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EGOCENTRICITY AND RISK TAKING IN FEMALE ADOLESCENTS

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A research report submitted to the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology)

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Abstract

Adolescence is often seen as a stage where risk taking and experimentation are common. The need to feel a part of one's peer group, to be valued as an individual and to overcome physical and emotional changes are all part of this developmental stage. This research examines the link between Elkind's theory of Egocentrism and risk taking in female adolescents. Risk taking and its links to the Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience were the main focus of the research. This study used a qualitative research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of risk taking among a sample group of ten female adolescents. A focus group from a different school was used to help analyse and discuss the data obtained. The results of this study show that Elkind's theory of adolescent Egocentrism (both the Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience) are, indeed, influencing factors in female adolescent risk taking.

KEY WORDS

Adolescent	Risk taking
Egocentrism	Personal Fable
Imaginary Audience	Formal Operational thought
Jean Piaget	David Elkind

Declaration

I hereby declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It has been submitted exclusively to the University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology).

_____

Juliette Grant

_____ day of _____ 2007

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Introduction

Sitting in the back of the movie theatre on an evening out the author noticed a small group of adolescents causing a commotion. The group of adolescents was continually drawing attention to themselves by performing cartwheels, handstands and talking at an elevated level. What struck the author was how these adolescents seemed to be putting on a play for the audience. Their conversations were audible throughout the movie theatre and the adolescents did not seem to be concerned about the increasing number of individuals reprimanding them. While the risks in this case were perhaps not life threatening, there were still consequences to the behaviour the adolescents were displaying. They could have been removed from the movie theater for example or parents might have been informed of their child's behaviour. In view of this behaviour, the author became interested in discovering why this group of adolescents felt the need to perform, not only within their peer group but to the wider audience, being the movie goers? Why, when the adolescents were receiving negative commentary about their behaviour, did they still continue, knowing that there were potential consequences?

As an adolescent, the author can remember a bumper sticker her friend's father had on his car that read, "Hire a teenager, while he still knows everything". While perhaps a little exaggerated, there is something about adolescence that makes the individual feel she has all the answers and is able to change the world. This belief that one is special and unique and the feeling that the "world is your stage" are two themes that seem, from the author's perspective to be an intrinsic part of adolescence. What made those individuals in the movie theater take part in the risky behaviour? Was it linked in any way to the feeling of being unique or special and therefore excluded from following certain social norms? Was the need to perform to an audience seen as a greater influencing factor than the possible consequences? If so, did the risk taking enhance or detract from the individual's perception or image of herself?

In an attempt to understand and explain the observed behaviour the author has chosen to look at risk taking using David Elkind's (1970/1984) theory of Egocentrism. This theory was based on Jean Piaget's (1954) notion of Egocentrism and thus his understanding of Egocentrism will be included. The question the author is interested in answering is what role does egocentric thought play in risk-taking amongst female

adolescents? Integral to this question, the concept of what constitutes Egocentrism[1] becomes important. The author wishes to understand how a cognitive structure, that of Egocentrism, impacts on the adolescent at an emotional level. Particular focus will be placed on female adolescents' risk taking and how egocentricity influences their thought processes.

It is hoped that this research will augment our understanding of teenage development and how the mechanism of egocentric thought impacts on the teenager's perception and reaction to situations with which she is confronted. Young adolescents are faced with issues such as a changing body, a need for autonomy and a crisis of identity; it is a stage on which few theorists have elaborated.

Elkind (1970) suggests that young females show the most prevalent signs of Egocentrism throughout the stage of adolescence. The author has chosen adolescent females between thirteen and eighteen years of age, focusing on grades eight, nine and ten. These grades were chosen for convenience. Therefore the majority of subjects used in this research will fall in the age bracket of thirteen to fifteen years old though there may be a portion that fall outside this age range. In order to remain true to the sample group chosen the author will use the pronouns 'she' or 'her' in preference to 'he' or 'him' throughout the research report. The author will not change any quotes given and thus he and him may be present in some of the quotes used.

The author will begin with a discussion of egocentricity in Chapter One. Egocentricity is the theoretical framework from which the author wishes to view risk taking. In the second chapter the author will give an outline of risk taking behaviour and some of the causes that have been identified in the existent research. The author will then complete the chapter with a section outlining Egocentrism and risk taking. This chapter is followed by a discussion of the research design and how the research was conducted. Chapter Four looks at the results found from the data captured and categorises it into four themes, Egocentrism, the Personal Fable, the Imaginary Audience and other causes of risk taking. Chapter Five concludes the research report and gives a summarized version of the main theoretical conclusions emanating from the report.

[1] The terms Egocentrism and egocentricity are used interchangeably in this report

Chapter 1: Theoretical background

1.1 Introduction

The author's focus in this research report is on Egocentrism and its effects on risk taking and thus the theoretical underpinning of the report is Egocentrism itself. David Elkind (1970/1984) is the primary theorist used in the understanding of Egocentrism in adolescence. To best be able to contextualize the primary aim of the research report it is necessary to provide a detailed theoretical description of Egocentrism so that risk taking is understood within this theoretical framework. The chapter therefore begins by looking at the origins of Piaget's concept of Egocentrism. This is followed by Elkind's view of adolescent Egocentrism which found its roots in Piaget's theory on childhood Egocentrism.

The author has chosen to complement the theory of Egocentrism and risk taking with quotes taken from an autobiographical account of a fifteen year old female who died from a drug addiction (Anonymous, 1997). The author believes these inserts lend support to the theories discussed. The chosen diary entries take the reader through her thought processes and give the reader a glimpse into her world. The anonymous writer will give readers a clearer and more personal understanding of the theory discussed.

1.2 Egocentrism

1.2.1 The origins of Jean Piaget's concept of egocentricity

"It won't happen to me", "No one has ever loved someone as much or as deeply as I do." At some time in one's life a person may find him/herself saying something similar to the statements above. The idea that a risk is unlikely to affect oneself, or that one's feelings are unique, are both examples of egocentric thought. Piaget and Inhelder (1979) defined this as Egocentrism and believed it was the result of a lack of cognitive maturity in young children. It is important to understand that Egocentrism is not interchangeable with egotistical thought and due to the continuous misinterpretations of the term egocentricity Piaget spoke of 'centredness' nearer the end of his career.

Piaget never developed his theory of egocentricity beyond the childhood years. It is however necessary to comprehend the grounding of egocentricity in order to see the distinction and similarities between Piaget and Elkind, who extended the concept of

egocentricity into adolescence. Egocentricity needs to be seen as a mechanism similar to that of cognition or morality, a continuous process that changes with each new developmental stage of the child.

> The transition from one form of egocentrism to another takes place in a dialectic fashion such that the mental structures which free the child from a lower form of egocentrism are the same structures which ensnare him in a higher form of egocentrism. (Elkind, 1970, p.50)

Piaget (1954) believed that children see themselves as central to the world around them. Piaget (1972) gave an example of a few months old baby who is at first unaware of anything else but her needs. This baby has not retained objects as permanent yet and the objects are forgotten as soon as they are out of the baby's sight range. "[T]he child's initial universe is entirely centered on his own body and action in an egocentrism as total as it is unconscious (for lack of consciousness of the self)" (Piaget & Inhelder, 1979, p.13). A child for example is unaware of the fact that her mother is also a wife, friend, sister, etc to others and can only see her in the role of a mother.

Egocentrism can be observed in the way children construct language. The way the child speaks at times may indicate a usage of symbolic reasoning and thought that is only pertinent to herself.

> The fact is that the speech of subjects between four and six (observed in situations in which children work, play, and speak freely) is not intended to provide information, ask questions, etc. (that is, it is not socialized language), but consists rather of monologues or "collective monologues" in the course of which everyone talks to himself without listening to the others (that is, egocentric language) (Piaget & Inhelder, 1979, p121).

This may be seen in a child as she is working on a drawing. Comments like, "now I'm going to colour in blue" may be heard or "I don't like this picture, I'm going to make another one instead". When these comments are not directed at any particular individual Piaget & Inhelder (1979) believed it was egocentric speech.

In Piaget and Inhelder's study (1979) on egocentric speech he found three types of speech that were common. These types are referred to as repetition, monologue and collective monologue. Berk (1992) speaks of repetition as certain syllables, sounds or echoes being repeated by a child after hearing them from another individual. This may be a teacher, a peer or family member, etc. The second stage (Monologue) Piaget and Inhelder (1979) observed when a child was alone or only communicating

with herself. Berk (1992) gave the example of a child involved in a verbal soliloquy whilst performing a task. The last stage Piaget observed occurred between two individuals. "…one child seems to stimulate speech in another, but the remarks of the second are not a meaningful and reciprocal response to those of the first." (Berk, 1992, p.19).

The fact that children often use egocentric speech in imaginary play demonstrates how the child constructs her own 'reality'. Berk (1992) noted how children talked their way through activities and fantasy play and also showed how this was linked to emotional expressions and comments. Egocentrism concerns itself with how the child views herself in the world of play and how the experiences impact on the outlook and feelings the child possesses. "Underlying all these expressions of egocentrism, it can be seen that the common factor is the subjective and affective nature of the child's view of the world" (Richmond, 1971, p.29).

The child sees herself as the pivotal figure in the imaginary play or social setting and therefore objects take on the characteristics and symbols of the child. "He credits the inanimate with feelings of his own. He believes his thoughts have the power to change events" (Richmond, 1971, p.29). This is why a child may say, "the clouds are angry" during a storm, or, "the plant is hurt" when it is cut. For the child the actions of inanimate objects reflect the actions of the child. The actions or feelings of the child are often projected on to a favorite toy.

Ultimately what Piaget was trying to demonstrate through his research is that Egocentrism is mainly due to an immaturity in the child's social skills. He believed that as soon as the child achieved sufficient social and communication skills the egocentric speech would fall away. The immaturity of the child's social skills are linked to the fact that the child was not cognitively able to understand the views of others. "The term 'egocentric' is used, not in a pejorative sense, but descriptively to refer to his inability to take another person's point of view" (Phillips, 1969, p.63). There are however limitations to egocentric thought as Phillips (1969) suggests the child battles to imagine objects from the perspective of others. This perspective therefore limits her understanding of the object and how other people relate to, or view that object.

According to Piaget (1954, p.219):

> The final stage [of cognitive development] is, on the contrary, that of a solid and vast world obeying physical laws of conservation (objects) and kinematic ones (groups), in which the subject

> places himself consciously as an element. From egocentrism to objective relativism seems to be the formula of this law of evolution.

This is a stage of abstract thought where the person would no longer tend to see the problem in concrete form and would be able to tackle hypothetical issues. Lourenco and Machodo (1996) pointed out that later in Piaget's career he saw egocentric thought more as a cognitive structure that emerges from self-regulation and thus it became seen as part and parcel of preoperational thinking.

1.2.2 Elkind's adolescent egocentricity

> Elkind (1967) proposed a model of **egocentrism** in adolescents based on Piaget's work. He states that as formal thought emerges, the adolescent gains the ability to understand an issue from another person's point of view. During the egocentric stage however, the adolescent may be self-focused, assuming an imaginary audience; for example, the adolescent boy may believe others are just as preoccupied with his appearance and behavior as he is (Gordon, 1996, p.564, *emphasis in original*).

While adolescents may be able to view themselves in respect to the world around them, Elkind (1970) suggests that some semblance of egocentric thought lives on during the formal operational stage. "The adolescent's egocentrism results from the extension of his thinking into the realm of the *possible* through the instruments of propositional logic" (Phillips, 1969, p.102, *emphasis in original*). Egocentrism in adolescents therefore tends to be caused by a lack of experience when it comes to their environment and the situations that they are faced with. The novelty of formal operational thought may limit their view of situations and the possible consequences of their actions.

Elkind (1984) suggested that formal operational thought led to the adolescent being able to understand the 'real' world and its imperfections. It is these defects that adolescents blame on adults and believe themselves capable of changing.

> He goes through a phase during which his own cerebration seems to him omnipotent, and it is at this time that he is likely to annoy his elders with all sorts of idealistic schemes designed to bring reality into line with his own thinking (Phillips, 1969, p.102).

This optimism tends to decline as the individual becomes more experienced and more 'cynical' of the world the individual lives in (Elkind, 1978). So when first faced with the realities of her environment the adolescent feels she is capable of changing it and creating a more 'perfect world' this belief however tends to change as she

begins to become aware of her limitations and the complexities of the society in which she lives.

The adolescent's optimistic view of what the world could possibly be causes the adolescent to come into conflict with the norms of society as the adolescent feels society is not living up to the world she is able to envision. The optimism is in conflict with the adult pessimism about the world they live in. This difference in perception creates a gap which is often called the generation gap. "His relations with parents and the adult world in general were seen as antagonistic and conflict-ridden, a pattern later to be designated as 'the generation gap'" (Esman, 1990, p.22). It is normally during this time that adolescents will fight against the system of society and their parents.

> I wonder if we really are going to have a full scaled revolution in this country. When they're discussing it, it all seems pretty reasonable and exciting– destroying everything and starting again; a new country, a new love and sharing and peace … I can't believe that soon it will have to be mother against daughter and father against son to make the new world (Anonymous, 1997, p.63).

This new ability to think abstractly Elkind (1984) viewed as similar to a "Copernican revolution" which makes adolescents question thoughts previously taken for granted. "Dad and Mom are constantly harping about the way I look…What it amounts to is they are so ultra-conservative that they don't even know what's happening" (Anonymous, 1997, p.40). Elkind (1984) believes this is why adolescents become more argumentative with their parents and authority figures in general. He believed that this was a natural way for adolescents to use their newly acquired abstract reasoning. Debating is not always about proving the parent wrong but rather about the debating process itself. Take for example the popular, "Why do I have to be back by ten?" Elkind (1984) says that, "Because I said so" no longer suffices for the adolescent. They want to hear a sound rational argument for the rule.

Elkind and Bowen (1979) and Enright (1980) have found evidence of the existence of adolescent Egocentrism with the use of the Imaginary Audience Scale and Adolescent Egocentrism-Sociocentrism Scale (AES). O'Conner (1995) found that self-esteem was an influencing factor in the Imaginary Audience Scale scores and therefore the results were not accurate. The AES was found not to be influenced by self-esteem and therefore a more conducive tool for testing Egocentrism. Although many researchers do not disagree with the existence of Elkind's Egocentrism per se, empirical evidence has not been able to establish a causal relationship with formal

operational thought and the beginnings of Egocentrism (Lapsley, *et al*, 1986, Vartanian, 2000) and there is the added inconsistency of gender differences and age ranges in the presentation of Egocentrism (Elkind & Bowen, 1979, Enright *et al*, 1980).

> Yesterday I remember thinking I was the happiest person in the whole earth, in the whole galaxy, in all of God's creation…Now it's all smashed down upon my head and I wish I could just melt into the blaaaaa-ness of the universe and cease to exist (Anonymous, 1997, p.1).

Physically the adolescent goes through many changes that create fluctuating moods and extreme emotional responses (Hopkins, 1983, Nielsen, 1996, Papalia *et al*, 2004). Elkind (1978) speaks of transient and abiding thoughts and how an adolescent is unable to distinguish the one from the other and she believes that a single embarrassing moment will live on in others' minds forever.

> A young person who is embarrassed among friends or acquaintances will be heard to say, 'I can't see them ever again, my life is destroyed.' The young person assumes that a momentary embarrassment will live permanently in other people's consciousness (Elkind, 1978, p.121).

It is important also to note that the multiple obstacles and changes that the adolescent is currently dealing with makes her less inclined to try out the assumptions she has about the world.

> Although he has the mental ability to test out these assumptions, the young adolescent lacks the motivation to do so. He is so preoccupied with the changes in his physical appearance and his new feelings and emotions that he has little interest in testing his assumptions about what other people think or feel (Elkind, 1976, p.110).

