

Risk - a plague or joy?

Some reflections on the dual nature of
risk in present society

Gunnar Breivik

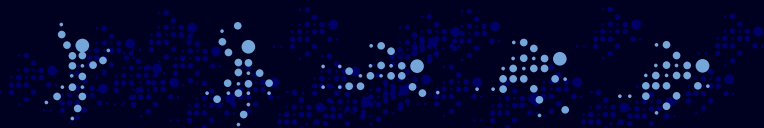
Oslo, NORWAY

Risk – the dual nature

- Risk as something **negative**
- Risk – aversion
- Minimize risk
- The cautious and prudent human being
- Zero risk – vision
- 24 hour safety
- Risk as something **positive**
- Risk acceptance
- Calculate risk
- The risk-taking human being
- Risk balancing
- Risk and freedom

UNVOLUNTARY

VOLUNTARY

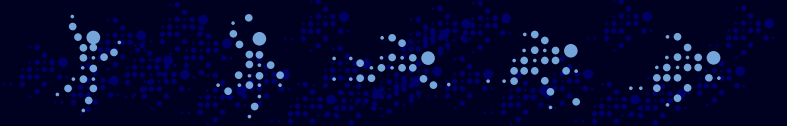


The control society – an unexciting society



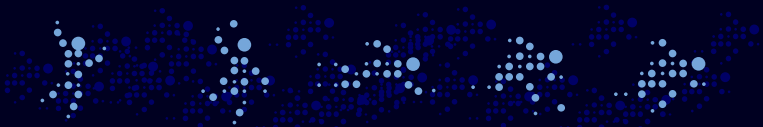
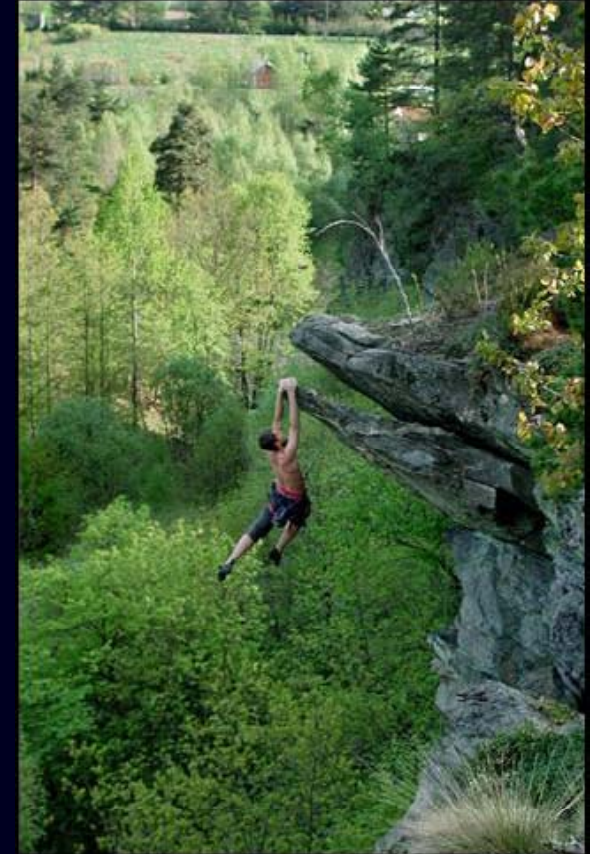
The idea of Modernity

- The Enlightenment Era – Man as Master of Nature (Bacon, Descartes)
- The idea of Modernity – Progress through rationality, science and technology
- The modern industrial society – a control society
- The rational safety seeker -
- “in isolation there is no such thing as acceptable risk; because by its very nature, risk should always be rejected” (Yates and Stone, 1992)



