



Report on the risk study group 2009 conference (27th February 2009)

The BSA risk study group is alive and well following the change of convenorship which has been at City University this past year. Our first one day conference in London attracted over 70 delegates from a range of academic and practice backgrounds. The conference was hosted by City University's new School of Community and Health Sciences. The School incorporates a range of disciplines and professions for which the broad field of the sociology of risk has particular relevance.

The conference explored How Risk Theory and Practice Inform Each Other. This theme was addressed by speakers who were both practitioners and academics, providing an opportunity for reflection on the relationship between these two arenas.

An excellent keynote address was given by Prof Hazel Kemshall, who is both a probation officer and a leading academic. She highlighted the reality of how we adopt, and adapt, the instruments designed to help us avoid risk in the light of our own judgment. Her theorising on the risk selection followed on from Liz Austen's presentation on the social construction of risk by young people as very different from that of both hegemonic practitioners and theoreticians and it is the everyday real world of the person who may be the object of risk in need of conclusion in the debate.

Other speakers considered how young people and children receiving services are often constructed as objects of risk across geographical contexts. Robert Whitman explained how risk categorisation overshadows children in the USA education system, whilst Mike Titterton outlined, from a Scottish European perspective, how risk status could be beneficial.

The practices of nurses and social workers in their assessment and management of risk of their clients was explored in relation to a wide range of social theory in papers by Paul Godin and by Tom Horlick-Jones and Colin Young. Like other papers they considered how the vulnerable/cared for/researched/done to groups were considered in risk categories. Charlotte Clarke extended the life span dimension of the day to explore how older people with dementia and their carers manage risk. Catherine Dodds and Adam Bourne reported research findings about attitudes towards sexual practices of gay men with HIV. Ismail Ibrahim concluded the day with an account of a health promotion project aimed at encouraging reflexive thinking about eating amongst an urban mixed ethnic minority group.

Paul Godin, a co-convenor of the BSA risk study group and chair for most of the day concluded that "Perhaps above all the conference papers emphasised to me how it is that the vulnerable, powerless and frequently only mildly threatening become objects of risk under the gaze of health and community care, whilst others create grand scale havoc in the 'world at risk'."

Papers related to the presentations from the day will be made available on City University's Risk Studies website

<http://www.city.ac.uk/communityandhealth/research/degrees/risk.html>

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