A youth may for example see a documentary programme or read a bit on a movement or cult and identify with what she sees. She may then become a member of this group without finding out more information or truly understanding what it entails. This may mean she dresses and calls herself part of that cult or movement but when asked, does not know the philosophy or views presented by that particular grouping.

"[A]dolescents often assume that everyone else is thinking about the same thing they are thinking about: themselves" (Papalia *et al*, 2004, p.407). This Egocentrism creates the worry of being different and an outsider in her peer group. The need to conform and identify with other peers is crucial at this stage. Thus she may begin to

change her image and presentation to correspond more closely to those of her peers. This heightened awareness of potential difference makes adolescents more aware of the 'Imaginary Audience'.

The quote below illustrates the awareness of an 'Imaginary Audience'.

> Anyway I feel closer to you than I do to even Debbie and Marie and Sharon who are my very best friends. Even with them I'm not really me. I'm partly somebody else trying to fit in and say the right things and do the right thing and be in the right place and wear what everybody else is wearing (Anonymous, 1997, p.9).

Erikson (1963) spoke about the adolescent's need to identify with her peers. He saw it as the main obstacle or challenge at this stage, that of finding out one's own identity or becoming part of a group. If one looks closely at Elkind's concept of the Imaginary Audience it confirms Erikson's view of how challenging and unpleasant it is for an adolescent to feel separate from her peers. "Whenever the young adolescent is in public, he or she is – in his or her own mind – on stage playing before an interested, critical audience" (Elkind, 1978, p.123) If she does imagine an audience it explains the need to dress, act and become cohesive to that of her group. When one looks at a group of adolescent friends together it is common to see the group similarly dressed and displaying the same behaviors. A group of female adolescents may all be dressed in gothic gear that includes dog collars, black dresses and dark facial makeup.

"Participation in fads also amounts to a kind of growth by substitution, an attempt to give the impression of inner transformation by means of outer alterations" (Elkind, 1984, p.71). With fads comes the whole idea of an image that is created rather than coming from any true belief. So rather than just being Sarah, an adolescent will try to define herself by being the cheerleader and popular girl for example. She will create her image using the correct clothes, language and acting in a certain way. So for example, if Sarah wants to follow the stereotypical role of cheerleader she may have to hide some attributes that are in conflict with the image she is trying to create. So if she's very smart and serious she may have to pretend to her audience that she's really bubbly and silly. "Sometimes I think we're all trying to be shadows of each other, trying to buy the same records and everything even if we don't like them. Kids are like robots, off an assembly line, and I don't want to be a robot!" (Anonymous, 1997, p.9).

> When the young person is feeling critical of himself, he anticipates that the audience – of which he is necessarily a part – will be critical too. And, since the audience is his own construction and privy to his own knowledge of himself, it is just what to look for in the way of cosmetic and behavioral sensitivities (Elkind, 1970, p.68).

This explains teenager's high levels of sensitivity. A mother may ask a teenager where she is going only to get the response of "You never trust me; you never let me do anything that my friends get to do". The mother in no way disallowed her to go but her insecurities and distrust in herself lead the teenager to pre-empt the mother's motives. This high level of sensitivity and need to fit in with one's peers is due to the insecurity a teenager has around a 'realistic' ability for introspection. As discussed above the teenager has not yet formed her own identity and thus feels under constant scrutiny by others (O'Conner, 1995, Everall, R. *et al*, 2005) and this creates a level of unease and discomfort in her own skin which is why the Imaginary Audience's opinions become so important to her. "The audience is important at this age, because the young person needs ratification from without, in as much as he or she cannot yet draw upon past achievements for self-approval and support." (Elkind, 1978, p.123)

"Perhaps because teenagers are so convinced that people are observing and thinking about them, they get an inflated opinion of their own importance" (Elkind, 1984, p.36). The belief that others are watching everything she does may make the adolescent feel constantly judged. Thus the adolescent may start judging herself and trying to view how others must be viewing her.

> Apparently, those who think they are special and unique come to such conclusions by judging themselves in relation to others (public self-consciousness) and by introspection apart from others (private self-consciousness) (Enright *et al*, 1980, p.113).

The idea of constantly being in the spotlight may make the adolescent begin to feel like the main part in a play just like the little child who sees herself as being the centre of all things. Playing the main part may sometimes mean that the adolescent feels foolish and stupid in her role. "Mom and Gran and Dad dabbed at their eyes occasionally and Tim kept sniffing, and of course Alex is a little girl, but me, well, naturally I made a spectacle of myself again!" (Anonymous, 1997, p.102). On the other hand feeling like all eyes are on her may make an adolescent feel confident and important.

The second fundamental understanding of Egocentrism and its applicability to the study of teenagers and risk taking is that of the Personal Fable.

> Elkind used the term *personal fable* to denote a belief by adolescents that they are special; that their experience is unique, and that they are not subject to the rules that govern the rest of the world Papalia *et al*, 2004, p.407, emphasis in original).

This logic makes adolescents feel immortal and omnipotent. There is no other that feels as much pain or pleasure, or no other that is quite as special as her. "It is a story that we tell ourselves but that isn't true. We tell ourselves, 'other people won't realize their life ambitions, but I will realize mine" (Elkind, 1984, p.36). The adolescent feels that she has a purpose in life and Elkind (1984) said that this could be seen in some adolescents' belief that they had a personal connection with God. "A raindrop just splashed on my forehead and it was like a tear from heaven. Are the clouds and the skies really weeping over me? Am I really alone in the whole wide gray world? Is it possible that even God is crying for me?" (Anonymous, 1997, p.86).

"What happens it that the young adolescent takes what is unique to himself as being universal to mankind but also believes that what is universal to mankind is unique to himself" (Elkind, 1976, p.110). Thus, a young adolescent will state that "everyone's doing it" or "all my friends get to go out until eleven". At other times a teenager may berate her parents as being unable to truly understand her position because her feelings are so "unique". Elkind (1976) uses the example of a teenage girl who tells her mother that she will not and cannot understand how she feels. He says that this is not a personal attack on her mother but merely the perception the adolescent has that no one else has ever felt the pain she feels right now and that the experience is unique to her alone.

The Personal Fable has been linked to risk taking behavior (Elkind, 1978, Rolison & Scherman, 2003). The Personal Fable however, can also lead to healthy reactions in adolescents and adults when interacting with their environment. "Given all the dangers of contemporary life, we would hardly venture outside our homes if we did not clothe ourselves in a personal fable, a shield of invulnerability" (Elkind, 1984, p.36). It allows us to live our life without constant fear of the potential dangers we may encounter in our everyday lives. A person can watch a devastating flood or hurricane on the news and feel safely wrapped up in her blanket of immortality. The idealism and energy that comes from the belief in the Personal Fable often breathes life into society and with it adolescents bring enthusiasm into the workplace or the organization that they may be a part of. "Kids need understanding, listening, caring

individuals. They need me! The coming generation needs me!" (Anonymous, 1997, p.93).

As adolescents develop and encounter more experiences they move from an egocentric point of view to that of a 'sociocentric' one (Enright *et al*, 1980). The attention moves from a focus on oneself to an outward focus on others.

> On the cognitive plane, it is overcome by the gradual differentiation between his own preoccupations and the thoughts of others; while on the plane of affectivity, it is overcome by a gradual integration of the feelings of others with his own emotions (Elkind, 1967).

The teenager is finally able to integrate her feelings with that of others and is able to get a more realistic understanding of how others truly perceive her. This is not to say that egocentric thought vanishes. Threads of egocentric thought will always be part of adult thinking just in a lesser form than what is seen in the stage of adolescence.

1.3 Conclusion

"Adolescents have a very rocky insecure time. Grown-ups treat them like children and yet expect them to act like adults…It is a difficult, lost, vacillating time" (Anonymous, 1997, p.66). By focusing on the Egocentrism of teenagers the author can better understand the thought processes, beliefs and emotions that are prevalent in this stage of their development. It is felt that it is of utmost importance that one gets an understanding of the complexity of the teenage mind. This is a challenging time for teenagers where they have to grapple with adult issues while still retaining part of their former egocentric outlooks. Thus, the author believes that gaining an understanding into the thought processes and views of adolescents will give one an understanding of risk taking behaviors.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter the author will discuss the studies conducted on the factors that might influence risk taking. The form or extent of the risk behavior will not be of significance to this study as the author's interest is mainly focused on the thought processes involved in the risk taking. Thus, risk taking may encompass severe, moderate or mild forms and be physical or mental in nature. The author will complete the chapter with a discussion on why Egocentrism as a precursor for risk taking is a relevant avenue of investigation. Once again quotes have been added, where possible, from the anonymous fifteen year old writer about her reasoning, or the reasoning of others she meets, for the risks they were involved in such as illegal drug taking, risky sexual practices, undereating and so on.

2.2 Risk taking in adolescents

Risk taking occurs more often in adolescents than it does during any other stage of development. "The frequency of car crashes, handgun deaths, and suicide in this age group reflects a violent culture, as well as adolescents' inexperience and immaturity, which often lead to risk taking and carelessness" (Papalia, *et al*, 2004, p.400). Elkind (1978), Hopkins (1983), Esman (1990), Plant & Plant (1992), Andrews and Dishion (1994), Gottfredson and Hirschi (1994), Ketterlinus *et al* (1994), Magnusson (1994), Pleck *et al* (1994), Rowe's (1994), Udry (1994), Wisdom (1994), Delignières and Sabas (1995), Nielsen (1996), Standford (1996), Tang *et al* (1996), Haiden (2002), Hook (2002), Rolison and Scherman (2002), Rolison and Scherman (2003), Papalia *et al* (2004), Carroll *et al* (2006), Chesson (2006), Michael and Ben-Zur (2006), Sinha and Cnaan (2006), Vukovic (2007) have all emphasized different areas of cause for risk taking behaviour. In this section the author will review biological and environmental factors that various researchers have found to be possible causes for risk taking.

2.2.1 Physical development

During the developmental stage of adolescence, the individual has to face many changes, one of these being physical change. Papalia *et al* (2004) discuss how teenagers undergo multiple changes including growth spurts, maturation of reproductive organs, pubic hair and so on. These physical changes adolescents experience are often embarrassing or uncomfortable. "Wouldn't you know, I got my period! Now I'll be self-conscious about that too!" (Anonymous, 1997, p.152). Udry

(1994) showed how the increase of testosterone in male adolescents was a possible factor for risk taking with higher levels of testosterone correlating with higher risk taking. Udry (1994) and Nielsen (1996) however did find that while hormonal changes and testosterone levels were in some way linked to risk taking, they only became significant factors when other causes, for example the lack of a father figure were included.

2.2.2 Body Image

During this phase of physical development Papalia *et al* (2004) suggests that adolescents become more focused on their body image and how others perceive them. Hopkins (1983), Esman (1990), Pleck *et al* (1994), Neilsen (1996) and Haiden (2002) talk about the impact society and media have on adolescents and their view of risk. Esman (1990) and Nielsen (1996) suggest that females have more difficulty with their body image due to societal pressures. Females are constantly fed messages through literature and the media that they need to be thin, beautiful and fashionable. "[B]ut maybe just before we leave and I'm thin and my skin is absolutely flawless and petal smooth and clear, and I have clothes like a fashion model he'll ask me for another date" (Anonymous, 1997, p.4). Haiden (2002) speaks about 'gender lenses' that create a stereotypical role for males and females; the stereotypical roles that society has constructed has often meant that certain risks are different for the sexes. Risks around dieting (anorexia or bulimia) or prostitution tend to predominate amongst females while physical violence and misconduct tends to happen more with males. "She doesn't like it when I look like a cow, neither does anybody else, I don't even like myself. I wonder if I could go stick my finger down my throat and throw up after every meal?" (Anonymous, 1997, p.8).

2.2.3 Autonomy

Hopkins (1983), Hook (2002), Rolison & Scherman (2002) and Papalia *et al* (2004) discuss how adolescents' need for autonomy leads to risk taking. "The teenage years have been called a time of **adolescent rebellion,** involving emotional turmoil, conflict within the family, alienation from adult society, reckless behaviour, and rejection of adults' values" (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, 2004, p. 440, *emphasis in original*). Risk taking can be viewed as a rebellion against adult society and norms. The need for the adolescent to define herself as separate from her parents may mean a 'far-out' dress sense, slang that is only spoken amongst peers and experimentation or behavior that rebels against the establishment. The need for autonomy arises from the fact that teenagers are attempting to create their own

identity and this means coming into conflict with parental values and societal pressures. “The key tension at this stage of development lies in holding together this diffuse and dispersed array of possible identifications in trying to assemble and integrate the disparate rudiments of an identity” (Hook, 2002, p.279-280).

2.2.4 Peer Pressure

“Studies of the use of drugs by young people repeatedly emphasize the importance of peer pressure in encouraging and maintaining drug use” (Plant & Plant, 1992, p.8). While there is an internal struggle within the adolescent to establish her own identity there is also a struggle to fit in and be part of a peer group. Peers become in many ways an integral part of how adolescents define themselves. If her friends are into punk music and dress she may chose to conform to her peers in order to fit in. Plant and Plant (1992), Tang (1996) and Michael and Ben-Zur (2006) all focus on peer groupings and its impact on risk taking. Papalia *et al* (2004) points to peer pressure being at its highest at the ages of thirteen and fourteen and showing a gradual decrease as teenagers began to assimilate their parents’ viewpoints again. “I don’t know how I ever got mixed up with them, but I was so pleased and felt so smart when they accepted me and now I feel miserable and ashamed…” (Anonymous, 1997, p.32). Having friends who participate in risk taking greatly increases the odds of engagement with risk.

Plant and Plant (1992) and Tang *et al* (1996) found that not only was peer pressure an indicator for illegal drug use but family drug use also showed an increase in the adolescent’s risk taking. Female adolescents were most influenced by family drug use in the research that was conducted by Tang *et al* (1996). It was discovered that when family values were different to peer risk taking then adolescents tended to take longer periods of time to convert to either one of the value systems.

> Mom and Dad flowed tears and flowers about how much they love me and how worried they’ve been about my attitude since I got back from Gran’s...I had the overwhelming desire to break down and tell them everything (Anonymous, 1997, p.39).

This indicates that both family and peer perceptions are significantly important to the adolescent and both contribute to the internal struggle an adolescent will go through when deciding to take the risk or not.

2.2.5 Environmental Factors

Risk taking is sometimes used as a way of escaping from the realities of the individual’s environment. “It’s a wonderful way to escape. I think I can’t stand it and

then I just take a pill and wait for sweet nothingness to take over" (Anonymous, 1997, p.36). Plant and Plant (1992), Udry (1994) and Vukovic (2007) all point to the fact that one parent families had adolescents who were more likely to participate in risk taking behaviors. "She said she's thirteen and that she had been on drugs for two years. Her parents were divorced when she was ten and she was sent to live with her father …" (Anonymous, 1997, p.134). Michael and Ben-Zur (2006) and Vukovic (2007) also found that if there was a relatively good attachment and open communication with the mother or parental figures, the adolescent was less likely to participate in risky behaviors.

Childhood victimization is another environmental factor that increases risk (Wisdom, 1994). "[W]hen Doris had just turned eleven her current stepfather started having sex with her…" (Anonymous, 1997, p.81). Drug taking or risky sexual behavior may be a way of escaping the painful memories of the individual's past victimization. This is also exacerbated by the fact that some individuals develop a very low self esteem due to the abusive situations. This low self esteem and questioning of one's self worth often become confused with guilt and identification with the perpetrator. "Since then she's pulled down her pants and hopped into bed with anyone who would turn down the covers…" (Anonymous, 1997, p.82). Wisdom (1994) and Sinha and Cnaan (2006) found low self esteem was often linked to participation in risk taking. Having attention from your peers, interest from the opposite sex, or the feeling of belonging one gets from drug taking is often an avenue that makes the adolescent feel accepted and boosts her self confidence for short periods of time.