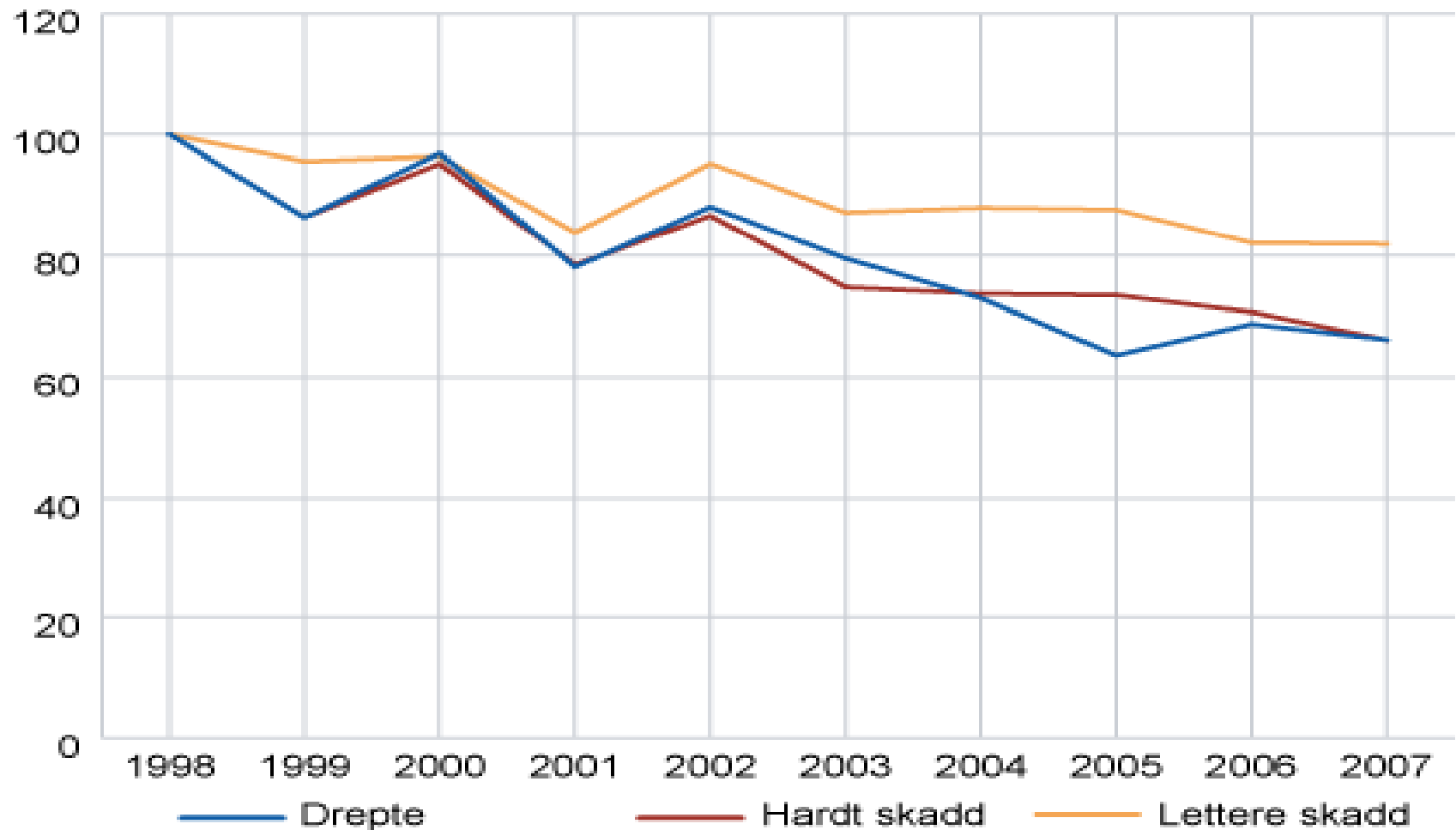
The concept of risk

- “Risk” from “riscare” – to cut up or cut through - insurance of ships
- Risk as probability of loss or damage of some kind
 - Physical risk – pain, injury or death
 - Economic risk – economic loss or material damage
 - Social risk – loss of prestige, status, public image
 - Intellectual risk – innovation, new ideas
 - Existential risk – a daring life project

