

Risking it All for the Rush: Why Humans Put Themselves in Harm's Way for Fun

By Andrew Roy





(“White Cyclone”)



Introduction

- **Thrill-seeking (T) Behavior**
 - **“The belief that motivation for much risk taking and uncertainty is worth the thrill of it” (Sarshar et al.)**
- **Action Park as case study**





What was Action Park?

- **Vernon, NJ from 1978-1996**
- **Extremely chaotic**
- **No engineering consultation for most rides**
- **High-speed, fast-paced experience (Scott and Porges)**





Extreme Sports

- **“Any sports featuring high speed, height, real or perceived danger, a high level of physical exertion, and highly specialized gear or spectacular stunts and involves elements of increased risk” (Laver et al.)**
- **2017 study**



(Turney)



(AngMoKio)



(“4 Reasons”)



(“BASE Jumping”)



Action Park and Extreme Sports

- **High speed, height, danger, physical exertion, increased risk (Scott and Porges), (Andersen)**

Cannonball Loop



(Michaels)

Alpine Slide



(Kuperinsky)

Super Speedboats



(Kuperinsky)



Risk of Injury and Death

- **Hundreds, possibly thousands of injuries at Action Park (Scott and Porges)**
- **6 deaths (McCallum)**
- **Injury and death common in extreme sports**
 - **2017 study**
 - **0.4 out of 1000 BASE jumps fatal; 75% of injuries moderate – severe**
 - **48 of 100,000 skydives end in injury (Laver et al.)**



(Scott and Porges)



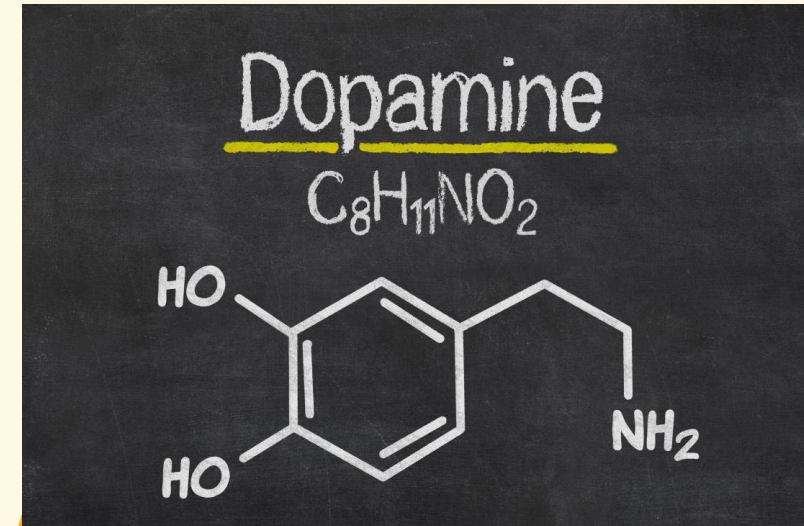
Proposed Explanations

- **Dopamine Reward System**
- **Prospect Theory**



Dopamine Reward System

- **Could involve dopamine reward system (Sarshar et al.)**
- **Pleasure chemical**
- **Involved in addiction and behavioral reward (Fox and Rompolski 227-228)**
- **Appears to be present in adrenaline junkies**
 - **2016 study**
 - **“I suffer withdrawal when I haven’t jumped for a while” (Heirene et al.)**



(Railton)



Present at Action Park?

- **Can't be positive because no definitive study has been conducted**
- **Interview indicates pleasure and sensation of fun drove guests to participate**
- **Rush experienced on Alpine Slide (Andersen)**





