

A motivational perspective on risky behaviors:  
The role of personality and affect regulatory processes

M. Lynne Cooper  
V. Bede Agocha  
Melanie S. Sheldon

University of Missouri - Columbia

The present study tested a motivational model in which personality influences on risky behaviors were hypothesized to be primarily indirectly mediated, by shaping the nature and quality of emotional experience as well as characteristic styles of coping with these emotions. This model was tested in a representative community sample of 1666 young adults, aged 18 to 25 years old. Results revealed strong support for the model, indicating that neuroticism and extraversion promote involvement in both alcohol use and risky sex via distinct pathways. Neurotic individuals were prone to engage in risky behaviors as a way to cope with aversive mood states, whereas extraverted individuals were more likely to engage in risky behaviors as a way to enhance positive affective experience. In contrast, impulsivity directly predicted some forms of risk-taking, and interacted with extraversion and neuroticism to predict motives for risky behaviors. The model provides a highly general though not complete account of risky behaviors.

Cooper, M.L., Agocha, V.B., & Sheldon, M. (2000). *Journal of Personality*, Vol 68(6), Dec., US: 2000, 1059-1088.