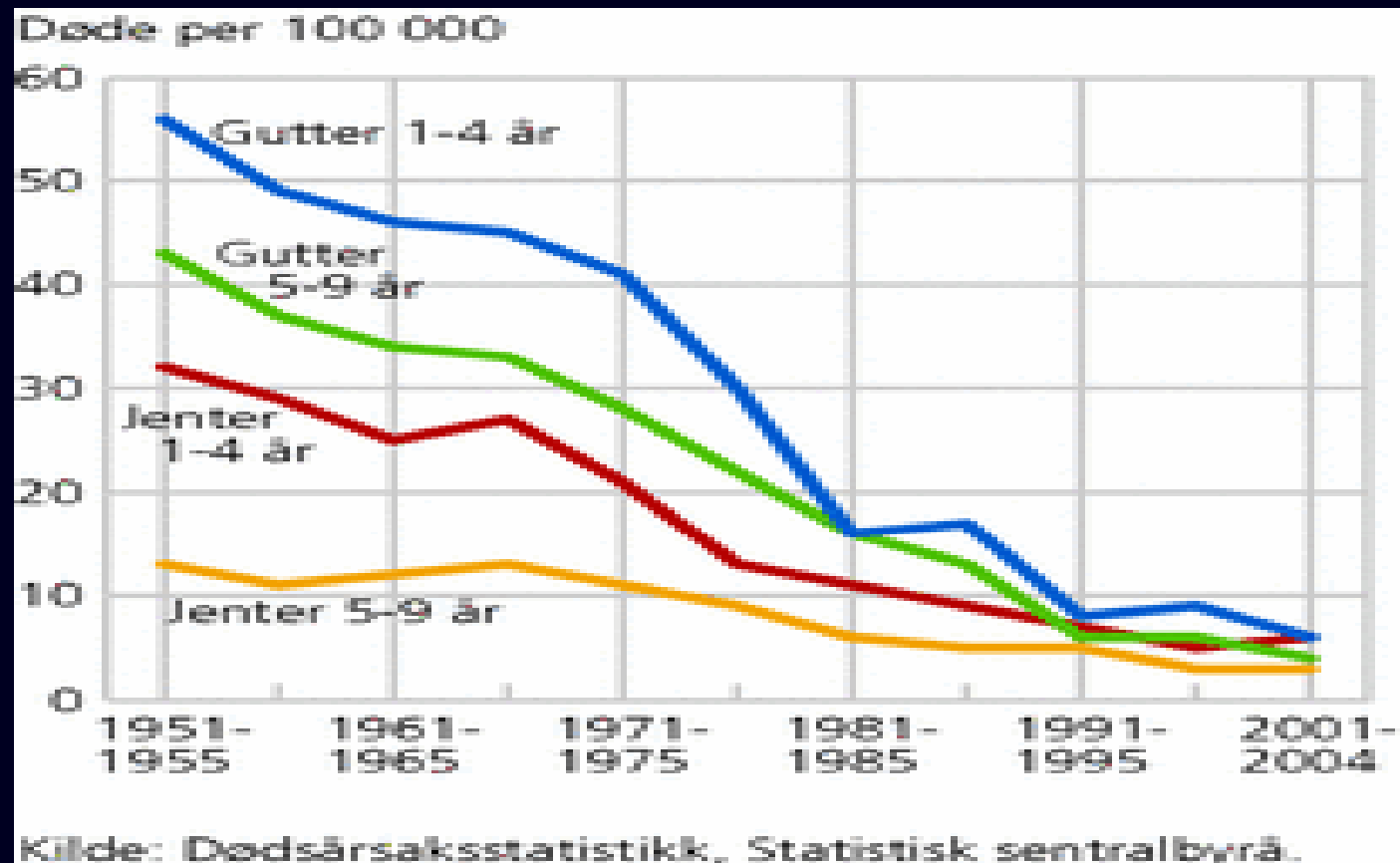


Persons killed, severely injured or lighter injured, 1998-2007. (1998=100)

Personer drept eller skadd, etter skadegrad. 1998-2007. 1998=100

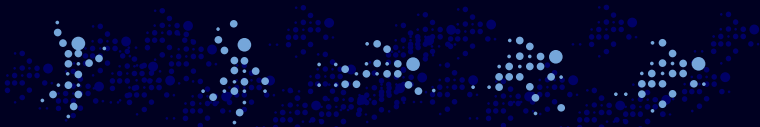


Figur 1. Death by accidents, Norway, 1951-2004. Five year average rates, by age and sex.
Per 100 000

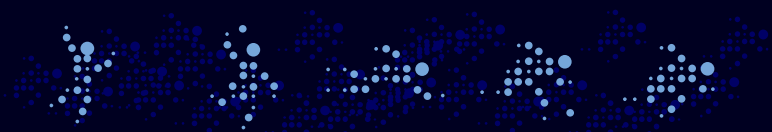


The costs of safety

- A great number of laws, rules and safety regulations – leads to a big and expensive state bureaucracy
- Rules that must be observed, complied with and reported on lead to an increasing administrative and economic burden for the institutions, in private as well as public sectors
- The single human being uses a lot of capacity to become a 24 hour security person
- Institutions and individuals kneel under the burden of security (the idea of zero tolerance)



Benefits of risk?



Structural measures leads to passivity and costs

- Structural measures mean additional costs for the single person and the institution – but contribute to new jobs in the security-industrial production
- Structural measures become a sleeping pillow – “I will be saved by the security helmet, the traffic islands and the mid-fences”
- Rules and structural measures lead to passivity; less alertness and watchfulness, less learning – the result is a decline in coping and mastery
- Extreme alertness and watchfulness come with danger!:
 - Climbers without ropes,
 - Drivers with a knife pointing from the steering wheel towards the heart



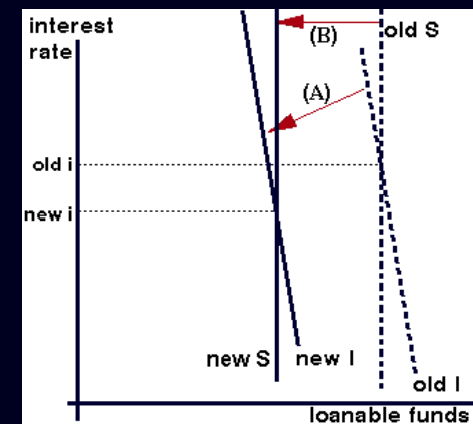
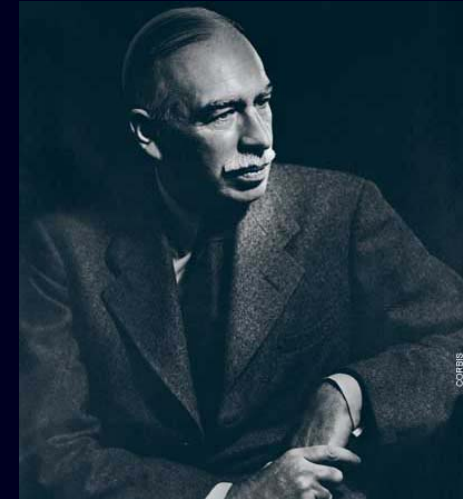
What is the problem with security?