Other environmental factors were found to contribute to risk taking amongst adolescents. Udry (1994) for example found male adolescents with low grades at school were more likely to drink alcoholic beverages compared to their peers with higher grades. Vukovic (2007) shows how having a higher weekly disposable income than normal led to adolescents participating in risky sexual practices 2.8 times more then the norm. Sinha and Cnaan (2006) found that increased religious perception and religious behavior was a protective factor for adolescents and therefore decreased all risk behaviors except sexual practices. The fact that sexual practices was the only risk religious adolescents participated in was postulated (Sinha and Cnaan, 2006) as being due to the potential perception of religious adolescents that sexual practices were linked to a higher emotional connection with the other person involved.

2.2.6 "High Discount Rates" and Hyperactivity

"Our theory begins by examining the nature of criminal, deviant, or delinquent acts. All such acts have a characteristic property: They produce immediate benefit while running the risk of long-term cost" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1994, p.41). Chesson (2006) spoke about 'high discount rates' as linked to risk taking which means the adolescent discounts the long term risks to herself because she is focusing on the present. Thus, these adolescents tended to make behavioral choices which they regretted in retrospect. This may be due to the fact that the adolescent battles to think of her future or has not factored in the reality that preferences may change over time. "They never talk about what they want out of life, or their families or anything, just who's holding, how much bread they'll get next year, and who has the least crumbs, at the moment, and will they cover" (Anonymous, 1997, p.63). Standford *et al* (1996) and Carroll *et al* (2006) found that higher impulsivity tended to be linked to risk taking. The adolescent tended to act without considering the possible implications and thus when a situation presented itself the involvement in the risk would be instant and not properly thought through. Adolescents with higher levels of hyperactivity (Magnusson, 1994, Carroll *et al*, 2006) also tended to be involved in more risk taking events. Magnusson (1994) suggests however, that the hyperactivity may have been biological in nature due to low adrenaline secretion and this may have been the underlying factor. So a need to increase the adrenaline secretion may cause an adolescent to take part in risks and this may present itself in a similar fashion to being hyperactive.

2.2.7 Self Control

"Oh damn, damn, damn, it's happened again…Anyone who says pot and acid are not addicting is a damn, stupid, raving idiot, unenlightened fool!" (Anonymous, 1997, p.72). Carroll *et al* (2006) speaks of lack of self control amplifying risk taking due to the fact that the individual does not have the means to set limits for herself. For example, an individual with the ability to control her behavior or risk would have a limit when consuming alcohol or define boundaries for what sexual activities she is willing to participate in with her boyfriend. Carroll *et al* (2006) suggest that some individuals battle to control themselves and thus participate in risky behavior due to their inability to create limitations for themselves. Ketterlinus *et al* (1994) noted that sexually active adolescents were 1.5 to 4 times more likely than virgins to participate in non-sexual risks. Thus, it could be postulated that a lack of adequate self control in general tends to surface not only in sexual risk but non-sexual risks as well, and individuals who are involved in some types of risks may display a higher level of risk

activity in general due to an inability to control their behavior. Plant and Plant (1992) suggested that adolescents may be more prone to risk taking due to the fact that they have not developed the necessary experience needed to understand their limitations and thus individuals may push the boundaries to find out their limitations and breaking point.

Rolison and Scherman (2002) suggest that the way adolescents perceive their control over the consequences of risk is a key variable in risk taking amongst them. Some adolescents have an internal locus of control, this is when the adolescent perceives herself to be in command of what negative and positive consequences might occur and can take responsibility for the outcome of the risk. Rolison and Scherman (2002) found some drug addicts could recognize the risk in their behavior whilst others had an external locus of control. An external locus of control is when the adolescent perceives consequences as unrelated to her risk taking behavior. [T]oday I sold ten stamps of LSD to a little kid at the grade school who was not even nine years old…The thought of nine and ten year olds getting wasted is so repulsive" (Anonymous, 1997, p.47). Rolison and Scherman (2002) reported that these individuals thought themselves invincible and unlikely to be affected by addiction or Aids. "If the risk ends in disappointment, even tragedy, this will frequently be ascribed by the protagonist to 'bad luck' or to external factors" (Plant & Plant, 1992, p.113). Thus individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to carry on taking chances even when negative consequences arise, due to their belief that it is merely bad luck and therefore a once off occurrence for that particular risk.

2.2.8 Sensation Seeking

Some individuals participate in risk taking activities due to the pleasurable sensations they experience. "Smack is a great sensation…I felt gentle and drowsy and wonderfully soft like I was floating above reality and the mundane things were lost forever in space" (Anonymous, 1997, p.58). Rolison and Scherman (2003) conducted a study on college students and how different variables affect risk taking. "Strong associations were found between both illegal and legal drug use and sensation seeking" (Rolison & Scherman, 2003, p.691). Plant & Plant (1992), Ketterlinus *et al* (1994), Delignières & Sabas (1995) and Rolison and Scherman (2002) all speak of sensation-seeking as one of the factors that correlate with higher risk taking. Rolison and Scherman (2002) found the thrill and adventure seeking subscale was the highest predictor for individuals participating in risky activities. This suggests that many individuals participate in the risk activity for the 'good' bodily sensations it

produces such as the “high” of drugs, the adrenaline rush when climbing a mountain without safety equipment, or the physical enjoyment of sexual intercourse. Gottfredson & Hirschi (1994) suggest there is a combination of the pleasure principle involved in risk taking combined with an inability to see the negative long-term effects. Thus, long term consequences are overlooked for the short term satisfaction the risk provides.

2.2.9 Self Medication

Plant and Plant (1992) suggest risk taking may go further than just creating a pleasurable experience for an individual, it may at times be a way of self medication. They suggest that individuals with psychological disorders may use illegal drugs for example to help them control the side effects of the disorder. So a depressed individual may choose to take illegal drugs that will lift her mood and create euphoria. “[S]he’s given me hearts a couple of times when I’ve been really low” (Anonymous, 1997, p.41). In addition, Plant and Plant (1992) and Ketterlinus *et al* (1994) suggest some individuals are more genetically predisposed to illegal drug taking or risk taking.

2.2.10 Biological or Psychological Traits

Biological or psychological traits as described by Andrews and Dishion (1994), Rowe (1994) and Plant and Plant (2002) are possible reasons for a dependency on illegal drugs or risky behaviors. Rowe (1994) speaks of a “trait phenotype” which is a term used to refer to a personality disposition that has become enduring over time. Thus if an adolescent tends to “blow up” and get angry at the slightest provocation she may be seen as short tempered. “He’d been in Group One a couple of times, but always got sent back because of his temper” (Anonymous, 1997, p.139). This reaction has to happen over a long period of time and also be a reaction that is common for it to be a “trait phenotype”. Rowe (1994) noted that individuals who were predisposed to risk taking due to certain character traits were more likely to participate in the risk when belonging to a peer group of similar character traits.

Andrews and Dishion (1994) looked at “microsocial behavior patterns”. These are moment to moment interactions with people or the environment. These interactions can change and adapt to the situation and the outcome of a previous exchange, however over time some patterns become habitual as the environment may encourage that response. Negative patterns may occur if an adolescent is confronted by negative interactions with others in her environment. An adolescent may at one stage in her schooling make a funny remark in class and receive a positive response

from her peers. Over time she may learn that acting up and playing the class clown gets her positive attention from her peers and it may become habitual and part of her makeup even when it is no longer an effective interaction. So what may at times begin as a way of coping with environmental issues may over time become ineffectual and sometimes limiting or harmful to the individual. "Rosie was upset because she felt the kids were ignoring her and they all told her why she wasn't easy to be with: because she tried to monopolize people and was always clinging to them and hanging onto them" (Anonymous, 1997, p.138).

2.2.11 Conclusion

The author has looked at some of the general views in the field of research for risk taking behavior. Although the author was unable to include all views and reasons for risk taking it is hoped that the literature reviewed gives one an understanding of the complexities of risk taking behavior. While each view was spoken about in isolation Hopkins (1983), Esman (1990), Plant and Plant (1992), Gottfredson and Hirschi (1994), Ketterlinus *et al* (1994), Udry (1994), Widom (1994), Nielsen (1996), Tang *et al* (1996), Rolison and Scherman (2002/2003), Papalia *et al* (2004), Carroll *et al* (2006), Michael and Ben-Zur (2006), Sinha and Cnaan (2006) and Vukovic (2007) all indicated that the reasons for risk taking were linked to multiple causes. Therefore the author wishes to state that risk taking behavior is multifaceted and often there is more then just one cause for participation in risk taking. The next section of the chapter is going to be focused on the author's avenue of investigation, that of egocentricity and its links to risk taking.

2.3 Egocentrism and risk taking

2.3.1 Personal Fable

Rolison and Scherman (2003) identify decision making as a factor of risk taking. "Adolescents may not sufficiently consider the possible consequences of their actions, and they may have a perception of invulnerability to consequences" (Rolison & Scherman, 2003, p.690-691). The egocentric outlook that he/she is immortal and special may cloud the adolescent's perception of the dangers involved in the risk taking. It may cause the adolescent to feel that the risks are real to others but is an external problem. Elkind (1984) called this belief the "Personal Fable". It is one of the specific risk factors that I will be examining in this research.

"According to Elkind, this special form of egocentrism underlies much risky, self-destructive behavior" (Papalia *et al*, 2004, p.407). This immortality and uniqueness creates a belief in the adolescent that she will not suffer the same fate as others. She

may also feel that she is less deserving of punishment than others. “The sense of uniqueness may give rise to recklessness if it is thought of as ‘others will get hurt and die but not me.’ Young men who play ‘Chicken’ in cars may think this way. Likewise, young people may experiment with drugs under the mistaken belief that ‘other people will get hooked, but not me’.” (Elkind, 1978, p.27)

2.3.2 Imaginary Audience

If one looks at the risks and violent actions of adolescents one will note that the actions tend to be more elaborate or attention seeking then those of their older counterparts. The risks taken will be more about pleasing the audience or making a strong statement that gets the adolescent noticed. “Unlike theft, vandalism results in no material gain for the perpetrator. There is an emotional gain, however, that is gleaned from the reaction of the imaginary audience” (Elkind, 1978, p.124). An example of how the Imaginary Audience could possibly impact on the adolescent is when she may be suicidal. An adolescent may talk about how all the people who were mean to her at school will feel sorry for what they have done and never be able to forgive themselves after she is gone. This is just one of many ways the Imaginary Audience affects the adolescent and her possible risk taking. However, suicide will not be looked at in the research report, it is merely used as an illustration.

2.3.3 Conclusion

The Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience are two aspects of risk taking that the author is interested in investigating. Both the Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience may have other contributing factors to the reason for the risk taking. For example an adolescent who is very reliant on impressing her peers and wanting to fit in may take more risks with the Imaginary Audience in mind. An adolescent who believes herself to be immortal and unique may choose to participate in a risk impulsively because of her Imaginary Audience. Thus, it needs to be remembered that the causes of risk taking cannot be seen as separate and unrelated. In the following chapter the author outlines the research design. The author focuses on data collection, data gathering tools, sample size, data analysis and lastly the ethical considerations.

Chapter 3: Research design

3.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters provide an overview of the complexities of risk taking and the theory of Egocentrism. On the basis of this exposition the author believes that the research methods need to provide an in-depth understanding of the thought processes of adolescent females and risk behaviors. Thus, this chapter will explore the use of the qualitative paradigm in research using thematic content analysis. Data capturing using semi-structured interviews and commentary from a focus group will be used. The focus group will be given the transcripts from the interviews and asked to categorise the information. Thus commentary will be in the form of written statements linked to the transcript read or evoked through the group discussion of the data after analysis has been completed.

3.2 Qualitative research

This research is focused on how adolescents construct and perceive their risk taking and its links to Egocentrism. "[T]he social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated; and that their model of a person is an autonomous one, not the plastic version favored by positivist research." (Cohen *et al*, 2000) Qualitative research takes the approach that in order to understand the phenomenon one needs to understand how others have perceived it. For these reasons the author has adopted a qualitative approach to this research.

The qualitative approach to research attempts to gain a rich, deep context about the information under observation. "Interpretive researchers start out with the assumption that access to reality is through social constructions such as language" (Smit, 2001, p5 or p69). The author's interest lies in how adolescents perceive risk and how Egocentrism is constructed and articulated through the adolescent's use of language. The qualitative approach is seen as being more insightful (Smit, 1995; Smit, 2001); allowing the researcher a deeper understanding of the individuals in context. This is done by attempting to understand the symbolic representation of themes through the data collected. Thus themes and the understanding the participant brings to the interview, are of interest and can allow a richer more dynamic understanding of the theory being researched.

3.3 Procedure

3.3.1 Sample Selection

The author chose to select her participants using convenience/haphazard sampling. "**Haphazard sampling** is a non-probability sampling technique whereby the sample of subjects selected is based on convenience and includes individuals who are readily available" (Christensen, 1994, p.65, *emphasis in original*). This choice of sampling was based on time constraints and monetary limitations. Three grades were primarily looked at, Grade eight through to ten. This was once again due to convenience and the need to draw the majority of the sample group from young adolescents where Egocentrism is said to be higher (Elkind, 1970). No participants were excluded from participating due to age considerations.

In School A ten participants were used. The only stipulations given when asking for volunteers was that the individuals had to have participated in some form of risk taking and be in Grade nine or ten. Initially the group that volunteered was self selected. From this larger grouping the numbers were reduced by the Deputy Principal who selected ten participants. Thus the sample group was a convenience sample and not randomly selected. The selection was based on creating a fair ethnic grouping of individuals. While this was a consideration when picking the group it is important to note that the sample group was not a true representation of the population at large.

School B's participants were included in the sampling grouping as a secondary form of data collection. School B had a group of six which was reduced to five after one participant chose to exit the research. The author gave a short talk informing the Grade eights what the research was about and that risk taking behaviour was to be looked at. The grouping was once again a self selection process and from there the group was picked by the principal, looking at individual diversity. This was not only based on ethnic difference but also personality difference. These participants were asked to read the transcripts gathered from School A and add comments or thoughts in the form of written comments on the transcript itself or in the group discussion. So although separate from the sample group in School A, School B's participants were used to gather more information or insight into adolescent risk taking.

Both schools were chosen because of their geographical location. Both schools have a similar religious ethos which may have impacted on the research and meant that the majority of both sample groupings were of one religious grouping. The schools

were both private which meant that socio-economically the sample groups tended to be from a middle to a high income bracket.

3.3.2 School A

Initial contact at school A was with a teacher who worked at the school in question. This teacher later approached her principal to discuss the research and the school's possible participation in the study. Telephonic contact was then made with the principal and a meeting was set up. A condensed version of the research proposal was given to the principal as well as a copy of the letter of consent to parents/guardians, participants and principal (Appendix A.1.1, A.1.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.2.1, A.1.3, A,1.3.1). A copy showing the basic questions that were going to be asked was also included (Appendix B and C).

Letters explaining the research and the ethical considerations of the research were distributed by the school from the original copy given. This was done after the deputy principal spoke at the general assembly about the author's research and asked for any interested volunteers. From the girls who responded and showed interest the deputy principal narrowed down the names of the girls to ten participants. The author was asked to come in on chosen days after school hours and during this time had interactions with both the principal, deputy principal and the initial teacher contacted, all of whom accommodated the author by offering an empty classroom or board room for the interviews. It is important to note that due to absenteeism some of the individuals chosen initially to participate were excluded and the Deputy Principal replaced these individuals with other interested individuals.

Interviews and feedback with School A occurred from September through to October of 2007. The interviews were conducted over a period of three days. Three participants were seen during each of these after school sessions, and the interviews had a duration of approximately half an hour each. One participant was seen in the morning before school due to a difficulty with transport on the day she was meant to be seen. At the end of three days of interviewing, ten participants had been seen. A week after the interviews were finished the transcripts were brought to the participants where nine of the ten girls were present. They were all given a chance to read through their personal transcript and make any amendments or disagree with any statements made. Some participants asked to be allowed to keep their transcripts. This was agreed to and a discussion was held around confidentiality and safe keeping. Six transcripts were returned by participants who were unwilling to keep them. Business cards with the author's contact details were handed out and a

reminder that the contact information had appeared on the letters given to each participant at the commencement of the process. Participants were reminded that if any individual changed her mind about participation or wanted to see the completed research report she should contact the author.