Prospect Theory

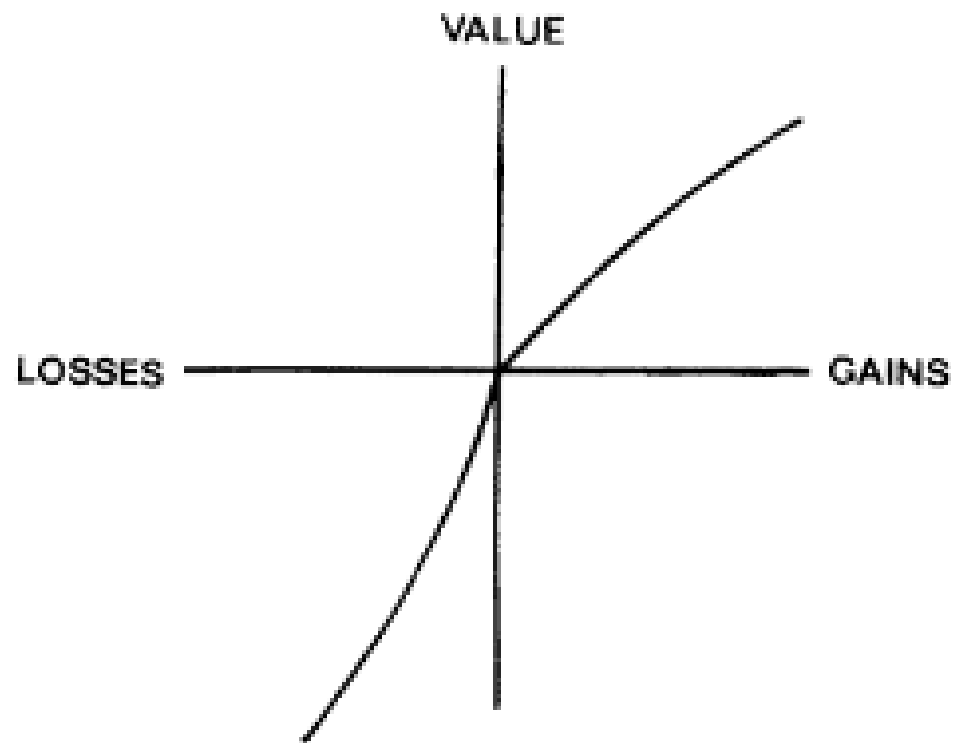


FIGURE 3.—A hypothetical value function.

(Kahneman and Tversky)

• **Kahneman and Tversky in 1979**

• ***Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision Under Risk***

• **Loss more influential**

• **Extensions to other areas of life with uncertain probability
(Kahneman and Tversky)**



Prospect Theory

**“The decision weight associated with an event will depend primarily on the perceived likelihood of that event, which can be subject to major biases”
(Kahneman and Tversky)**



Action Park and Prospect Theory

- **Major biases = Mostly teenagers**
 - **“Rules [were] for everyone else” (Andersen)**
- **Limited life experience can affect perception of likely consequences**



Benefits of Risk Taking

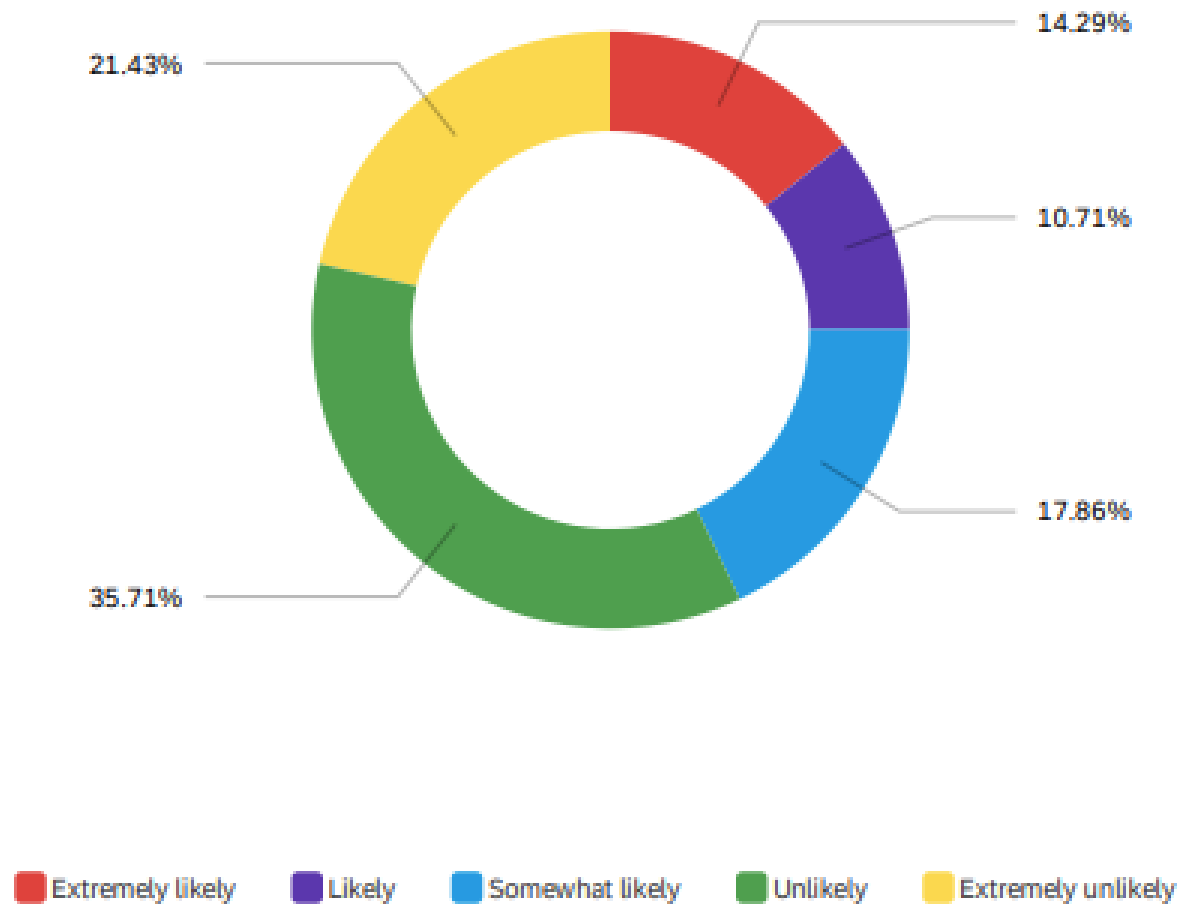
- **Healthy relationship with fear and how to conquer**
- **Realization of uncertainty of future**
- **Deeper understanding of self**
 - **Mind over matter (Brymer and Schweitzer)**