- We would still have been sitting in the trees – too dangerous on the ground
- No people in Norway
- Children and youth do not get enough stimulation and training to master challenges and dangers
- We need risky investments, innovation and entrepreneurship in business and industry.
- We need daring people in space travels, rescue operations and polar expeditions



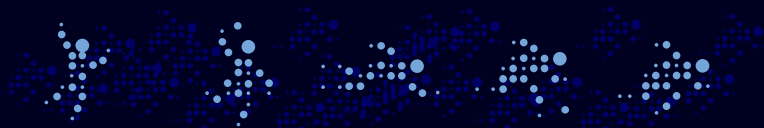
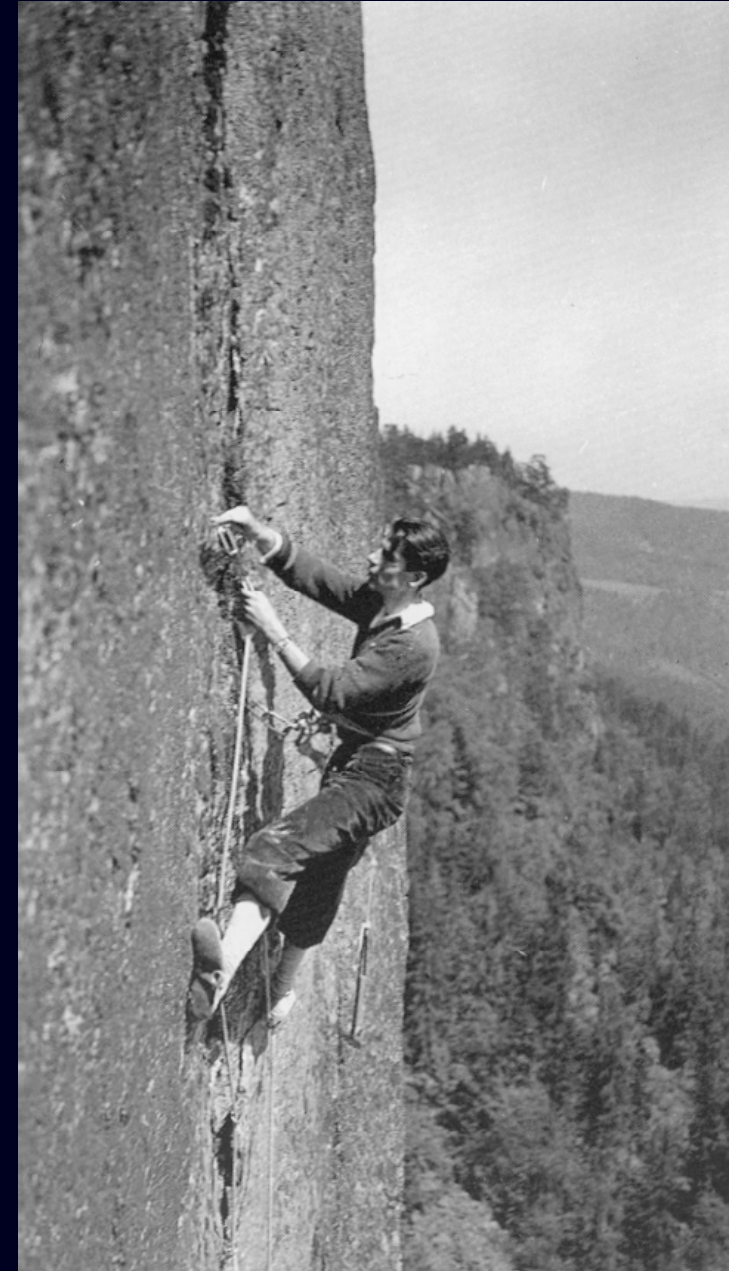
The ambiguous meaning of 'risk'

- Risk is something negative that should be avoided - we want secure bridges and roads, atomic plants should be safe
- Risk is also something positive, pointing to possibilities and rewards – the big fish harvest, business deals, stock market investments and new jobs
- Keynes – we are not security-processing machines – "uncertainty makes us free"



Risk and arenas

- Arena-risk versus action-risk
- To be risk-averse on dangerous arenas and risk-taking on relative safe arenas
 - Hiking in the mountains versus climbing
 - Walking into a playground versus walking into a mine-field
- BASE jumpers as control freaks



Risk and coping

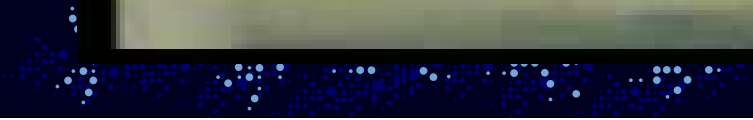
- “One should never underestimate the importance of staying alive!” (Tom Patey, Marius Morstad)
- Risk not a goal in itself – but
 - Some goods can only be obtained by taking risks
 - The risk must be voluntary, relevant, and reasonable
 - To cope with risk is a joy in itself – mastery of one’s own fear