3.3.3 School B

In school B the author set up a number of meetings with the principal where ethics and the author's requirement for fulfilling the Master's degree were discussed. It was decided in these meetings that this school would be used for the focus groups needed and the author was to make contact with the grade head. A condensed version of the research report up to that point was given along with a copy of the letter of consent to guardians/parents, principal and participants (Appendix A.2.1, A.2.1.1, A.2.2, A.2.2.1, A.2.3, A.2.3.1). Within this folder the author gave copies of the material that would be used in teaching the participants how to use thematic content analysis as well as a copy of the lesson plan around Egocentrism (Appendix D).

The principal informed the author that the Grade Eight group would be the convenient group to work with. A time was given for the author to come and present her research to them, and at which time they were told what participation would entail. This included the days, how long the sessions would be and what activities would be carried out. It was reiterated by both Principal and author that participation was voluntary and that no individual would be prejudiced if she did not choose to participate in the study. Volunteers were asked to come forward and write down their names and the Principal informed the volunteers that six participants from the list would be chosen by her to gain a greater mix of individuals.

A session lasting one hour was conducted with all six individuals present. The following week a session of two hours was conducted with five individuals as one participant had withdrawn because of other commitments. These sessions occurred in September, 2007. At the beginning of session two confidentiality forms were completed around material seen (transcripts from individuals in School A) and participants were reminded of the fact that they could choose not to answer all questions and that they were free to leave at any time if the material or process became too difficult for them. At the end of the second session the author mentioned contact details and spoke about the fact that participants could ask to see the finished research report or could choose to view the transcript of the discussions by the focus group.

3.4 Data gathering tools

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A short questionnaire was used to obtain information on race, religion, age and so on (see Appendix B). This was done to gain a clearer idea of the distribution of age and race amongst the sample group. This questionnaire was given to both School A and School B. The individuals were told that they were not obliged to answer all the questions in this section.

3.4.2 Interviews

The author conducted 10 individual interviews using semi structured interviews with participants at School A. "In general, researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain a detailed picture of a respondent's belief about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic" (Smith, 1995, p.1). The open-ended questions focused on adolescents' rationalization of risk behavior. The author was interested in the though processes around the risky event. The author explained that she was interested in mild, moderate or severe forms of risk taking and gave the participants examples of the type of risk taking that may be entailed.

At the beginning of the interview it was reiterated to each participant that participation was voluntary, that the interview could stop at any time the participant felt uncomfortable, and that she was not obliged to answer any questions that she found sensitive in nature. The author made it clear that she was not interested in the risks the adolescent had participated in but rather the thought processes behind the risks and therefore the participant at no time needed to vocalize the risk activity itself. The questions (see Appendix C) were asked and from information given the author would ask further questions based on answers given to create greater clarity.

3.4.3 Focus Group

Lastly a focus group of a final number of five was used from School B. The author was interested in investigating how the focus group would analyse the data and interpret the information given by School A's participants. "Focus groups are contrived settings, bringing together a specifically chosen sector of the population to discuss a particular given theme or topic, where the interaction with the group leads to data and outcomes" (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p.288). The idea of the author was to gain individual perspectives from School A and for School B to give a group perspective on risk taking, thus making the data a closer representation of 'adolescence' rather than of individuals. The focus group was therefore used in two

ways. First, the transcripts of the interviews conducted from School A were split amongst the group. The transcripts had been altered by the author in any instances where the individual may have described the risk taking activity or given some information that may have breached confidentiality. The individuals in the group read through the transcripts highlighting any information they considered to be similar to the theory been looked at. Each individual in the group wrote down reasons for categorisations next to the highlighted text. This could be in the form of how she perceived Egocentrism and the themes around that or what she thought the individual she was reading about was attempting to say. After this task was concluded the individuals in the group spoke to each other about the information read and discussed similarities or differences in the information gathered. This gave the author more information on the group's understanding of risk taking and Egocentrism.

In order to obtain the results required the author conducted two sessions. In the first session the author spoke to the focus group about categorising information into separate groupings and finding evidence of this in the data. The author explained that individuals did not always agree on how certain parts of the text were to be categorised and at times one piece of text may actually fall under more then one category. An example data analysis was then done using a portion of a novel[2] entitled "The Dandelion Diary: The tricky art of walking" by Margot Black. Four relevant themes from the novel were given; individual's positive responses, individual's negative responses, negative community responses and positive community responses. These themes looked at the author's reactions to her disorder and her communities' responses. A particular colour was introduced for each theme so that each individual could highlight the text in the relevant colour to the theme. After each individual had finished analysing the text the author and the group went through the information and as a group categorised the data. Any difficulties were spoken about and the author gave the individuals time to ask any questions or voice difficulties the individuals had experienced. A hand out explaining Egocentrism was given to the group (Appendix D) for them to become acquainted with the theory and the session was concluded.

In session two the theory of Egocentrism was discussed extensively with the group. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, in order to categorise the data the focus group needed an outline of the different themes being looked at and an

[2] The novel's theme was different to the research being investigated due to the fact that the author did not want to influence the final data analysis

understanding of the themes so that they could accurately analyse the data. Secondly, given the author's interest in using School B as a focus group to discuss the information received and its links to Egocentrism and risk taking, the focus group needed to be aware of the theme or topic of discussion. This was followed by the participants looking through the transcripts of the interviews. The participants each looked at two transcripts and in all ten transcripts were looked at. The participants wrote down any comments or reasons why they thought a piece of information may fall under a particular heading. The participants also wrote about any thoughts they had on the possible reasons the individual being read about may have participated in the risk. An hour and 20 minutes was given for this and at the end of the time due to time constraints the participants had to leave any unfinished work.

The last part of session two was taken up by a discussion around the information read as a group. The five participants came together and discussed what had come up in the information from the transcripts and how they understood it as an adolescent group. "Hence the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge – the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda can predominate" (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p. 288). The participants spoke about the main reasons for risk taking and their perception of why certain things had been done. The author asked questions or probed a little further around information given that she found important to fully understand how the group as a whole saw risk taking.

3.5 Data analysis

Content analysis is a tool used to understand the data collected. It is a tool that goes further then merely looking for recurring words or themes but attempts to gain a more intense understanding of the data obtained by looking at the symbolic representations. Zhang (2006) and Stemler (2001) speak of content analysis as looking at interpretations and the multiple meanings of the data rather then merely categorising words and sentences. This means that the data has to be taken in context to the participant's views and understanding of the questions. For each participant this may mean a different point of view or understanding and content analysis enables the researcher to use the potentially differing or similar information to create a richer understanding of the theory being looked at.

The author used Thematic Content Analysis to capture relevant data. "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). This means that the author was interested in

interpreting and categorising the participant's interviews and the focus group interview into separate themes. Four themes were of interest when analysing the data; Egocentrism, the Personal Fable, the Imaginary Audience and an overall theme categorised as other that looks at any information about risk taking that fell outside of the first three themes. School A's transcripts were analysed and categorised into these four themes by both the author and the focus group (School B). These four themes were then discussed by the focus group and the author used this information as a further form of analysis.

Ultimately it is hoped that the sample group (School A) and the focus group (School B) will provide a more integrated representation of Egocentrism in risk taking that may be indicative of the wider adolescent population. Krippendorff (1980) suggests that the analysing of the data is not about understanding the physical events but rather capturing the "symbolic phenomena". Thus, the goal was not to get caught up in the surface factual information being given but rather attempt to understand the more imbedded beliefs and thoughts that are hidden behind the factual understanding.

Specifically this research was looking for particular themes (that of Egocentrism, the Personal Fable, the Imaginary Audience and other aspects of risk taking). This form of thematic analysis is a deductive or top down approach. "When dealing with *a priori* coding, the categories are established prior to the analysis based upon some theory" (Stemler, 2001, p.3, *emphasis in original*). This data capturing will commence with the focus group who will add comments or explanations to the themes given by the author. The information obtained through the focus group interview will add an extra dimension to the data collection. The author will then categorise data and comments which add a deeper understanding of the data. In places the author may not agree with the participants' (focus group) categorising and this may add a fresh perspective to the data and aid the author in understanding it more. At times however the categorisation may be incorrect or the author may see the information in a different way; in this case the author will illustrate the difference or if no sense can be made of the way the participant has categorised it the author may chose to ignore it.

3.5.1 Ethical Considerations

This study focuses on individuals. Thus, the author had an obligation to her subjects to be open, trustworthy and to ensure that the study did not affect any individual in a negative way. "This awareness, focusing chiefly, but by no means exclusively, on the subject matter and methods of research in so far as they affect the participants, is

reflected in the growth of relevant literature and in the appearance of regulatory codes of research practice formulated by various agencies and professional bodies" (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p.49).

Before beginning with the research the author obtained the consent of the relevant parties. This included the schools, parents of the participants, the participants and finally The Ethics Committee of the University of Witwatersrand. "The principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination" (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p.51). The participants were free to choose whether they were willing to be part of the study. No coercion took place and their rights were reiterated not only in the letter to parents but in the talk given to both schools, before each interview or session.

Cohen *et al* (2000) speak about the right of the participant to privacy. The semi structured interviews with School A was conducted by the author and no other officials or individuals were present during the interview process. The author would have suggested external help if any participants displayed ill effects from the interviews or sessions. This was made clear to both groups of participants and suggestions were made as to the various organizations with which they could get in touch. Each participant in School A was given the opportunity to view the transcripts and retract any information that she did not want to share.

Confidentiality was guaranteed to all the participants in the study. No names were mentioned. The schools remained anonymous. Given the fact that the individuals in the focus group at school B worked with the information from each interview at School A, the identities of the persons interviewed were concealed. All participants signed confidentially agreements about details of the research. No background history or distinguishing information was given about the individuals interviewed. The author also chose to delete parts of the transcripts that gave any information of the type of risk or where it may have occurred. Neither schools were made aware of the other's participation.

Lastly, the author ensured that all participants and affected parties were aware of the study and what it entailed. There was no deception and all relevant parties were given the option of reading the final draft. If at any time a participant felt she could not continue with the study, she was thanked for the time already given and for making the effort to phone and make the author aware of the unforeseen circumstances.

Chapter 4: Results and discussion

4.1 Introduction

The results will be broken up into four main categories, that of Egocentrism, Personal Fable, Imaginary Audience and Other. The 'Other' category will encompass any additional causes for the risk taking behaviour the participant was involved in. The initial theme, 'Egocentrism' was not included in the interview questions but the author identified aspects of Piaget's Egocentrism in the responses of the participants and thus, this theme was included. The Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience were the two themes the author focused on predominantly in the interviews. The author did not focus on possible causes outside the theory in the semi-structured interview although the participants were asked at the end of the interview if they felt any other reasons for the risk taking had not been spoken about; thus category "Other" was not given as much focus in the interview process. This category was added so that if risk taking is not linked to Elkind's form of risk taking the author would have a better understanding of the real causes. It was also included because the author believes risk taking does not have a singular cause but is rather due to a number of factors that are interlinked with each other. Quotes used from participant's transcripts were not altered in any way and thus at times the quotes used may have grammatical inconsistencies, slang or may use informal dialect.

4.2 Background history

As discussed above there was a range of racial and cultural groupings though not a true representation of the South African population as the highest grouping was Caucasian. It is also important to reiterate the religious affiliations both schools have which meant a large portion of the participants were Roman Catholic. The ages ranged from thirteen to eighteen with the majority of the participants falling into the fourteen- and fifteen-year old age group. The sample groups were collected from grades eight, nine and ten.

4.3 Results

The results were gained from the ten interviews conducted with School A as well as the comments written and discussed by the focus group. The responses from the individual interviews will be labeled Participant A through to Participant J. Participants from the focus group were not seen as individuals but rather as a representation of a group of teenage females thus any responses either written or spoken will be labeled

'focus group'. This is also due to the difficulty of distinguishing the different voices of the individual participants (from School B) during the transcribing of the focus group discussion and thus it is advantageous to use a label that distinguishes the group rather than an individual.

4.3.1 Egocentrism

This theme looks at Piaget's terminology and thoughts on Egocentrism in its original format. While it was not a theme that was looked at specifically, data was found to indicate that in some cases semblances of egocentric thought from preoperational thinking was still in place. Thus the author thought it a viable avenue to explore as it indicates the original form of Egocentrism may transcend the cognitive structures of development. It is the idea that an individual does not merely move from one cognitive level to the other in stages; that there is rather a transition phase where some aspects are expanded on and others remain in the former phase of development. Therefore an individual may have the cognitive ability to understand a poem in abstraction but still be on a very concrete level when it comes to mathematical literacy.

4.3.1.1 Participants' Responses

The aspect of Piaget's Egocentrism that was seen in two participants was the inability to see the risk taking behavior as potentially harmful to others. Participant C spoke about the fact that her parents were more hurt at her risk taking then she ever would have anticipated. "I got back and my mom was in tears". She had anticipated her parents as potentially being upset to a lesser extent. "I thought they would be, 'what you did that! No way! Tell me the whole story' and then say, 'okay, just give me some time' you know give them a day or two…" Instead she indicated that her parents had been 'very disappointed' and that they were 'overwhelmed' at what she had done. She had not conceived of how damaging her risk taking would be to her parents. When asked why she had not anticipated that response she merely indicated that she had not really thought about it. Her main thoughts had been around getting in trouble and being told off. It is interesting to note that although this idea is very much part of Piaget's understanding of the egocentric thought process it also has a lot to do with how Participant C constructed getting caught by her parents. While Participant C had envisioned her parents response to her risk taking it had been linked to how it impacted on her rather than them. It is therefore also linked to Elkind's theory of the Imaginary Audience.

Participant G indicated that in retrospect she felt she should not have been involved in some of her risk taking because of the impact on other people. "…more people got hurt in the process. And I lost a lot of people". When asked if Participant G had considered the impact her actions would have on others she gave a response very similar to Participant C, "No I wasn't actually thinking about that at the time. The only thing I thought about was if my mom finds out, what's going to happen". Once again the thought was more on repercussions for herself rather than on others.

Piaget's concept of egocentric thought was not seen amongst all the participants. For example Participant A spoke about the main reason she did not participate in some risks was owing to the possible impact it would have on her parents. "Um, when I think about my personal safety I think more about what are my parents going to think if something happens to me…it would be more about 'shame' putting my parent's through all of that".

4.3.1.2 The Focus Groups' Responses

The focus group showed consensus with the author around statements above. The group however also thought that the fact that individuals justified their risk taking by saying nothing bad happened so it was okay was linked to egocentric thought. One individual in the focus group said, "She thought just because she had done something wrong … by not getting caught, and by having her friends on her side that everything is ok, because she never died or was really bad". There were similar views from others in the focus group, all of whom agreed that not caring about the risk taking from a moral aspect was a type of egocentric outlook. This view is an intriguing one as all participants in the focus group were united on this point. Therefore, not considering the participation in a risk and what that indicates about oneself is part of Egocentrism. It also goes back to one of the questions the author was interested in looking at in this research viz., of 'How does a teenager view risk taking and does it enhance or detract from her view of herself?' The focus group indicated that these individuals did not perceive themselves as 'immoral' or 'bad' in terms of their behavior but rather focused on issues like good or bad repercussions as an indication of the outcome of the risk on themselves. Participant D stated, "…I thought like it's just a risk and it kind of worked out at the end because I didn't get caught. So I don't really feel bad at the end for what I did." That comment substantiates the focus groups' view that egocentric thought blocks the individual's capacity to be self reflective on her behavior. This thought is linked to the Personal Fable given the fact that the individual feels so unique and special; she feels that moral norms to not apply to herself. Therefore, even though the focus group chose to

classify the behaviour under the theme “Egocentrism”, the author believes there is justification for including the behaviour under the theme “The Personal Fable”.