Original Survey

- **How do regular people view risk in general?**
- **IRB approved survey**
- **Distributed via social media**
- **29 respondents**
 - **11 male, 16 female, 1 non-binary, 1 prefer not to say**
 - **Age breakdown:**
 - **18-24: 15 respondents**
 - **25-34: 4 respondents**
 - **35-44: 4 respondents**
 - **45-54: 3 respondents**
 - **55-64: 3 respondents**

Q44 - If you had the choice, how likely would you be to eliminate all risk from your life?



(Figure 1)



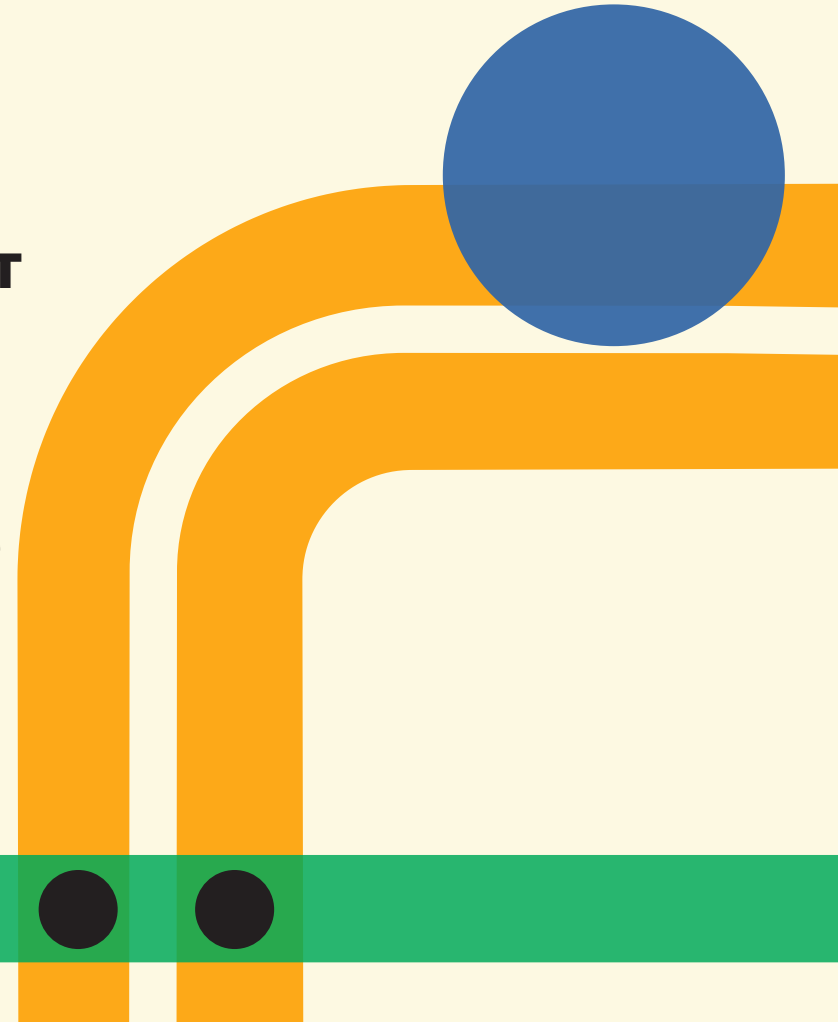
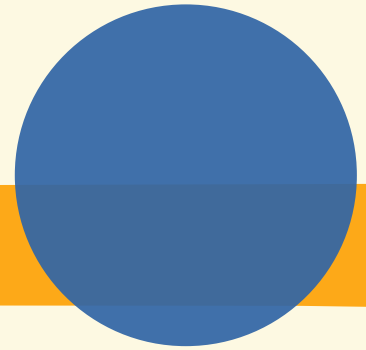
Responses

- **“It's not possible, and risk can mean many different things. To live is to risk untimely death. Obsessing over risks is unhealthy.”**
- **“Just because risk is scary and has the potential for harm, I would never totally eliminate it. Physical risk is one thing, but to eliminate all emotional risk is grounds for having a really boring and unfulfilling life.”**
- **“Without risk, there's no reward.”**



What's the point?

- **T behavior and risk taking is common to humans**
 - **Varying degrees of risk**
- **Be aware of what attempts to take advantage of T behavior**
 - **Action Park**
- **Important to understand one's own desires to live fulfilling life**
 - **Risk and reward to every choice**





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