Deep flow

- Csikszentmihalyi “deep flow”
 - climbing, basketball, music-composing, surgery, rock-dance
 - Movement, joy, mastery, focusing, immediate feedback, unity mind-body-environment (unio mystica)
 - studies of surfers in Australia og New Zealand (Kent Pearson)
 - “peak experience”, “peak performance”

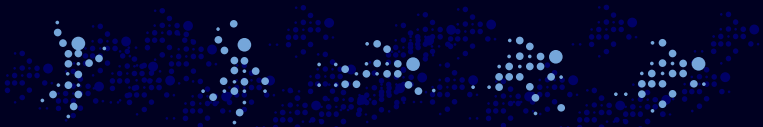








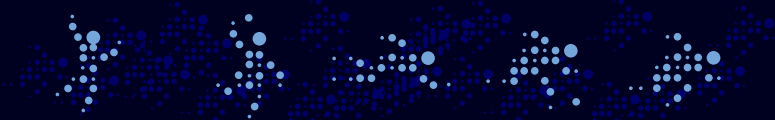
Why mastery is important!



Two basic attitudes



The safety-seeker. Life is dangerous!



The risk-taker
Life should be lived with
strong sensations and
experiences



Two risk cultures in Norway

- **The coast culture**

- Fishing
- Shipping
- Trade and commerce
- The oil industry
- Risk taking
- Accept change!



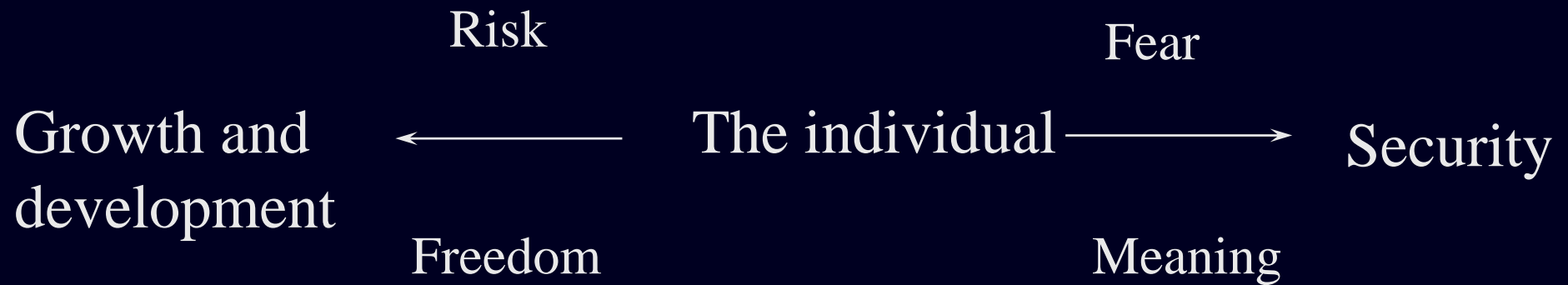
Statfjord-feltet er det største i Nordsjøen. Her er A-plattformen. Foto: Statoil

- **The inland culture**

- Farming
- Big industry (steel, fertilizers)
- Church and state
- Health care and schools
- Safety seeking
- Stability and control!



The individual



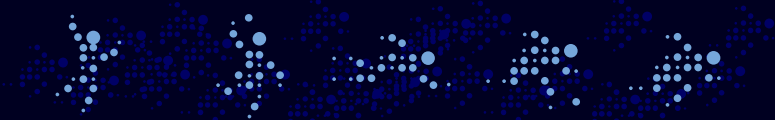
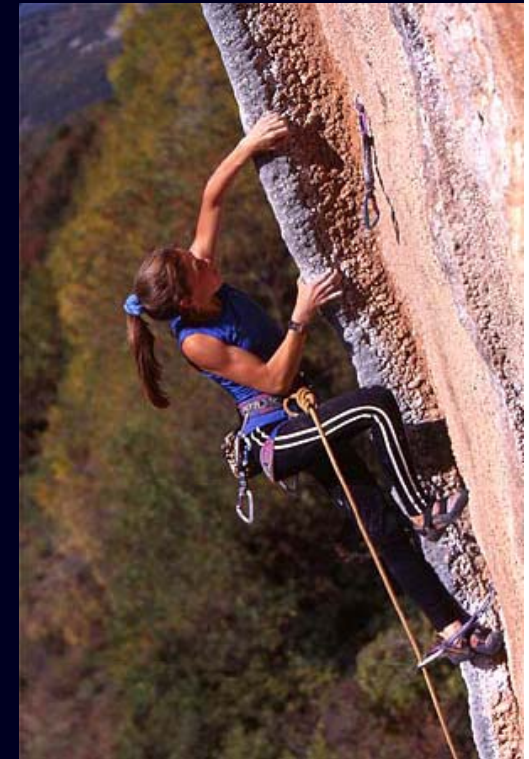
(Moxnes 1989)