4.3.2 The Personal Fable

4.3.2.1 Participants’ Responses

The author was looking for any indication from participants in the study that they perceived themselves as different, special or unique compared to their peers. All participants in the individual interviews spoke of having some aspect of the Personal Fable influencing their perceptions of their world and taking part in risky behaviours. Each participant saw this ‘special’ or ‘unique’ qualify as either being part of their personality, developmental stage, a concrete representation or as an external factor.

In terms of her personality only Participant C described herself as being ‘different” and “weird”. Participant C spoke about how this uniqueness was misunderstood and had expected people to be impressed with her ‘difference’.

> I thought that they would look at me and like, amazed like, wow she’s made something, wow she’s different, she can give us something like advice or something like, normally you get those people that talk to you and you’re like ‘I understand you know’ I thought that they would have that type of reaction to me.

This view that others would be able to recognize her uniqueness and “special”-ness is very much connected to her Personal Fable that makes her perceive herself as an individual that can help and enlighten others. Her view of herself and what she has to say seems to often come into conflict with reality. Participant C speaks of people being really “objective”[3] and “judgmental” or friends having a ‘ja, whatever’ attitude to her news. What is interesting about this is that Elkind (1970) described Egocentrism in adolescents as potentially being due to a lack of experience. He believed it was eventually overcome owing to a gradual integration of others’ feelings and views. Perhaps over time with many interactions with other people and experiencing her limitations the adolescent discovers that she is not as special or unique as she originally perceived herself to be.

Participant I, also spoke about difference although in her case she did not ascribe it to personality factors but rather her cognitive ability. “Um, not different, just like I’m a lot more intelligent than 90% of the people that are my age…I’ve never been able to talk to people my own age ever. I have to move down to their level”. This difference from others left her feeling unable to connect or identify with her peer group. “I just

[3] Participant C used the word ‘objective’ in place of ‘objectionable’

felt disconnected, I felt like that's them and this is me. Like I was in a parallel universe; coinciding but never meeting". In some ways Participant I found her Personal Fable rewarding and she described her private moments with her thoughts as being "blissful" at times while at other times she found her thoughts 'dark' and 'dull'. The need however to connect with others her own age made her experience of her uniqueness difficult. "I was so sick and tired of being you know, the odd one out'.

Participant F believed herself less at risk from the potential consequences than friends because, "Well my friends are all very sheltered people. I don't think that they would be able to handle the situation as I would have." Participant H and E displayed similar reasoning ascribing their differences to the fact that their friends were younger or less mature and therefore not able to handle the situation as well. Characteristics like being more observant or having an ability to remain calm in a situation were seen as reasons why they were better able to confront risks. Participant C said that she had been 'raised right' and that this protected her from any potential consequences of what she had participated in.

Participants C and J both viewed the ability to control their impulses as another reason why they had perceived the risk as less threatening. Participant J indicated that the risk was worse for others, "[b]ecause people just go overboard". This perceived idea that one is able to control herself was seen as flawed as Participant C indicated that she had ended up losing that control. In both cases participants felt others did not have the same internal resources to control the risk taking and its consequences. The view that others are more fallible than oneself is interesting given the fact that although Participant C did suggest that she had lost control of the quantity of risk she took, however she had still indicated that she had the ability to control her level of risk taking.

Some participants saw external factors as having protective or shielding power. Participant B felt safer in her home environment, "[i]t's not really a risk, I feel safe at home". The consequences were seen as diminished given her surroundings and being in a familiar and 'safe' space. Four participants felt being with friends shielded them from possible threat. Participant D perceived her friend's previous experience with the risk and her ability to "get out a situation" as the reason why they wouldn't get caught. "The thing with me is that I could have easily got caught but with a friend, depending on the friend, there's some who would never get caught you know…".

Three participants perceived their risk taking at the time as being due to the developmental stage of adolescence. Participant B saw adolescence as a time for

experimentation which was supported by Participant J. Participant B's view of the reasoning behind experimenting was however quite different to Participant J and linked to the Personal Fable. Participant B spoke about the fact that experimenting with certain risks later in life would lead to addiction and "more trouble". Participant B believed that her youth gave her the ability to control any possible risk. What makes her statement more interesting is the fact that the participant indicated that the risk had occurred on a number of occasions. Given the risk was not a singular experience but rather becoming a habit it may be argued that the potential for addiction or trouble is present and her youth does not exclude her from the outcome. Thus her perception of her safety at this point may be linked to her own Personal Fable.

Participant D and Participant J both indicated that they had not known the consequences at the time and their possible immaturity had led them to taking part in the risk. These responses were in contrast to later information that did indicate their understanding of the risks and the consequences. It may therefore not be linked to a lack of ignorance but rather a difficulty with understanding why they had behaved in that way or a difference in the way they both assimilated the consequences. Participant J did link her lack of knowledge with immaturity and later added to her understanding of her risk taking at the time with, "…at that stage I didn't have so many bad thoughts in my head of the bad consequences". This points to an interesting idea that the Imaginary Audience may be linked to the Personal Fable and that as the individual experiences more of life she is able to think through more consequences that have been assimilated or accommodated into her thought processes. Thus 'the film that runs through her head' of the interactions she will have becomes more closely linked with reality and possible consequences.

The idea that the Imaginary Audience may be linked to the Personal Fable (see later discussion) was also indicated in Participants A, B and F who all believed that their safety from risk was linked to their ability to act out the role in their minds. This is similar to playing out the responses of the Imaginary Audience in one's mind to see their reactions. Participant A gave the example of being approached by a 'dingy oke' and how she would think up the best approach to extract herself from the situation. She said that she "thinks before she acts" and has the ability to remain observant. In Participant B's case she had envisioned a whole scenario around her risk so that she would know how to behave if she was caught. She said she had worked out the situation to the point where she knew how to hide her risky behaviour and how to cover it up. Participant E believed that being more observant than her friends led to

her being safer. The idea that they are always on the look out and are aware not only of the real situation but also have the ability to think through the 'best' solution, lends itself to the participants' feeling safer and adding to their Personal Fable of invulnerability.

Participant E and Participant G were the only participants who described their Personal Fables in an almost tangible way. Participant E spoke of being "disguised" by her friends as they were acting almost like a shield of invisibility for her so that she was safe from getting caught. While she quite confidently said, "they wouldn't be able to spot me"; she did indicate that she had been laughing, talking and drawing attention to herself. Thus, her Personal Fable made her feel invisible and safe from the harm of getting caught which allowed her to be very theatrical within her group and to the people around her.

Participant G described her feelings of being safer and protected from harm with a physical representation. "I played it around and said, 'I'm in a bubble, I'll be fine, nothing can harm me'." She had said that she had survived previous difficulties in her life and thus she could survive any pain. Her perceptions of herself seemed to be linked to a view of herself as indestructible almost like an impenetrable bubble. The physical and visible idea of a protective bubble makes the Personal Fable more concrete. This is also once again linked with an ability to visualize this presence and play it out in one's mind. Participant G may have called on that image of the bubble when scared, to feel safer and more protected, similar to the way Elkind (1984) explained the Personal Fable when he used the words "a shield of invulnerability".

The author speculates that potentially all individuals in the study had the belief in the Personal Fable but to some it was less tangible and harder to explain. All participants except one spoke about not thinking of the consequences for themselves when taking part in the risk behavior. Participant E said that, "I walked into it". Others spoke about being "impulsive" or not thinking about the consequences as though the risk was too removed from their reality to be present in thought. This may be due to the fact that internally they felt protected for the range of reasons given above and thus the consequences did not need to feature in their decision making. When asked to voice why each participant viewed her risk as less risky many battled to verbalize the reasoning which is possibly why it may have been conveyed through personality traits or external objects. The difficulty is describing something that is so abstract in form, which is what makes Participant G's responses fascinating. She has constructed a tangible, concrete representation for the Personal Fable that of a

‘bubble’ that protects her from harm, something that she can withdraw into when consequences or events become too real.

Some participants were able to see the fallibility and the reality of their own Personal Fable and generalize this perception of oneself to the greater population. Participant A had the insight that, “Ja, I think at any time of your life you always kind of think well like getting cancer, I’ll never get cancer”. Participant A is illustrating the thought that the Personal Fable is not restricted to adolescents (Looft, 1971 and Frankenberger, 2000), but rather always with us in a potentially lesser form. Participant I was able to recognize her own justifications for her risk taking by saying, “…everybody does it, its human psyche. Its like, ‘ja well I only drink beer not Stroh rum because that’s dangerous…I’ll only have sex with guys with condoms, I’ll never have sex without because that’s dangerous. God it’s the same thing”. Part of her was able to see how people attempted to make excuses for their risks or minimize them by looking at bigger risks and saying that they will never get to that stage or that their consequences will never be as serious.

Participant A said, “[o]bviously when you’re doing it you don’t realize it. You think that, hey it can’t happen to me and stuff like that but it can, you just don’t, now that I can see you know, I can kind of see that its not.” There is an indication that the Personal Fable is able to override other thought processes when decisions are taken impulsively. Having time to think over all the possible risks may give the individual time to better think through all the consequences and thus time may actually diminish the Personal Fable in some way. Participant H gave some indication that this may actually be the case, when she spoke about thinking, “this is never going to happen to me” she also said that as time went on with a particular risk she was participating in she became more fearful of the consequences and that the thoughts around getting caught became bigger and more worrying than when she had first thought it. “In the first two weeks I was, ‘well if she catches me I’m grounded’ but then in the third week I started thinking, ‘oh god, if she starts catching me now!” Participant H expressed this change in thought as a stressful one and she spoke about the fear of the consequences “getting worse” and that this started “getting on me”. This may indicate that the Personal Fable is a transitory state of mind and that the reality of the situation and consequences does become a factor if the individual has the time to process the risks and the consequences.

The idea that the Personal Fable diminishes over time is linked to Participant J who said that at the time of participating in the risk she had not had as many bad thoughts

in her head and had spoken about the world being a safer place back then. This was interesting as the incident had only occurred the year before and thus although improbable that society had greatly changed and become more dangerous over this short period, it could be that her perceptions of the risks and consequences have begun to override her Personal Fable. Elkind (1970) speaks of the Personal Fable peaking in early adolescence and then gradually reducing as the adolescent grows older. What these findings may be indicating is a reduction in the Personal Fable both over a short period when the risk is continuous and over a longer period of time as a result of maturation in the cognitive processes of formal operational thought.

It is interesting to note that participants did not show any indication or acknowledgement of the moral implications of their risk taking behaviours. There was an indication that as long as one was not caught the individual did not feel bad for the risk taking. Elkind (1984) speaks about the adolescent feeling that her uniqueness and difference means that social norms are not relevant to her.

4.3.2.2 The Focus Groups' Responses

One participant of the focus group discussed how the interviewed participants had seemed to have considered the fact that they may get caught on one level but this tended to be outweighed by the thought that it would never happen to them. This shows that there is some conflict within the participants about the consequences versus their Personal Fable when deciding on taking part in a risk. On a rational level the participant may be able to see the risk aspect of her behaviour but on an emotional level she sees herself as immortal.

4.3.3 The Imaginary Audience

In this section the author was interested to establish if the participants model their risk behaviour on the perception of how others will view them and their reactions to the risk taking. The author was interested in both positive and negative perceptions of other's reactions and how this influences risk taking. In addition the author wanted to know whether the participants' perception of the Imaginary Audience's response was in fact realistic to the eventual outcome if they were in fact found out or if they did tell the people in question.

4.3.3.1 The Participants' Responses

The author felt it may be helpful to begin with some examples of how the 'Imaginary Audience' was played out in the minds of the participants. Participant A spoke about envisioning all the differing ways of telling her friends about the risk taking and trying

to decide which was best. Therefore she used the 'video' in her mind as a tool to create the response she wanted from her audience. While Participant H used it to think about telling her friends and how interested they all would be almost like she was 'daydreaming'. Participant G explained it as, "…I would sit on my bed and then I would go, 'okay this is what I did' and then move to the next side and say this is what he's going to say". So Participant G played out the scenario thinking about how she was going to tell the person involved and his possible reactions. While Participant G used the image of her 'audience' to help her cope with the reality of the situation Participant A used it to create the most positive reaction. "Sometimes it's like showing off, oh, I (*redacted*) this or I did that. You think about telling your friends and how they would react and stuff like that." She went on to talk about how she used the thoughts to help her with the presentation of the material, "..you think of the appropriate things so you can get the answer that you want". So these two examples demonstrate that Elkind's "Imaginary Audience" is very much a part of the process of risk taking and behaviour in general.

Elkind (1978) spoke about the adolescent perceiving the 'Imaginary Audience' as one that may be critical of her dress sense, appearance and behaviours. Participants A, D, G, H and J all spoke about their perceptions of the risk as normal for their age grouping and that taking the risk for some was a way of fitting in. Participant D said, "it was something cool to do" while Participant H and J spoke of everyone doing it. Participant A discussed how her view of the "Imaginary Audience" had made her become involved in one of the 'fad groupings' and this meant dressing up and acting in a particular way. She said it even influenced her perception of her parents at that stage. "Like I hated my parents and all that junk you know." Participant A very clearly stated that she had never been pressurized by her friends to do this but rather the need to be like them had been the influencing factor. Participant C was the only individual to say that her approach to the risk and her behaviour during the time was in sharp contrast to how her friend would have handled the situation. She did however indicate that people's perceptions of her had been important while carrying out the risk.

The need to fit in and be a part of the group is where the power of the 'Imaginary Audience' comes into play. Participant G demonstrated this when she said, "I didn't want to stick out, and be an individual, people always asking me questions. Did you do this, did you do that? I didn't want to go, 'no I didn't do that'. I'd rather have done it than lied about doing that so I didn't want to stick out like a sore thumb." The fear of being different to her audience of peers made Participant G want to take the risks

that would make her fit in more. In her mind she perceived herself as 'sticking out' and a 'sore thumb' and her discomfort with being different made her recreate herself as closer to her perception of a 'normal adolescent female'.

Participant H saw her risk taking as a way of increasing her status. She spoke about wanting to be seen as a leader in her peer group, "I wanted to feel cool, like feel like above them." So when going through with the risk behaviour Participant H was envisioning her friend's responses and how it would elevate her position. Her view was reinforced by the fact that her friends did respond the way she envisioned and they wanted to follow her lead, "…we must do that some time. We must come to your house and do this, this and this". So the Imaginary Audience was influencing Participant H's view of the risks as she saw it as a way of creating an image of herself as a leader. Participant H did indicate that in retrospect she was at this point unsure of whether their responses had really been a true representation of what they had thought of her risk behaviour. This was reinforced by the fact that the same peers had later been persuaded and "manipulated" into following her lead.

Both Participants E and J admitted that the reaction of their peers was a deciding factor when judging whether a risk was worthwhile or not. Participant E admitted that, "Um, ja, if they had been more negative about it, then I would have been like no I'm not going to take the risk but because they were so, 'oh sure, no problem' it encouraged me more". Participant J said that her peers had informed her that she shouldn't have been doing the risk in question due to the possible consequences. Thus, she said that she wouldn't take part in that risk behaviour again as she agreed with her peers that it was not worth it.

