

# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION IN PSYCHOLOGY, 2011

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## Abstract

Bohlin, C. M.\* (2011). Music and Risk in an existential and gendered world. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden and Department of Social and Behavioural Studies, University West, Sweden.

Adolescents in Western society often expose themselves to high levels of sound at gyms, rock concerts, discotheques etc. These behaviours are as threatening to young people's health as more traditional risk behaviours. Testing boundaries and risk taking are fundamental aspects of young people's lives and the processes of developing their identities. There is, however, a need to balance reasonable risk taking and risks that can damage health. The aim of **Study I** was to analyze the relationship between self-exposure to noise, risk behaviours and risk judgements among 310 Swedish adolescents aged 15-20 (167 men/143 women). The adolescents' behaviour in different traditional risk situations correlated with behaviour in noisy environments, and judgements about traditional risks correlated with judgement regarding noise exposure. Another finding was that young women judge risk situations as generally more dangerous than young men, although they behave in the same way as the men. We suggest that this difference is a social and culture based phenomenon which underlines the importance of adopting a gender perspective in the analysis of risk factors. Adolescents reporting permanent tinnitus judged loud music as more risky than adolescents with no symptoms and they did not listen to loud music as often as those with occasional tinnitus. The aims of **study II** were to illuminate the complexity of risk behaviour, the meaning and purpose of adolescent risk-taking in both a traditional sense (e.g. smoking and drug use) and in noisy environments (e.g. discotheques and rock concerts), in relation to norms and gender roles in contemporary society. In total, 16 adolescents (8 men/8 women, aged 15-19) were interviewed individually and in focus groups. The interviewees' responses revealed social reproduction of gender and class. Main themes of the phenomena for both genders emerged: Social identity and Existential identity of risk taking. The descriptive sub themes, however, which together formed the general structure, were rather diverse for men and women. The incorporation of social and existential theories on gender as basic factors in the analysis of attitudes towards risk-taking behaviours is considered to be of utmost importance. Likewise, research on hearing prevention for young people needs to acknowledge and make use of theories on risk behaviour and similarly, the theories on risk behaviour should acknowledge noise as a risk factor.

**Study III** aims to increase the knowledge about young women's and men's risk judgement and behaviour by investigating patterns in adolescent risk activities among 310 adolescents aged 15-20 (143 women; 167 men). The Australian instrument ARQ, developed by Gullone et al, was used with additional questions on hearing risks<sup>[1]</sup> and a factor analysis was conducted. The main results showed that the factor structure in the judgement and behaviour scale for Swedish adolescents was rather different from the factor structure in the Australian sample. The factor structure was not similar to the Australian sample split on gender and there were differences in factor structures between genders among Swedish adolescents. The results are discussed from a gender and existential perspective on risk taking, and it is emphasized that research on risk behaviour needs to reconceptualize stereotypical ideas about gender and the existential period in adolescence. The aim of **Study IV** was to investigate possible gender differences regarding psychometric scales measuring risk perception in noisy situations, attitudes towards loud music, perceived susceptibility to noise, and individual norms and ideals related to activities where loud music is played. In addition, the purpose was to analyze whether these variables are associated with protective behaviour, e.g. the use of hearing protection. A questionnaire was administered to a Swedish sample including 543 adolescents aged 16 to 20. The result revealed significant gender differences for all the psychometric scales. Furthermore, all psychometric measures were associated with hearing protection use in musical settings. Contrary to previous studies, gender did not solely contribute to any explanation of protective behaviour in the analysis. One conclusion is that although gender does not contribute solely to the explanation of protective behaviour, gender may affect psychological variables such as risk perception, attitudes and perceived susceptibility and these variables may in turn be valuable for decision-making and protective behaviour in noisy situations. Although women tend to be more 'careful' psychologically, they nevertheless tend to behave in the same way as men regarding actual noise-related risk-taking.

Key words: Adolescents, Noise, Music, Risk taking behaviour, Gender, Existential theory, Hearing, Youth

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