Quest for excitement – the exciting society



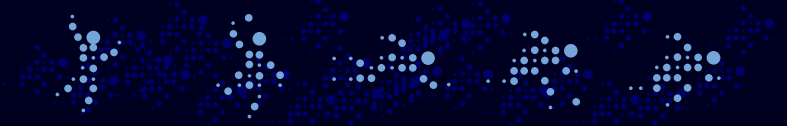
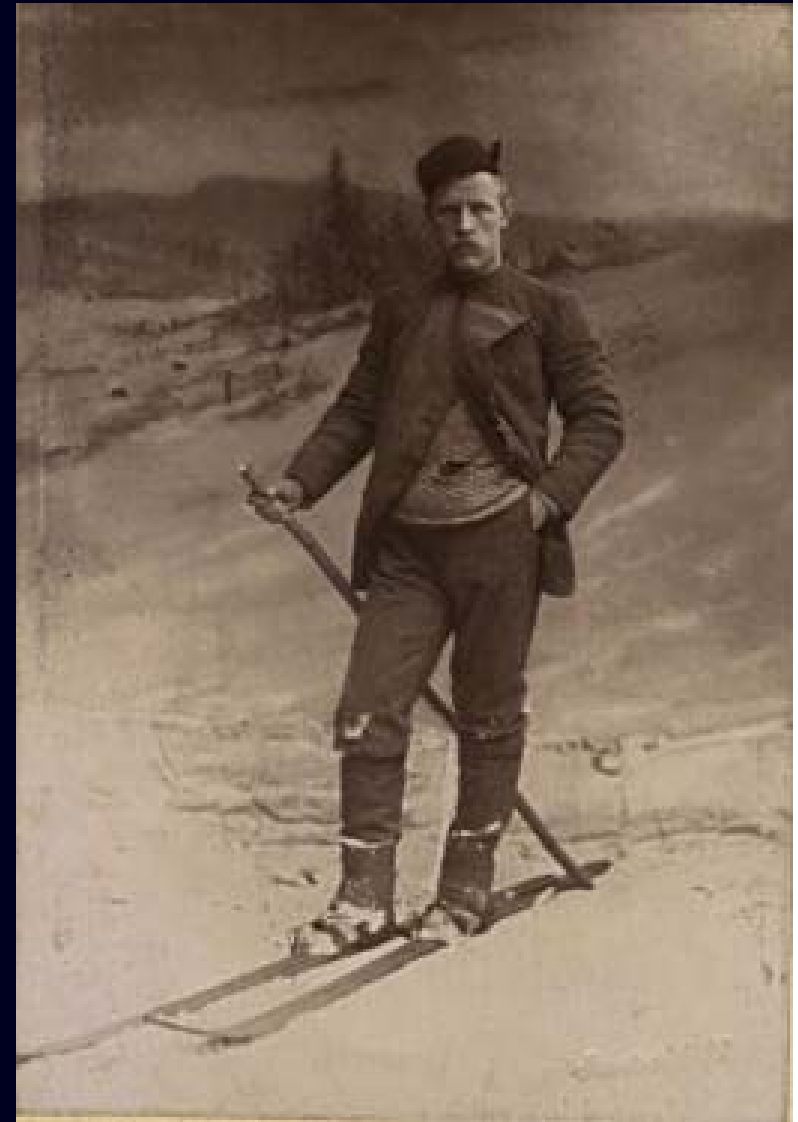
Well-equipped and ready for challenges

- The Bourgeois picture: the frail human body and the strong mind; culture as compensation for physical weakness
- The evolutionary picture: the robust, strong, active, exploring human being
 - Entered all climate zones; snow and jungle, deep sea and high mountains
 - Sweat glands, endurance, motor capabilities
 - The excellent senses, the fabulous hands



The explorer

- Nansen (1926)
- .."It is our perpetual yearning to overcome difficulties and dangers.."
- "Nothing worth having in life is attained without taking risks.."



Risk-taking

- Representative survey of the Norwegian population 15 years and above (Norwegian Monitor 2007):
- “I am willing to take big chances to get what I want out of life”
 - 10 totally agree
 - 32,7 percent partly agree
 - 42,6 percent partly disagree
 - 12,6 percent totally disagree



The beast within us?

- “Just because it is exciting and risky I sometimes like to do things that are dangerous or forbidden”
 - 4,8 percent totally agree, 13 percent partly agree
- “I like the challenges of unforeseen or unclear situations situations”
 - 8 percent totally agree, 33 percent partly agree



(Norwegian Monitor 2007)

Adventurous sport

- Around 10 percent of the population are "high sensation seekers"
- High sensation seekers are more willing to take risks – rescue personell and investors, gamblers and firefighters, downhill racers and climbers
- High sensation seekers are often better able to handle risks – since they started their training in early childhood by climbing higher in the trees and exploring uneven terrain on foot and with bicycles - learning from small injuries and accidents



