TIME PERSPECTIVE AND SOCIAL HEROISM
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There is no research on the issue of temporal orientation differences between two major categories of heroes: Physical risk vs. Social risk heroes.

It is reasonable and conceptually appropriate to argue that in many cases, physical risk heroes act impulsively, making the decision to act on the spur of the moment, captivated by the emergency of the situation they face. They are reactive to situational demands and have their behavioral response system set to: Play, or Forward action, but not to Pause.

The problem arises when they do not evaluate the emergency situations fully or appropriately because in some cases they are not equipped to respond fully to the demands of that situation, or they should get help in doing so, such as calling the police or other bystanders in that setting.

A prime example is the physical risk hero, Wesley Autrey, who a few years ago in New York City jumped down from the platform of a subway to help someone who had fallen across the train tracks and was unconscious. Autrey repositioned the man so that his body would be between the tracks rather than across the tracks and then climbed on top of him to hold him down as the train sped over them. There was only a clearance of half an inch between the top of Autrey’s head and the train bottom, which could have decapitated him if the man he was pressing down had pushed him up.

A few weeks later a similar event occurred in a New York City subway station but there a bystander who had heard of Autrey’s brave (but impetuous) deed, and learned how to deal more wisely with that situation. What he did was to jump down on the tracks, lift the fallen victim to the side of the platform, call for help from some men nearby who all lifted the victim to safety before the next subway train raced by. That hero, Chad Lindsey, then simply boarded the train to go to work—a wise and effective hero who had learned his lesson well from his risky predecessor.

While we discuss the initial evidence suggesting heroes in physical risk situations may use automatic processes to respond, with little consideration for anything but the present moment, the operational picture and time perspective may be different for social risk heroes.

Generally, social risk heroes are engaged in activities (e.g., whistleblowing) that unfold over a period of time, often through a set of escalations. For example, there are many examples of whistleblowers that, upon identifying a wrong, attempt to point it out to their supervisors using established, internal channels. When this fails, the whistleblower may threaten to use other channels to expose wrongdoing, and this may result in top down pressure from the wrongdoers designed to get the
whistleblower to back down. Typically, they will collect information about the wrongdoing as the hard evidence needed to convince higher ups to act, or for juries and judges to use in making legal assessments. This cycle gradually escalates. In situations like these, the social risk hero has both time to think about the consequences to him or herself and the sacrifices and risks that may result (such as being derogated, scapegoated, not getting promoted, or even losing one's career). However, they also are able to consider the future consequences of their failure to act.

Often in social risk heroism, we see what appears to be a dual-time perspective, that is, an ability to attend to and act in the moment as necessary, while simultaneously maintaining an acute sense of how these actions (or omissions) will impact later outcomes in the future. The ability to maintain a focus on future states as a way to maintain an unwavering current action orientation, when faced with serious present moment pressures has been proposed as one of the ways social heroes are able to complete heroic tasks where others fail to do so.

One example of a social risk hero is **Pvt. Joe Darby**, who exposed the prisoner abuses occurring by his Military Police buddies in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq in 2004. He had time to review the CD given to him by one of his friends that contained hundreds of images of prisoner abuses, and then to decide to turn it over to a senior investigating officer-- fully aware that all those MPs would be punished, and they would consider him a traitor. In fact, he had to be put in protective custody for three years along with his wife and mother because of threats to their lives.

I can add another social risk hero, **Michael Winston**, who challenged Countrywide Mortgage Company's illegal loan practices and unhealthy work conditions, who was fired, offered bribes to cease and desist, but he persisted in winning a jury settlement against his former employer.