotland there is a relatively high level of intoxication and harm alongside minimal concern about consequences, this paradox requires further exploration. Getting drunk is seen by young people as an attribute of their stage in life and one which they hope to relinquish once adult responsibilities descend over them. The cultural meaning of being drunk requires to be investigated further.

#### *16. Acknowledgements*

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### *Risk Taking and Alcohol*

A number of focus groups are being organised to explore the way in which young people think about risk taking, particularly in relation to alcohol. If you would be interested in





SISTER: YES:  
HOW MANY?

No:

What does risk taking mean to you? Give examples of risks you or others you know have taken - what was the outcome? (please write legibly)

### *Appendix*

#### Risk Taking - Focus Group

What does risk taking mean to you? - Individual response

Involving in an activity that has some degree of risk (danger) in it, the person knows that there is risk involved however he/she still carrying out that activity e.g. speaking about myself I, a smoker, I know everything about smoking and how it might affect health which in turn will affect my life, but I still smoke!

Driving motorbikes - I've been driving a motor-bike sometimes without helmet, over the speed limit and I'm fully aware that any accident might cause me some kind of trauma/head injury etc and will affect the quality of my life.

Putting yourself or others in danger. Risks - drinking too much and ending up in undesirable situations. Drinking too much and taking drugs (E), making friends very worried, getting thrown out of a club and being in a very bad state for about a week.

Going into the country at 4.00 a.m. with a group of people I did not know, with no idea how I was going to get back, that turned out o.k. in the end. Nothing I have done has ever ended up in disaster, so far all of the risks I have taken have

not damaged me (as far as I am aware) or my friends/family.

Doing something which might cause yourself or others harm, but which can give you a «thrill», practising unsafe sex when drunk, taking drugs when drunk, drinking too much (binge drinking) had to get stomach pumped, driving too fast - speeding fine, taking Speed - felt very unwell next day, smoking cigarettes - caused ill-health, risk taking in everyday life, crossing busy roads, eating beef, drinking tap water.

Drug use - cocaine, dependency and depression as a result of long term use (friend), risks to myself or putting yourself or others in danger, such as drink driving, drug abuse, general recklessness. Elements of risk with reference to putting yourself in danger. I enjoy Adventure Sports such as absailing, whitewater canoeing, climbing etc. The element of risk is always there and creates the adrenaline «buzz» that make such activities exciting, but when things take over your life and are endangering your health, perhaps on a long term basis, I see this as risk taking - pushing your limits too far. Risks to me - stealing, friends have spoken of the same «buzz» i would get from sport, the risk being getting caught, this event usually occurring at an early teenage rebellious stage - going against the authorities.

The probability or likelihood that harm may be incurred e.g. there is a risk in speeding but I appraise that as being low - maybe incorrectly.

Drinking copious quantities - falling asleep unusual places, picking fights, being generally irresponsible (I survived! - made a terrific fool of myself on occasions - tends not to drink as much now), speeding in my care, no negative outcome - probably will do so again

I have one friend I think of as an almost pathological risk taker - heavy drinker (> 3 pints beer most nights), has taken

cannabis, amphetamine, amyl nitrate, cocaine, ecstasy, multiple homosexual and heterosexual relationships. He's actually one of the most likeable people I've met. I think his «roguish charm» appeals to most. He has never come to any harm because of his behaviour. We've discussed it on several occasions and while he is well aware of the risks (he is a regular watcher of Health Section on «This Morning with Richard and Judy»). He seems to get so much gratification from current patterns of behaviour.

The risks we have discussed are - alcohol/drug dependence, financial problems, health implications of sexual behaviour. I think the benefits outweigh the risks for him. Perhaps when he leaves and starts work (which is another worry) the risks might outweigh the benefits - it will be interesting to see what happens then.

### *Group B*

#### *Age 16*

Risk: doing something which could be dangerous or have a dangerous consequence.

Examples of risk – drinking alcohol/taking drugs

driving car under influence of alcohol/drugs

Extreme sports – bungee jumping/skydiving

etc.

Risk: is doing something you would not usually do, something that could put yourself or others in danger.

Risk has a great range i.e. risking a, £1 on the lottery to

risking your life whilst running across a road drunk for example. Also things like drinking too much or too quickly pose a risk to you/your body.

Risk: Taking chances, going too far and putting yourself in danger, being out of control, not realising what you are doing, letting yourself do things which you do not agree with and are not happy with.

Risk: to me it means going further than you would usually think of going maybe drinking too much alcohol – we know it harms you but we do it anyway – that could be risky.

Taking yourself above a certain limit – which could affect you adversely.

Risk: Risk is danger and the level of danger which is involved in any given situation.

Example: Being around people drinking in public areas, like groups of boys in parks, can lead to violence and muggings which I myself have experienced. Can result in arrest and criminal record which I almost got when I was picked up by the Police while drinking in a public place, not far from here, when I was with a large group of drunken teenagers who were at risk.

Risk: Taking chances which put yourself or others in danger.

Example: 2 male friends, running up the middle of a road in the dark. Unwittingly being set on fire as a result of being very drunk.

Risk: Is anything where the outcome is fairly unpredictable.

Risks from an everyday part of my life. Stereotypical risks are where what you could lose (i.e. money, your life) far outweigh any benefits, and these I tend to avoid. I have never intentionally risked my own life or any of my friends.

Risk: Putting yourself or others in danger. A situation where someone could get hurt physically or mentally. You are not sure what the outcome could be.

*Age 17 years*

Risk: Making a decision to take a chance that could likely result in a dangerous result.

Example: My friends taking drugs. The risk of getting caught and the risk of what it could do to their health. Taking the decision then chancing the consequences.

Risk: Is doing something potentially dangerous – getting so drunk I had no memory of what I did, and getting in a position with a guy where anything could have happened. Also drug taking.



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