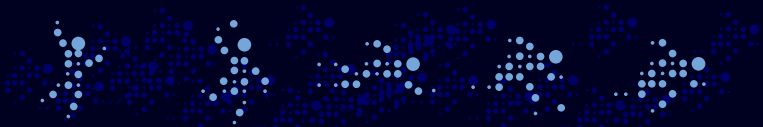
Trends

- 1) The interest for adventure sports is growing
- 2) Renewing older sports through new technology, differentiation
(Parachute jumping, climbing)
- 3) Innovations
 - **Air:** hanggliding, paragliding, basejumping, acrobatics, speed wings
 - **Ski:** telemark, ski extreme, kiting, heli skiing
 - **Boards:** skateboard, wakeboard, sky board
 - **Surfing:** wave surfing, wind surfing, kiting
 - **Rivers:** white water kayaking, rafting, boards
 - **Marathon:** ultramarathon, triathlon - in mountains, deserts
 - **Long distance races:** bicycles, skis, on foot – in the woods, in mountains, uphill



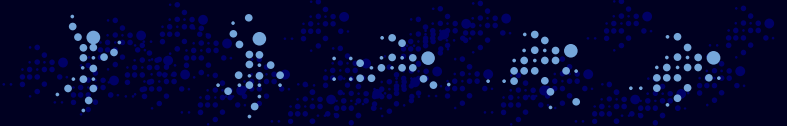
Trends 2

- Commercialisation
 - Adventure courses – personality development, team building, performance development, stress control
 - Extreme sport i marketing and sale, commercials, films, internet sites, TV – programs (the most extreme stunts, the worst accidents..)
 - Adventure tourism (Himalaya, North and South Pole, Andes)
 - Expeditions, long distance races (Dogs, cars, skis)



Trends 3

- Involvement of the masses
 - Leisure parks
 - Bungee jumping, roller coasters
 - Wilderness
 - Safaris
 - Rafting



From gentleman-sport to sport for the broader public

- From 1998-2008 18 Norwegians lost their lives in climbing accidents in Norway and abroad.
- The statistics show that the number of fatal accidents is decreasing even if the number of climbers is growing very fast.
- Spectacular accidents like Rolf Bae' death on K2 seem to attract new climbers
- The reputation of climbing as a serious risk sport demands serious accidents.



The most extreme sports - and accidents

- Basejumping 1995 - 2005 at Kjerag in Rogaland, Norway
- In the time period 1995-2005 around 2 000 jumps were reported every year.
- The number of fatal accidents was 9, or 0,04 % of all jumps, which means a rate of 1 death per 2 300 jumps. In addition 82 accidents were registered (0,4 %) – a rate of 1 per 250 jumps.

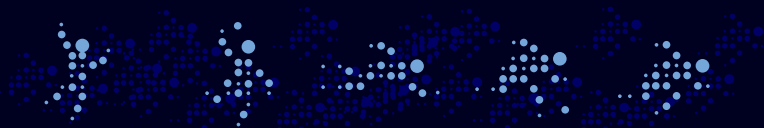


Voluntary risks England 1980

Death risk per mill. persons
per year

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------|
| • 20 cigarettes a day | • 5000 |
| • Climb mountains | • 40 |
| • Drive a car | • 170 |
| • Play football | • 40 |

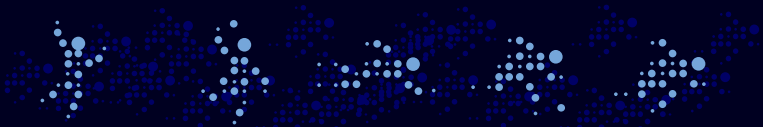
Morsing, (1982: 159)



Theories – how to explain the quest for excitement and risks?

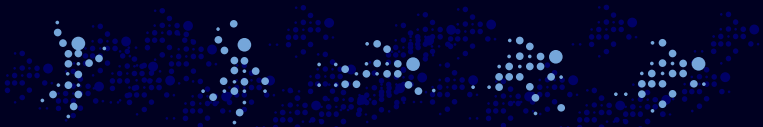
Explaining risk-taking I

- Individual level
 - Biological theories, genetic disposition (Zuckerman)
 - Flow-theories, peak experience (Csikszentmihalyi)
 - Cognitive theories, deficiencies in learning, bad heuristics (Kahnemann, Tversky)
 - Socialization theories (self efficacy) (Bandura)
 - Risk homeostasis (Adams)



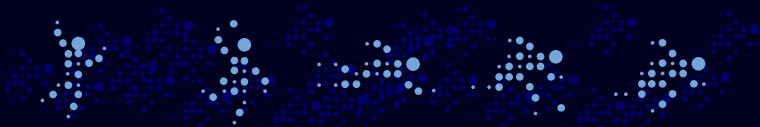
Explaining risk-taking II

- Society level
 - Compensation (Elias-Dunning)
 - Risk society (Beck)
 - Self-construction in high modernity (Giddens)
 - Risk as social and cultural construct (Mary Douglas)
 - Utilitarianistic decision theories – maximizing subjective expected utility (Feinberg)



Two main types of theories

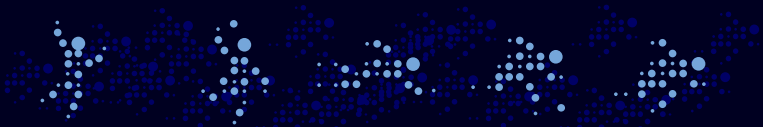
- ADAPTATION – society becomes more and more dynamic and focused on change.
 - Risk-capital, innovation, entrepreneurship,
 - Extremeresport as a metaphor for late capitalistic society
- COMPENSATION – society becomes safer, focused on control and more boring.
 - Voluntary risk-taking as compensation
 - Extremeresport as rebellion and contrast to the safe society