During her risk taking Participant C said that she had been worried about what the group she was with thought about her. The group was unknown to her as she indicated that this was the first time she had been in their presence. This may have made it more difficult for Participant C to gauge their reaction to her risk taking as she had no background history of the group to construct a realistic idea of what their expectations or views were. Participant C said that she felt 'judged' and that the group had been, 'really objective'[4] towards her. This left her feeling 'out of place' which was in sharp contrast to what she had envisioned their reaction to have been. Participant D saw the risk as a possible thing to add or speak about to her peers. "It's an experience that I can tell". Both Participant C and D spoke about wanting to share the risk taking event with their group of friends. Participant C said that she tried to tell

[4] Participant C used 'objective' to signify 'objectionable'

her friend but had given up after her friend displayed little interest. Participant D also admitted that her risk taking had not meant much more attention was focused on her as her group saw it as a 'common' risk and was thus not as interested as she had anticipated. Participant D did reiterate the fact that her risk taking was something she could tell people about like a good story and so even though she may not have induced the response she wanted at the time she pointed out that it was something she would always have to share with people.

The idea of taking the risks to engage or draw the audience's attention to oneself was also seen in Participant A's case. She admitted to the fact that her risk taking was linked to the need to draw attention to herself whether good or bad. Participant A felt that taking the risk would help her relate more to her peer group. She also admitted that for her older friends she was more interested in getting attention. "…I had older friends who would say, you should really stop it and stuff like that. And I would like hearing that they would just make me like, I don't know; feel like, like it, you know, like I was doing something because I'm getting attention from everyone". So even though the attention she was receiving was negative attention Participant A found it an influencing factor in her risk taking behaviour.

In Participant J's case the 'why' of the behaviour was looked at as she indicated that her best friend, "…was probably, going to be a little disappointed in me but then, speak it through with me like she always does and try and think why I did, or whatever". This demonstrates that the risk taking becomes a way of the Imaginary Audience helping the individual in understanding her thoughts and reasons for her actions. So although she was aware that her best friend's reaction was going to be a negative one, her focus was on being understood and being able to work out her internal struggles with another peer. Participant J began the interview by saying that her English was bad. She did struggle with communicating thoughts, "Maybe, I don't know". It may therefore be that Participant J struggles to communicate thoughts using language and thus has to demonstrate frustrations through actions. In this way she uses another individual in the form of her best friend who can verbalize the possible reasons of her own risk taking.

Participant I was the only individual who spoke about using the 'Imaginary Audience' as a way of getting back at her audience. She spoke about the fact that she would "fantasize" about the reactions of her audience and making them pay for the pain they had caused her, "Hard fact, I wanted them to be guilty, I wanted them to hurt".

Her experience was almost like an out of body experience looking down on the audience and judging their various reactions.

> I kept having these thoughts of my mother, seeing me, crying. I was ja, serves you right, serves you right. You should have listened to me. I like wanted to do it just to get back at her. And then I envisioned my sister and like, envisioned her, I was like, 'ja, you should have helped'.

This fantasy extended to her peers as well, with her saying, "…I wanted them to know, 'oh shit we did this'". She said that thinking about the Imaginary Audience had become almost habitual, "I use to fantasize a lot about it". Playing out that 'video' in her head had almost become a way of releasing some of the angry thoughts she had about the various people in her life and had become a way of coping with the aggressive elements within herself.

Although all participants spoke about the Imaginary Audience contributing to their risk taking most also had an experience of the Imaginary Audience being a possible deterrent. This tended to take the form of the parental figures although, as has been discussed earlier in Participant J's experience, it was also linked to peer responses. Participant B was the only individual to speak about the fear of how she may come across during her risk taking. She was fearful of losing control and looking ridiculous to her audience. Her fear led her to asking her friends to look after her and "stop me or send me away" if she did anything she would not normally do.

All participants, except one, indicated that they were worried about one or both of their parental figure's reactions. Participant B, E and J spoke about the thought of how their parents may respond if they found out as being very 'scary'. Participant B said, "Oh, they would kick me out of the house, they would kick me out of the house. It's like um, ja they would kick me out of the house." Looking at her statement one can see the anxiety of Participant B by the amount of times she reiterates the one thought. Participant E said that her parents were very strict and would, "[p]ut a lock on my door and never let me out". Participant J said that her parents would, "… probably shoot me. Kill me, ja". Although the author suspects that the parent responses may not be nearly as severe as described by the participants it does allow one a view of the 'video' playing out in each participant's mind when confronted by the risk.

As seen in the paragraph above the Imaginary Audience is not always a contributing factor to the risk behavior but can act as a deterrent. Participant C spoke about her mother's reaction to her risk staying with her and making her aware of the risks she

took. She spoke about the fact that her parents had raised her in the correct manner and that she appreciated it and this allowed her to “take the responsibility and uphold it”. In this case this picture of her parents as the Imaginary Audience may be enough to deter future risk taking behaviors for Participant C as in the case of Participant J.

Most participants had a picture of their parental figure’s negative response and yet this did not deter them from taking part in that risk. Participant J did indicate that she weighed up each risk and her parent’s reaction to that risk before coming to a conclusion. So, if in her mind the negative reactions of her Imaginary Audience outweighed the positive, then she would not participate in the risk. Participant B also suggested that one risk in particular was taken because her parents were not around and her fear of them finding out was diminished. However this was not the case for the rest of the participants who took the risk in full awareness of the negative responses they may get from family.

Participants A, B, D, E, F and H all received the positive responses they had envisioned from their peers although both Participants B and D indicated the response was not as enthusiastic as they would have liked. Participant D also admitted that it had not created the impact she had hoped for. It did seem on the whole however that these participants had a more realistic and accurate view of their audience when the audience was peers. Participant F said, “[t]hey laughed. We all laughed. We spent the whole morning just, every time they looked at me they couldn’t comprehend what I did”. Participant H had a similar experience with her peers saying, “’are you stupid, are you crazy!’ you know but we would laugh and we’d all laugh about it”.

Participant E indicated that with certain individuals she was aware of their possible responses and so did not need to imagine their reactions or play out the ‘video’ in her head. This goes back to the point discussed earlier in the chapter around the Personal Fable and how it diminishes with time. Participant E perhaps did not need to play to her ‘Imaginary Audience’ because she had a fair idea of what to expect in reality. When asked if those specific individuals had reacted as anticipated, Participant E said they had. Participant J said that she had not attempted to imagine the reactions of certain people whom she did not know well enough only those who were close to her. So in her case she only imagined the response when she had a good idea of what their reactions would be.

Participant C displayed an inability to properly recognize all of her ‘audiences’ responses as she indicated that both the unknown group, her friend and her parents

gave very different responses than anticipated. This was similar to Participant G who was expecting a positive response from her peers and had instead received a negative one. In Participant A's case she indicated that she was not always correct when judging responses, "Ja sometimes when I tell them about something and they'll be like really shocked, like when I expect them to be like, that's really like, that's really cool, ja, and they'll be 'oh no, no no you did not just do that!''.

Lastly, some individuals indicated that the envisioned response of the Imaginary Audience was sometimes used to help them decide who to tell. Participant A said that some individuals would have thought, "she's such a freak', and stuff like that and I would never want that type of response from people", this was similar to Participant D who merely said that she had been selective with the people she told. Participant G said that if she thought an individual or group would judge her she did not tell them and had only told the individuals whom she had perceived would have a positive response. There were similarities to Participant H's story as she said that other people who were not her friends would have reacted differently.

The Imaginary Audience encompasses more then just one's peers and family but rather a greater audience made up of the society the individual lives in. So while the individual speaks merely of the immediate peer group or family members she may be trying to gain the attention of others. As Participant E indicated in her behavior when she was out with her group she felt protected and was "out there" and "in the moment" making herself very visible to the people surrounding her even though this was contradicted by her earlier view of her being invisible to the relevant individuals. Participant B spoke of being "loud" and "all over the place" and that she had been "very out there" during her risk taking.

4.3.3.2 The Focus Groups' Responses

One individual in the focus group when reading through Participant E's transcript wrote,

> She didn't feel loved, and she might have thought that nothing is getting solved because what she did was basically because of what and how they were reaching towards her, and therefore she had done what (she forgot the 'she') did because she thought they would see how she felt deep inside and everything would maybe have changed

This comment was an interesting one given the fact that when the author read the same transcript she was unable to see what information had led to this individual's comment. Therefore the comment may have been more about the individual writing

than the participant been read about. To this individual in the focus group the risk taking was seen as a possible way to show the 'Imaginary Audience' her pain. In the discussion with the focus group this point was spoken about and one individual said, "You feel better doing it because you basically thinking yes they're going to find that I'm doing it but are they actually going to find out why or are they just going to be like 'oh, your grounded'." So the risk taking in this case has become a tool for indicating to the 'Imaginary Audience' (who in this case is the parents or guardians) an internal struggle or conflict. The message the adolescent is trying to convey does not always lead to resolution as the 'why' is not looked at.

All individuals in the focus group spoke about peer pressure seeming to be the main cause of risk taking and its links to the Imaginary Audience. One individual said that friends seemed to be the main influencing factor when considering the Imaginary Audience and that, "its like the parents didn't matter". This is consistent with Erikson's (1963) view that during this age of development peers are the main influencing factor in identity formation.

The focus group believed that most individuals were interested in impressing people outside their grouping.

> Almost like you want to impress everyone around you not just your group. I mean mostly your people because your group has influenced you and have been there for you and you think they will be there to the end. Bu I mean, it's mostly, also like, how it was pointed out, it's not actually just those people, you're trying to make attention for everyone around you because you know everyone is going to see it.

This means that the 'Imaginary Audience' is more then just close friends and family but rather all people in the vicinity, as one individual in the focus group said, "a more popular group" for instance.

4.3.4 Other Aspects of Risk Taking

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the author believes it important to discuss all themes that emerged in the material concerning reasons for risk taking. In this last section the author wishes to look at some themes that are not derived from the theory outlined before but were still influencing factors for the individuals interviewed. It is important to note that the author did not focus her attention on other aspects of risk taking and thus any other possible reasons for risk taking that are not seen below are not necessarily excluded from the participants' reasoning for the risk taking but may not have been covered in the questions asked by the author. Some of

these reasons may resonate with the theory and thus there may be some overlap of previous information.

4.3.4.1 The Participants' Responses

All participants admitted to some form of peer pressure. This could simply have been friends asking them to participate in risk taking or otherwise influencing them. Participant I spoke about, "I think I wanted that, because a lot of me just, I was so sick and tired of being you know the odd one out". Others felt it was the normal thing to do and wanted to be seen as part of that grouping as Participant D demonstrated when she said, "…it was a no care attitude because I wanted to fit in ja, because so many people had done it. It was something very common".

Participant A and I both spoke about taking part in the risk in an attempt to almost self-medicate themselves. Both admitted to being depressed at the time. Participant A said she began taking part in the risk after a friend had said it made her feel better. She said, "so I thought, 'why not, I feel like really aggro with everyone'. The risk to her was a way of alleviating some of her more aggressive feelings. Participant I said that it allowed her space to get away from her thoughts. Participant F spoke about being in a different environment which had led her to feeling lonely, bored and needing freedom and thus her risk had been a way of alleviating these feelings.

Participant B saw experimentation as being an influencing factor of risk taking. "I just wanted to try it so I decided to try it". Participant D saw it more in the light of trying something different. Once Participant G had started taking part in the risk she said she had wanted to experiment in order to learn and understand more about the risks. Participant J said that, "[y]ou've got to take risks to experience things and no matter what it is you're still a teenager who tries everything". So to her experimentation was part of the stage of development she was going through.

Rebelling against authority was also seen as a reason for risk taking. Participant A said that her parents sometimes made her very angry and that they tended to 'blow things out of proportion' so she did not feel their rules or warnings were always justified. Participant B said her parents' warnings only made her want to try the risks more. Freedom from parental rules was also mentioned as being a part of the need to rebel. The moment Participant B was given more freedom she used it to take part in some risks her parents had warned her against. Participant E also spoke about the need for freedom and being suffocated at home due to overprotective parents. This led her to telling 'white lies' in order to get away with more. She spoke about the fact

that she had been fighting with her parents at the time and this had led to her wanting to try out this risk which ended up being a once off occurrence.

It was evident in the comment of the risk having a good outcome and luck being on her side that Participant D had an external locus of control. Rolison and Scherman (2002) spoke of the external locus of control being linked to risk taking behaviour. Participant H said that not getting caught had made her continue her risk taking. Not getting caught had made her feel like a 'pro'. When asked if she felt she was unlucky to have been caught she said that yes it had been a fluke as that night in particular her mom had changed her regular routine. Participant I spoke about the fact that she felt she did not have control of her life anymore and could not "handle" all the things that were happening. All the difficulties were placed on external people and on life in general and there was no indication of the problems having internal origins.

Impulsiveness was seen in Participant C, F, G, H and I's case. Participant C said, "…you just get caught up in the moment". Participant I spoke of the fact that she was impulsive and that she thought impulsively and acted impulsively and she spoke of it as 'just doing'. Each individual spoke about not really thinking through the risks at the time and having jumped into the risk without properly evaluating the consequences or outcomes. Impulsiveness was linked to a lack of self control. This was especially seen in Participant C's case as she was unable to control the amount of risk she took after she had started participating in the behaviour. Participant H spoke about her relief at having been caught by her mother because if not she would not have been able to stop her risk taking as she did not know how.

Sensation seeking was discussed in Participant B, D, F, G, H and I's case. Participant B said, "it was good, it felt good" and this was linked to her trying it again in the future. Participant F and G said that they thought it might be a fun thing to do. Participant H said, "[i]t was more a thing that because I had fun, I wanted to do it again". Participant I said the feelings and sensations she experienced while taking part in the risk were wonderful and that since stopping her risk taking it was the sensations she missed the most.

Attention seeking was also a major aspect of risk taking as seen in all participants. In Participant A, D and H's case, attention seeking seemed to be a predominant factor. Participant A said, "I was just looking for attention". Participant D spoke about hoping the risk would bring her attention and give her something that could capture the attention of her peer group. Participant H wanted to gain the attention of her group so

that she could be perceived as cool and someone the others would look up to and want to follow.

Participant G and I indicated that the environmental factors had influenced their decision to participate in certain risks. Participant G explained it as, "…before I did all this stuff I had family issues and stuff. I kind of said to myself, 'well you're buggered already'." Participant I said that her home, school and social environment had all been giving her problems and all her 'bad relationships' had eventually led her to take part in the risk. In some way as spoken about in the Imaginary Audience section Participant I viewed her risk behaviour as a way of getting back at the relevant parties. The risk taking was also a way of escaping from the difficulties of her environment, "[i]t's a breakaway from reality".

4.3.4.2 The Focus Groups' Responses

The focus group did not add any new points to the data categorised in this section except parental involvement which can be viewed in the last paragraph of this section. The author has added some of the comments individuals in the focus group made about various reasons for risk taking. The focus group similarly to the author believed the main reason for risk taking to be peer pressure. They spoke about individuals wanting to 'fit in' or being pressurized by others. One individual explained it as, "[i]t's peer pressure. They want to fit in and also most of the information was very influenced by their friends or they were influencing their friends". Another individual said that, "[j]a, the girl in mine was being influenced by her friends even though they knew it was wrong…". Peer pressure was also seen by the author to be a main influencing factor. Interestingly enough one individual in the focus group said that with the Imaginary Audience the main influencing factor was, "[m]ainly friends…it's like the parents didn't matter". It seems therefore, that during this stage the participants in the study found peers to be the most important influencing factor.

Environmental factors was another factor that was looked at in the discussion. One individual spoke about the fact that the participants tended to focus on the "negative things in their life". This pessimism she felt was one of the reasons the individuals participated in risk taking. Another individual suggested that the risk taking behavior was linked to a call for help from the participants, "…they did that because of situations at home or because of situations at school but because it was their way of calling out for help". Attention seeking was linked to the need to call out for help and the need to look good to one's peers. So while it was discussed that the risk taking could be linked to getting some attention from parental figures as a form of calling out

for help it was also suggested that the risk was a way of making participants' feel 'proud' amongst their friends. The individual acknowledged that this form of attention seeking did not seem to be very effective, "[a]nd then they go home and they don't understand and they going to ground you and your not going to get what you want out of it and meantime at the end of the day your left there wondering why this has happened to me". What is also interesting about this individual's reflection was that although she was initially talking about the participants read about she ended her thought with the word 'me' which may suggest that in actual fact the individual was discussing herself.