Summary

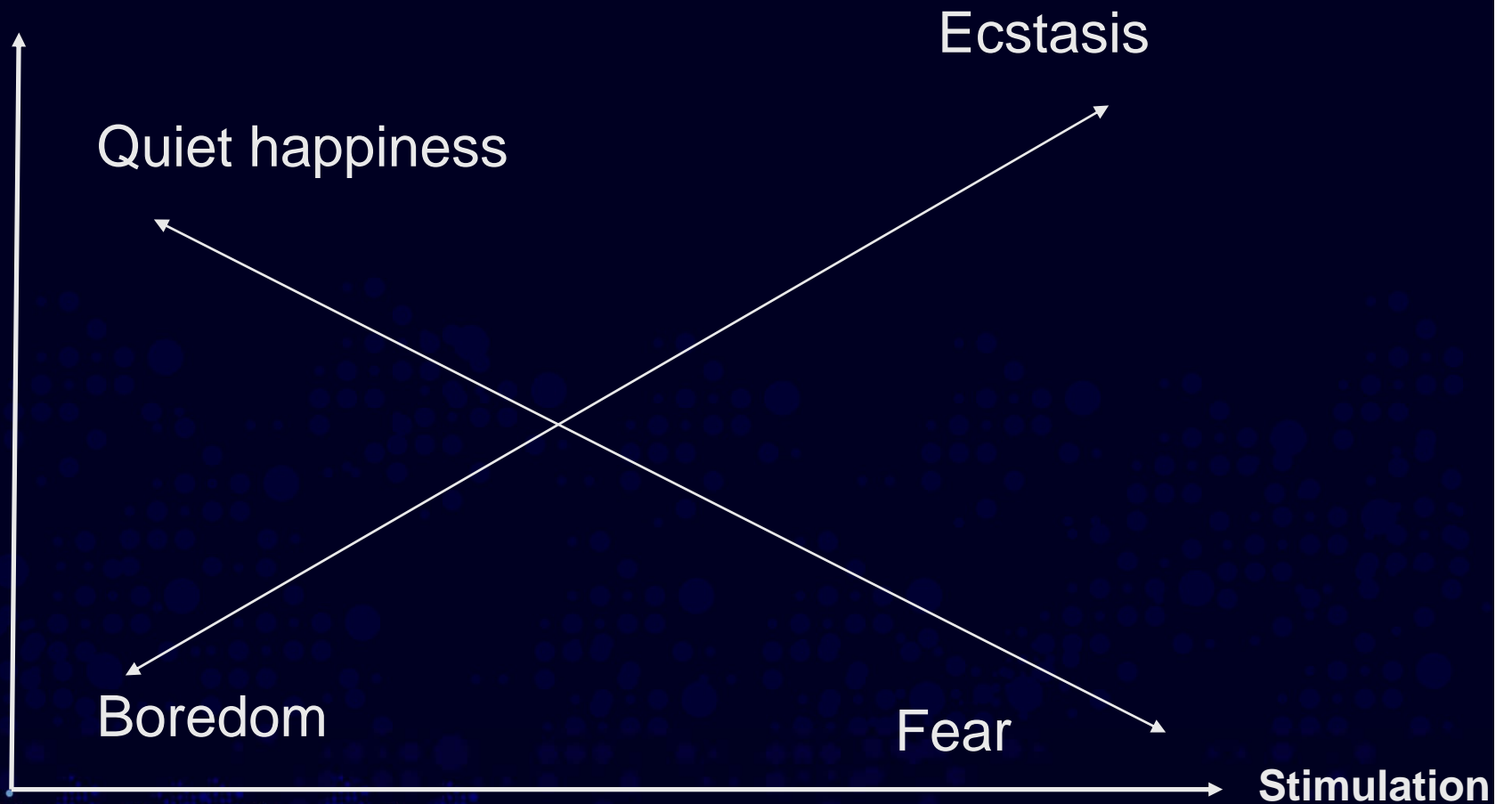
Risk and modern society

- We want security - bridges, cars, atomic plants
- We need risk – innovation, entrepreneurship
- We need training to master risk – at work, in transport, in leisure and sport
- Risk must be relevant and come in the right way – as controllable challenges
- Develop a society with “relevant risks”
- As little irrelevant risk as possible!

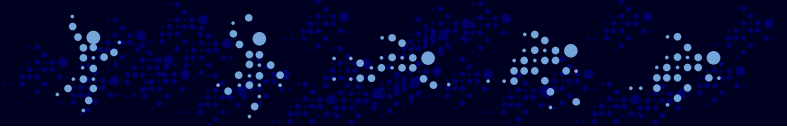


Stimulation space

Level of happiness



Climbing – the whole life



Old risk takers

- Arne Næss – climbing and boxing
- Trygve Gran - flying
- The 86 year old bungee jumper