An individual in the focus group spoke about the fact that the participants being read about didn't care about the risks and what would happen to them. The participants seemed to live in the moment and discount the possible moral judgments in question, "they're not very worried that it happened". This could be linked to the theory of high discount rates which Gottfredson and Hirschi (1994) discuss which suggests that adolescents discount future consequences for current satisfaction. Therefore, the participates may be more interested in the short term gains of taking the risk and not reflecting on the long term consequences or the moral aspect of it.

A new theme of parental styles were brought up by the focus group as another possible reason for risk taking. One individual said that having parents who were lenient in their discipline was a potential harm, "I fear that, thinking that your parents won't freak out or do anything makes you, why not just carry on doing it?" Another individual suggested that very strict parents were also likely to be a reason for risk taking, "sometimes um, they are so possessive, they are trying to secure you so much and you feel like you have to break free and this is a way of getting out of their little rut". This is linked to the need for autonomy and freedom as the adolescent is attempting to find herself and develop her own distinct personality separate to that of her parents. So the need to participate in the risk was seen in some cases as a rebellion against the individuals parental figures, "[l]ike they would get quite attached to it because they were like, ha ha my parents don't know". One individual said that someone she knew had the most overprotective and strict parental figure and yet she was the most rebellious amongst her peers.

4.4 Conclusion

This results section allows the reader to see how complex and integrated risk taking and its causes are. The author has attempted to highlight each theme and get a better sense on how adolescents perceive the risk through their thought processes.

The author looked at both the participant's of the interviews and the focus groups responses to gain better clarity on the similarities and differences on how each perceives the risk and the consequences.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In the concluding chapter the author wishes to revisit the research title, 'egocentricity and physical risk taking in female adolescents' and discuss whether the questions posed have been sufficiently answered. Thus the author will look at whether the results from the research conducted give credence to the theory that egocentric thought plays a role in female adolescents' risk behavior. This chapter will also provide an overview of the findings from the research. The author also wishes to discuss the limitations of the research and the possible impact these limitations may have had on the research findings. From the results found the author suggests potential areas for future research and what factors would be more constructive in future research in this particular area.

5.2 Results

In this section the author wishes to look at the four themes discussed in the results chapter and highlight the key aspects seen in each. In doing so the author wishes to show the evidence of egocentric thought during each participant's participation in the risk taking. The author wishes to draw attention to some of the results found in the research and how this information can add to the Elkind's theory of Egocentrism in its current form.

The author found that certain individuals in the study still showed some form of egocentric thought as described by Piaget. Two individuals spoke of how they had not been able to see the potential consequences of the risk on others. Both individuals had been centered on themselves and had therefore found it difficult to accurately reflect on the impact of their actions on those around them. This was not the case throughout however as one participant spoke of how certain risks would impact badly on her parents/caregivers and thus she would never participate in them. Another interesting definition of what egocentric thought encompasses came from the focus group; that of not having the ability to view oneself as immoral or irresponsible when one participates in a risk. This thought was also linked to the Personal Fable. This is due to the fact that the individual believes she is unique and thus social norms do not apply to her.

The Personal Fable was documented in all interviewed participants. What was interesting was how each individual defined her Personal Fable. The individuals tended to see their immunity from consequences in a number of ways. Reasons like personality, personality traits, cognitive ability, external factors, the developmental stage of adolescence were all given as reasons. Two individuals were unable to explain what had made them feel impervious to the consequences. What was fascinating was that two other individuals believed that they were impervious due to a concrete representation of their own Personal Fable. In the one case this was in the form of a bubble which the individual felt protected her from harm. In the other case the individual felt she was invisible, that her friends almost shielded her in a cloak of invisibility.

The author speculates that the Personal Fable is not always so tangible or concrete for the adolescent and tends to take the form of a feeling of immortality or being untouchable. All except the two participants who had physical representations of their Personal Fable battled to formulate in which way they were unique or different from a peer or someone else in the same situation. Most individuals spoke about taking part in the risky behavior without thinking or impulsively. This suggests that the Personal Fable may be an unconscious aspect of oneself and thus when the risk presents itself the individual has a feeling of safety and immortality but does not cognitively name that feeling or rationalize it.

The Personal Fable and time was another interesting aspect of the information obtained. Time seemed to influence the individual's view of her Personal Fable and the consequences around the risk. It seemed that if the risk was continuous that the individual's Personal Fable became less influential and the individual began to rationalize the potential consequences and outcomes of her behaviour. Some individuals also showed an ability to relate the Personal Fable to society in general. It was suggested by participants that the belief that 'nothing will ever happen to me' is a normal one and is seen often in society. This was interesting as these same participants believed in their Personal Fable although they perceived the fallibility of this device in society as a whole.

Some commonalities were seen with the Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience. First, both were influenced quite strongly by the emotive state of participants. This was seen when individuals spoke about not being understood due to their uniqueness or difference in the Personal Fable for instance. Imagining the 'audience' brought about feelings of anger, pride or made individuals feel a greater

sense of belonging. What was also very explicit in both the Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience was how most participants engaged in these practices through mentally imagining them. In both these themes participants showed a considerable amount of playing out the scenario or behavior in their minds 'like a video'. So for instance, Participant G imagined a bubble around her and was able to visualize it in her head. Some participants suggested their ability to overcome any consequences were linked to the ability to think up many scenarios in their heads and play out possible responses. This indicates that the participant feels safer if she is able to 'handle' the consequences in the scenario she plays out in her head.

This 'video' was one of the main features of the Imaginary Audience with it being used as a tool to try multiple ways of communicating to get the reaction wanted, imagining responses, or using it as a coping mechanism when trying to deal with a difficult situation. What was common amongst the majority of the participants was an image of what a 'cool' or 'normal' adolescent was. This image played a significant role in influencing participants' risk taking. Envisioning the response of these 'normal' or 'cool' peers made the participants more likely to carry through with the risk.

All participants were able to identify their use of the Imaginary Audience in their thought processes. The Imaginary Audience tended to be constructed of two groupings: peers and parental figures. When picturing the reactions of parental figures all participants but one indicated 'scary' or 'bad' responses. Some participants seemed to have a picture of a very severe Imaginary Audience. Participants tended to picture the consequences given by their parental figures as extreme with very vivid thoughts of being "locked up" or "kicked out". When peers were the audience the responses tended to be positive with some participants expecting the risk to elevate their stature in the group or allow them to fit in more. Between these two groupings the peer groups tended to be the most influential when deciding on whether to take the risk. There was some indication of the Imaginary Audience encompassing other people. Other peers or people around the adolescent during her risk taking were also seen as an audience viewing her performance.

Most participants demonstrated an ability to know their audience, being able to decipher accurately how their peers or family may respond. Others however, had envisioned very different responses to those they received. In general individuals who were very close to their peers or had past experiences with similar situations tended to gauge the response more accurately. When the individuals were new to

the participant she tended to gauge the reaction less accurately. In some cases there was no need for a participant to imagine her audience due to the fact that she was certain of a predetermined reaction. The participant was selective in the audience she chose to imagine. Thus her preference tended to be individuals to whom she was close and so could attempt to imagine a viable reaction or a reaction that would enable her to feel better about herself. Some individuals did choose to imagine an audience that was new to them. Participants also used the Imaginary Audience to determine which individuals would most likely give them the most favourable responses. If the individual potentially perceived a negative response from her audience she may also refrain from sharing the risk with others. This was not the norm however, rather individual reactions or views about the 'Imaginary Audience' and its uses.

What is interesting is that the 'Imaginary Audience' does not always merely play the role of influencing factor or deterrent for the individual. At times it may be used as a way of seeking help. In the individual's mind for instance there may be the thought that the risk taking will be seen by the audience as a cry for help. So she may play out the scene and imagine the response of the 'audience' (in the form of parental figures) to the risk taking. It may also be used as a tool for coping or dealing with aggressive or angry feelings as seen in Participant I's case. She thought about her 'audience' and how she would get back at them until it became almost a compulsive thought.

The author also looked at influencing factors that were outside the theory being looked at. In the catergory "other aspects of risk taking" a number of influencing factors were picked up. The main factor that was seen amongst all participants was peer pressure. Other reasons were self medicating, experimentation, autonomy and rebellion, having an external locus of control, impulsivity, sensation seeking, attention seeking, environmental factors and high discount rates.

5.3 Limitations of the Research

First, for the sake of convenience the author used a very limited sample group. The sample group only consisted of ten participants and five participants in a focus group. While there was some ethnic diversity, the majority of individuals were Caucasian. Both schools were similar in that pupils tended to come from the middle to high income bracket, they were both girls' schools, and both had the same religious ethos which meant that the majority of participants were from the same religious grouping. This means that the sample group was not a true representation of the general

population. Any of these factors could have influenced the responses of the participants in the research study.

The second possible limitation is the fact that the participants volunteered to participate in the study. The self-selection process may have meant that the individuals being interviewed had their own agendas for volunteering. Being part of the research may have been seen by them as an avenue for seeking help or simply being able to talk freely about the risks without having any judgment placed on them. The author suspects this may have been the case as only a small number of individuals indicated that they did not often participate in risky activities. The remaining participants all indicated through the interviews that they had participated multiple times in risk taking. During the initial stages or after the interview some individuals brought up the fact that the author was studying educational psychology and spoke of the interview in a way that suggested the process had been cathartic.

The author hoped that the focus group (School B) would add more depth to the information given by the interviewed participants (School A). The author felt that the focus group did not add as much as initially hoped. This may have been due to the limited time constraints, which may have meant that the focus group was not allowed sufficient time to immerse itselves in the transcripts and the theory of Egocentrism. The group discussion at the end was also limited due to time constraints, which meant that participants were not given enough time to voice potential differing/similar views and opinions.

The author was interested in gaining information about Egocentrism and risk taking thus the questions asked during the interview tended to focus on the Personal Fable and the Imaginary Audience. Christensen (1994) speaks about the Hawthorne effect affecting the validity of experiments. The view is that a participant in a study will act a certain way because she may believe the researcher expects it from her. Thus, the participants may have been led into answering the questions in a certain way because they believed that was what the author wanted. In this case participants may have felt that the author was expecting them to agree with something said or to view things in a certain way. Thus, the information obtained may not be an accurate description of the reasons behind the risk taking.

Lastly, Christensen (1994) speaks about the “Experimenter Effect”. This is when the experimenter’s bias towards a certain result influences the study to suit her views. It cannot be discounted that the author may have unwittingly viewed statements from participants in a biased manner and in so doing misrepresented the participants’

original meaning. Although the focus group was included in a certain capacity, to analyse the data collected, the final analysis was that of the author including decisions on what information should and should not be added to the research findings. It is also plausible that the focus group may have misrepresented and obscured the data. The instructions given to them was to find any data that represented Egocentrism, thus the focus group may have also been biased in the way they viewed the material given to them

In conclusion, the results found in the research conducted strongly suggest the theory of Egocentrism as discussed by Elkind (1970) is very much a part of the female adolescent's thought processes when involved in risk taking. Both the Imaginary Audience and the Personal Fable were seen in all participants interviewed. Thus, there appears to be sufficient justification for further research to expand on Elkind's theory of Egocentrism. The author's research was limited due to convenience sampling. In future, it may be beneficial for researches to widen the sample group so that a more accurate reflection of the population at large can be seen. The author feels that there is much more to learn about how adolescents envision both the Imaginary Audience and the Personal Fable and that there is much to gain from viewing Elkind's Egocentrism theory from an emotional angle rather then merely as a cognitive process. As seen in this research report, adolescents' emotional state and relationships with various peers and parental figures all influence how they chose to use the 'Imaginary Audience' or how they perceived themselves and their own Personal Fable. Egocentrism and risk taking as an avenue of investigation can possibly give one a greater understanding of adolescence as a stage of development.

> Diaries are great when you're young. In fact, you saved my sanity a hundred, thousand, million times. But I think when a person gets older she should be able to discuss her problems and thoughts with other people, instead of just with another part of herself as you have been to me…see ja (Anonymous, 1997, p.158)

This was the last diary entry the fifteen year old, anonymous writer put down. She died three weeks later from an overdose. This author used her diary to capture her struggles with addiction, peers and parental figures. While one will never know why she chose to take part in that risk on that fatal day we have been given some idea of her struggles with her own Imaginary Audience and Personal Fable. It is hoped that if nothing else this research report can begin to understand how adolescents view themselves and the risks that they participate in. If Life Orientation teachers,

counselors, psychologists and parents had been given a glimpse into this fifteen year old adolescent's life and her thoughts perhaps the outcome may have been different. In the introduction the author gave an example of a group of adolescents she had seen taking part in risky behaviour. The author feels that the theory of Egocentrism can give one a better understanding of why this group of adolescents were acting out. Perhaps like the participants in the study, the group had a 'video' in their head of the Imaginary Audience in that movie theatre or believed themselves to be above social norms? It is hoped that this research has created some thought into how adolescents feel about themselves and their risk taking.

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Appendix I: Letters of consent

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I.1 School A

I.1.1 Letter to the Principal



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Principal,

My name is Juliette Grant and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand. My focus is on risk behaviour in adolescents. I am looking to understand teenage development and how thought processes impact teenager's perception and reaction to situations she is confronted with.

Your student's participation in this research will entail one individual interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Approximately ten students will be needed from grade nine and ten. Participation is voluntary, and no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not complete the questionnaire. While questions are asked about their personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as their name, is asked for. The personal details shall only be viewed by the researcher. Only questions around risk taking will be used as data for the focus group and thus no identifying features will be seen by the group. The student will not be asked about her risk behaviour therefore, no information around the risk itself shall be revealed to the researcher. Responses will only be looked at in relation to the rest of the groups. This means that feedback that will be given to the school, parents and learners will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions.

If you agree to allow your students to participate in the study permission must be given. Only after permission has been granted shall I the researcher begin the research procedure. If a student does decide to participate a consent form will be sent through to the student and her parent/guardian to be filled in. Interviews will be conducted individually to ensure confidentiality. If at any time you wish to withdraw your students from the research please feel free to do so. You are under no obligation to the researcher.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to body of knowledge on adolescent development and risk taking behaviours, as well as your school's, parents and student's understanding of the underlying factors that influence adolescent risk taking. If you wish to read the information obtained in the completed dissertation I can be reached telephonically at 0828840333 or via e-mail at juliettegrant@gmail.com or jgrant@telkomsa.net. A meeting will be set up at the end of the study to give feedback to all the relevant parties.

Kind Regards
Juliette Grant

I.1.1.1 Principal's Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

I _____ give permission to allow Juliette Grant to conduct interviews on the students of this school for her study on the thought processes behind risk-taking behaviour.
I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That the students may refuse to answer any questions they would prefer not to.
- They may withdraw from the study at any time.
- The nature of the subject being studied may create harmful reactions in the pupils participating and that free counselling (e.g. helpline) is offered to any pupil who needs additional help.
- No information that may identify the school or students will be included in the research report, and all responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____

I.1.2 Letter to the Participant



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Student,

My name is Juliette Grant and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand. My focus is on risk behaviour in adolescents. I am looking to understand teenage development and how thought processes impact teenager's perception and reaction to situations she is confronted with.

Participation in this research will entail one individual interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. With your permission this interview will be tape recorded (auditory) in order to ensure accuracy. All tapes will be locked up for safe keeping with only the researcher having access to the materials. The tapes will be destroyed within a few months of its making. Participation is voluntary, and no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not complete the interview process. While questions are asked about your personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as your name, is asked for. The personal details shall only be viewed by the researcher. Only the questions around risk taking will be used as data for the focus groups which will ensure confidentiality. The questions are focused on your thought processes when involved in the risk behaviour and not the risk itself so at no time will the research ask for a description of the risk taking you were involved in. Your responses will only be looked at in relation to all other responses. This means that feedback that will be given to the school, parents and learners will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions. Direct quotes may be used from the interview. Your name will be changed to ensure confidentiality. The questions asked may potentially create unease or discomfort and can therefore be potentially harmful. If at any time I the researcher feel that the questioning is becoming to burdensome to you the interview will be stopped. Help in the form of free counselling from helpline or others will be given if you daughter need additional help. You may refuse to answer any questions you would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice.

If you choose to participate in the study please fill in the consent form. Interviews will be conducted individually to ensure confidentiality although a member of the focus group may be given your transcript. No identifying features will appear on the transcript given to the member of the focus group. If you indicated your agreement to participation in class and have return the consent form signed this shall be considered consent. For any additional information or concerns you may have I can be reached telephonically at 0828840333 or via e-mail at juliettegrant@gmail.com or jgrant@telkomsa.net.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to body of knowledge on adolescent development and risk taking behaviours, as well as your school's, parents and your own understanding of the underlying factors that influence your own risk taking. If you are interested in reading the completed study you can contact me. Any changes you feel need to be made to the draft can be communicated to me and a meeting will be held at the end of the study to inform all relevant parties of the results of the study.

Kind Regards
Juliette Grant

I.1.2.1 Participant's Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

I _____consent to being interviewed by Juliette Grant for her study on the thought processes behind risk-taking behaviour.
I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- Direct quotes may be used (the names will be changed to ensure confidentiality).
- The process may be harmful to me due to the sensitive nature of the study and that free counselling is offered (e.g. helpline) if needed.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report.
- Transcripts with no identifying information will be given to a focus group to categorise and discuss.
- Audio tapes will be used.
- All audio tapes will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Signed _____

I.1.3 Letter to the Parent/Guardian



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Juliette Grant and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand. My focus is on risk behaviour in adolescents. I am looking to understand teenage development and how thought processes impact teenager's perception and reaction to situations she is confronted with.

Participation in this research will entail one individual interview. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. With your permission this interview will be tape recorded (auditory) in order to ensure accuracy. The tapes will be destroyed as soon as the information has been collected. Participation is voluntary, and no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not complete the questionnaire. While questions are asked about your daughters personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as her name, is asked for. The personal details shall be viewed by the researcher alone. Only the questions around risk taking will be used as data for the focus groups and at no time will participants be made aware of whose information they are reading. No questions will be asked about the actual risk your daughter was involved in only the thought processes at the time of the occurrence. Your daughter's responses will only be looked at in relation to all other responses. This means that feedback that will be given to the school, parents and learners will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions. The questions asked may potentially create unease or discomfort in your daughter and can therefore be potentially harmful. If at any time I the researcher feel that the questioning is becoming too burdensome to your daughter the interview will be stopped. Help in the form of free counselling from helpline or others will be given if your daughter or yourself need additional help. Your daughter may refuse to answer any questions she would prefer not to, and you may choose to withdraw her from the study at any point.

If you choose to allow your daughter to participate in the study please fill in the consent form. Interviews will be conducted individually to ensure anonymity and participation in the focus groups will mean that confidentiality clauses are signed around the information your daughter will be looking at. If you have return the consent form signed this shall be considered consent. For any additional information or concerns you may have I can be reached telephonically at 0828840333 or via e-mail at juliettegrant@gmail.com or jgrant@telkomsa.net.

Your daughter's participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to body of knowledge on adolescent development and risk taking behaviours, as well as your daughters school's, your own and your daughter's understanding of the underlying factors that influence her and other adolescents risk taking behaviour.

Kind Regards
Juliette Grant

I.1.3.1 Parent/Guardian's Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

I _____ consent to letting my daughter be interviewed by Juliette Grant for her study on the thought processes behind risk-taking behaviour.
I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That my daughter may refuse to answer any questions she would prefer not to.
- She may withdraw from the study at any time.
- That due to the sensitivity of the subject of the study my daughter may find the interview harmful and that free counselling (e.g. helpline) is offered if needed.
- Transcripts with no identifying information will be given to a focus group to categorise and discuss.
- No information that may identify her will be included in the research report.
- Audio tapes will be used during the interview process.
- All audio tapes will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Signed _____

I.2 School B

I.2.1 Letter to the Principal



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Principal,

My name is Juliette Grant and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand. My focus is on risk behaviour in adolescents. I am looking to understand teenage development and how thought processes impact teenager's perception and reaction to situations she is confronted with.

Participation in this research will entail two focus groups. The focus groups will take approximately one hour each. Approximately five students will be needed. Participation is voluntary, and no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not complete the questionnaire. While questions are asked about their personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as their name, is asked for. The personal details shall only be viewed by the researcher. Your students will be involved in categorising information around risk taking in adolescents. None of the information shall be obtained from the students themselves. They will merely be part of the processing and categorising of the information. A discussion of the information looked by the group will be conducted. Their input will be a combined input. This means that feedback that will be given to the school, parents and learners will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions.

If you agree to allow your students to participate in the study permission must be given. Only after permission has been granted shall I the researcher begin the research procedure. If a student does decide to participate a consent form will be sent through to the student and her parent/guardian to be filled in. If at any time you wish to withdraw your students from the research please feel free to do so. You are under no obligation to the researcher.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to body of knowledge on adolescent development and risk taking behaviours, as well as your school's, parents and student's understanding of the underlying factors that influence adolescent risk taking. If you wish to read the information obtained in the completed dissertation I can be reached telephonically at 0828840333 or via e-mail at juliettegrant@gmail.com or jgrant@telkomsa.net. A meeting will be set up at the end of the study to give feedback to all the relevant parties.

Kind Regards
Juliette Grant

I.2.1.1 Principal's Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

I _____ give permission to allow Juliette Grant to conduct focus groups on the students of this school for her study on the influence of thought processes on risk-taking behaviour.
I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That the students may refuse to participate in any part of the process they would prefer not to.
- They may withdraw from the study at any time.
- The nature of the subject being studied may create harmful reactions in the pupils participating and that free counseling (e.g. helpline) is offered to any pupil who needs additional help.
- No information that may identify the school or students will be included in the research report.

Signed _____

I.2.2 Letter to Focus Group Participants



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050,
Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Student,

My name is Juliette Grant and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand. My focus is on risk behaviour in adolescents. I am looking to understand teenage development and how thought processes impact teenager's perception and reaction to situations she is confronted with.

Participation in this research will entail two focus groups. The focus groups will take approximately one hour each. Participation is voluntary, and no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate in the group. While questions are asked about your personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as your name, is asked for. The personal details shall be viewed by the researcher alone. You will be involved in categorising information around risk taking in adolescents and you will take part in a group discussion around risk taking. Your input will be part of a group input. This means that feedback that will be given to the school, parents and learners will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions. The information dealt with may potentially create unease or discomfort and can therefore be potentially harmful. If at any time I the researcher feel that the process is too burdensome to you it shall be suggested that you discontinue. Help in the form of free counselling from helpline or others will be given if you need additional help. You may refuse to participate in any part of the process, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any point without prejudice.

If you choose to participate in the study please fill in the consent form. Participation in the focus groups will mean that confidentiality clauses are signed around the information you will be looking at. If you indicated your agreement to participation in class and have return the consent form signed this shall be considered consent. For any additional information or concerns you may have I can be reached telephonically at 0828840333 or via e-mail at juliettegrant@gmail.com or jgrant@telkomsa.net.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to body of knowledge on adolescent development and risk taking behaviours, as well as your school's, parents and your own understanding of the underlying factors that influence your own risk taking. If you are interested in reading the completed study you can contact me. Any changes you feel need to be made to the draft can be communicated to me and a meeting will be held at the end of the study to inform all relevant parties of the results of the study.

Kind Regards
Juliette Grant

I.2.2.1 Participant's Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

I _____consent to participating in a focus group conducted by Juliette Grant for her study on the influence of the thought processes around risk-taking.
I understand that:

- Participation in this focus group is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to participate in any part of the process I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- The process may be harmful to me due to the sensitive nature of the study and that free counselling is offered (e.g. helpline) if needed.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report.
- An audio tape will be used.
- All audio tapes will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Signed _____

I.2.3 Letter to Parent/Guardian of Focus Group Participants



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Juliette Grant and I am conducting research for the purposes of obtaining a Masters at the University of the Witwatersrand. My focus is on risk behaviour in adolescents. I am looking to understand teenage development and how thought processes impact teenager's perception and reaction to situations she is confronted with.

Participation in this research will entail two focus groups. The focus groups will take approximately one hour each. Participation is voluntary, and no student will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to participate in the group. While questions are asked about your daughters personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as her name, is asked for. The personal details shall be viewed by the researcher alone. Your daughter will be involved in categorising information around risk taking in adolescents. She will be part of the processing and categorising of the information as well as participating in a group discussion around risk taking. Your daughter's input will be part of a group input. This means that feedback that will be given to the school, parents and learners will be in the form of group responses and not individual perceptions. The information dealt with may potentially create unease or discomfort in your daughter and can therefore be potentially harmful. If at any time I the researcher feel that the process is too burdensome to your daughter it shall be suggested that she discontinue the focus group. Help in the form of free counselling from helpline or others will be given if your daughter needs additional help. Your daughter may refuse to participate in any part of the process and you may choose to withdraw her from the study at any point without prejudice.

If you choose to allow your daughter to participate in the study please fill in the consent form. Interviews will be conducted individually to ensure confidentiality and participation in the focus groups will mean that confidentiality clauses are signed around the information your daughter will be looking at. If you have return the consent form signed this shall be considered consent. For any additional information or concerns you may have I can be reached telephonically at 0828840333 or via e-mail at juliettegrant@gmail.com or jgrant@telkomsa.net.

Your daughter's participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute to body of knowledge on adolescent development and risk taking behaviours, as well as your daughters school's, your own and your daughter's understanding of the underlying factors that influence her and other adolescents risk taking behaviour. If you wish to read the completed study you may contact me. A meeting for all relevant parties will take place to give feedback on the information received in the study.

Kind Regards
Juliette Grant

I.2.3.1 Parent/Guardian's Consent Form



UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Department of Psychology
School of Human and Community Development
Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, Johannesburg, South Africa

I _____ consent to letting my daughter participate in a focus group conducted by Juliette Grant for her study on the thought processes behind risk-taking behaviour.
I understand that:

- Participation in this focus group is voluntary.
- That your daughter may refuse to participate in any part of the process she would prefer not to.
- She may withdraw from the study at any time.
- That due to the sensitivity of the subject of the study your daughter may find the information she is working with uncomfortable and thus harmful and that free counselling (e.g. helpline) is offered if needed.
- No information that may identify her will be included in the research report.
- An audio tape will be used.
- All audio tapes will be destroyed after the research is completed.

Signed _____

Appendix II: Questionnaire

Section A

This section is only pertinent to the researcher and is therefore not to be circulated to the research participates.

Age: ……..years, ……months
Race (optional): …….....

Cultural group: ……...
(optional)
……...

……...

……...

I am presently studying at:

School: …….

Grade: ……...

Appendix III: Open ended Questions

Section B

This section is applicable to all research participants and the researcher and shall be used in the focus groups for data gathering and categorising. The questions below will act as a general guide for the interview but given the fact that the researcher wishes to use open-ended questionnaires this is merely a framework.

Before the interview commences the participant will be asked to recall a time during this year or previously when she participated in any form of risk taking. The participant will be told to think of the event but not to inform the interviewer of that event. The information around the risk taken will only be around the thought processes during the time of the event and after. Examples of risk taking will be given to the participants but the category is not as rigidly defined and thus it will be the participant's perception of the category. Given the fact that the risk taking event will not be spoken about and recorded the definition of what type of risk is not fixed but rather there to guide the participant through her thought process.

1. What factors lead up to the risk taking event?
2. What do you think made you decide to take the chance?
3. Can you explain your thoughts when you took the risk/What was going on in your head at that time?

Questions depicting the possibility of the Personal Fable

4. How did you justify it at the time to yourself (and possibly others)?
5. How do you view it now?
6. Do you think that you will suffer from the same risks as others do who take part in the same risky behaviours? Why not or why (dependent on the answer)?
7. Do you feel that there is a difference in the risk taking when you do it compared to others? Substantiate your answer and thoughts?

Questions depicting the possibility of the 'Imaginary audience'

8. Were your friends there at the time of the risk taking?

If not:

9. Did you tell them about it afterwards?
10. How did you think they would react in your mind?
11. How did they react?

12. How do they view the risk?
13. Was their opinion of the risk taking important to you?
14. Did their opinion influence your risk taking in any way? (at the time or in the future)
15. How would your parents/guardian view your risk taking?

If they are aware of it:

15. Was their reaction the same as you envisaged?

Appendix IV: Egocentrism Worksheet

Egocentrism

"A raindrop just splashed on my forehead and it was like a tear from heaven. Are the clouds and the skies really weeping over me? Am I really alone in the whole wide gray world? Is it possible that even God is crying for me?" (Anonymous, 1997, p.86)

"No-one understands how I feel because no-one has ever loved anyone as much as I love him."

"Yesterday I remember thinking I was the happiest person in the whole earth, in the whole galaxy, in all of God's creation…Now it's all smashed down upon my head and I wish I could just melt into the blaaaaa-ness of the universe and cease to exist" (Anonymous, 1997, p.1)

- How many of you have ever felt or said something similar to one of these statements before?

To begin with it is important to show the difference between Egocentrism and egotistical behaviour. They are not the same thing. Being egotistical means putting oneself before others and believing you are better then everyone else. Egocentric on the other hand is part of everyone's cognitive makeup and it means that an individual comes from her space and thoughts first before she can understand others. For example, how many of you have ever thought about what your teacher does when she goes home from work. I'm sure most of you struggle to see most of your teachers as married with children. Even harder may be to imagine your teacher going out with friends and having a good time. This is because you see your teacher in a fixed role, that of being your teacher and its harder for you to think about her/him in a different role outside of your experience of her/him.

The Personal Fable

"Kids need understanding, listening, caring individuals. They need me! The coming generation needs me!" (Anonymous, 1997, p.93)

"I will never be like mom when I grow up. I will be the best, most understanding, kindest and coolest mom ever and I will never be as mean as she is."

- How many of you have ever felt like this?

The Personal Fable is the belief that one is special and unique and due to this is immortal. It's both a positive and negative thing to have. Can you imagine watching the news on television and thinking, "That could have been me" to each of the stories. The belief that it won't happen to us allows us to leave the house everyday and not be scared of all the bad things that are in the world. It can also be bad however to have this belief in your immortality. How often have you thought about the bad things that can happen to your friend for doing something risky but never think it can happen to you? For example you often hear drug addicts saying, "I won't get hooked" even when they're clearly addicted or "If they don't get the drugs from me they'll get it somewhere else".

The Imaginary Audience

How many of you have been part of or seen another group of girls laughing very loudly, exaggerating their movements or drawing attention to themselves?

The Imaginary Audience is made up of various people in your life whose opinions are important to you. Think about the last time you had a pimple on your face and how you walked around all day thinking everyone was looking at you. By the end of the day that pimple had become ten times bigger in your mind. We use the Imaginary Audience for a range of things. Sometimes you play out a 'video' in your head of what your friends will say when you tell them a juicy piece of gossip or you may think about how your parents are going to ground you when you get home long after your

curfew. If you have a really difficult situation to deal with (lets just say dumping your boyfriend) then you may play out how best to handle it.

The Imaginary Audience is also about how one may perform in front of others. The giggling girls who are making themselves visible to people passing by may be trying to catch the attention of their peers and others. A very shy girl may feel that people are scrutinizing her and she may feel constantly watched. If her self esteem is low a girl may feel that everyone dislikes her and that she is unattractive and uninteresting. This may not be true but in her mind her 'Imaginary Audience' has her believing that she is unworthy. So the Imaginary Audience may be a positive or negative audience and it may be used to aid her or burden her further.