

Time Perspective and Motivation

William H. Jackson
bjackson@plata.com
May 12, 2006

*Educational Psychology,
College of Education, University of New Mexico,
Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA*

Abstract

Future time perspective is an individual, group or societal view of possible psychological futures. It is a somewhat stable personality trait that differentially influences behavior in the "now." This article highlights three instruments that measure different aspects of future time perspective and reviews additional articles that compare future time perspective with other measures of motivation and achievement. Finally, the aspect of altering an individual's time perspective is presented and speculation regarding how educators may utilize that is presented.

As living beings, we are subjectively aware of our existence in the ever-present "now." It is the juncture in time where we sense the world and the only place where we have direct control and influence. But as sentient beings, we are also aware of our selves having existed in the past, through our memory, or imagine possible existences in future times through projections and speculations. These psychological pasts and psychological futures are the influences that shape current behavior (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) and for that reason, the concept of time, and how individuals perceive it, is fundamental in understanding our activities, hopes, goals and motivations (Kauffman & Hussman, 2004).

Time Perspective is a measure of one's orientation with respect to time, and how an individual perceives and acts based on those perceptions of the past or future. People with a future-time preference are more likely to perceive future outcomes and take steps that lead to more positive outcomes (Bandura, 1989). Future time perspective, and the related ability to mentally project oneself into future outcomes, has been linked to substance use (Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, & Tushman, 2001; Keough, Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), duration of homelessness (Eppel, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 1999), and future consequences (Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994). These and other observations suggest a link between time perspective and; goal-setting (Atance & O'Neill, 2001), decision-making (Suddendorf & Busby, 2005), school investment (Peetsma, 2000) and motivation (Husman & Lens, 1999; Kauffman & Hussman, 2004; Phalet, Andriessen & Lens, 2004). In order to investigate these possible connections, it is first

necessary to establish a precise definition of time perspective, and develop a valid and reliable measure of the Future Time Perspective construct.

Time in Perspective – Past Present & Future

Three measures of Time Perspective will be reviewed in this article (see Shell & Husman, 2001, Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Edwards, 1994 and Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999 for complete discussions and copies of the respective survey instruments). One that is frequently cited is the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI). It is a 56 item Likert style survey that measures time perspective preferences along five nearly orthogonal dimensions, which include *past-negative*, *present-hedonistic*, *future*, *past-positive*, and *present-fatalistic* (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Past-Negative denotes a generally bad perspective regarding the past, which is reflected in survey items like (4) "I often think of what I should have done differently in my life." or (34) "It is hard for me to forget unpleasant images of my youth."

Present-Hedonistic describes a "thrill seeking" attitude towards time and life that focuses on pleasures of the now and little regard for future consequences. It is illustrated by the survey items (19) "Ideally, I would live each day as if it were my last." and (44) "I often follow my heart more than my head."

The *Future* perspective implies a personality that is focused on future goals and rewards and a willingness to forgo immediate pleasures in their pursuit. Survey items include, (18) "It upsets me to be late for an appointment." and (51) "I keep working at difficult, uninteresting tasks if they will help me get ahead."

The *Past-Positive* perspective holds that attitudes toward the past are favorable and sentimental. Items that load on the past-positive construct include (7) "It gives me pleasure to think about my past." and (20) "Happy memories of good times readily spring to mind."

Finally, the *Present-Fatalistic* time perspective reflects a view of life that is hopeless, fatalistic and influenced more by luck than individual, personal controls. This factor includes items like (38) "My life path is controlled by forces I cannot influence." and "It doesn't make sense to worry about the future, since there is nothing I can do about it anyway."

Test-retest reliabilities of the ZTPI were established using 58 Stanford introductory psychology students. The reliabilities of the five subscales ranged from 0.70 to 0.80 and the Future scale (the scale of interest in the proposed study) demonstrated a 0.80 reliability factor (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Valence & Connectedness

In contrast to the time perspective measure

above, Shell and Husman (2001) take a two faceted view of future time perspective (FTP) in that time perspective is view in term of valence and connectedness. FTP-valence is conceptualized as the importance or value ascribed to future goals. Survey items include “Given the choice, it is better to get something important in the future than something you want today.” and “The most important thing in life is how one feels in the long-run.” By contrast, FTP-connectedness is conceptualized as the disposition to anticipate future consequences of present actions. It is the ability to perceive connections between anticipatory actions in the now with outcomes in the future. Items on this scale include. “Realizing a long term goal is worth some sacrifices today.” and “One should take steps today to help realize future goals.” In their study (Shell & Husman, 2001), undergraduate participants ($n = 198$) were given a single survey, which contained items regarding *Future Time Perspective, Reported Study Time, Perceived Study Effort, Self-efficacy, Locus of Control, and Causal Attributions*. Grade Point Averages were obtained from student records. Multivariable, canonical correlation analysis was used to obtain the results, with GPA, study time and effort compared to control beliefs and FTP measures.

The study appears to support the “formulation of competency and contingency as distinct aspects of control” that “operate independently of each other and involve somewhat different motivational mechanisms” (Shell & Husman, 2001, p. 498). Further, there is support of joint, multivariate relations of future time perspective and control beliefs on achievement and self-regulation. Higher FTP-connectedness may enable students to extend beliefs concerning instrumental consequences into the future, thereby explaining the observed additional increase in achievement. It was also noted that individual correlations, even when significant were less than .21. “This suggests that when considered individually, control and future time perspective beliefs, with the exception of self-efficacy, were not strongly associated with either GPA or studying” (Shell & Husman, 2001, p. 492).

Futures Orientation – Control and Satisfaction

Kimberly Prenda and Margie Lackman (2001) also support the dual influence of perceived control and future orientation in a study that investigated future planning, control and life satisfaction. Participants were surveyed with a combination of written instruments and 20-30 minute telephone interviews as part of the Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) study conducted by the John T. and Catharine D. MacArthur Foundation. This multiple survey study included author developed

environmental questions, personality questions (Big Five), a five item, author developed future planning instrument, and a 12 item personal control instrument. The first part of the study indicated that the factors of age, social support, predictability (environmental stability), influence self-reports of future planning. In the second part of the study, the authors argue that future orientation and control have a mediational relationship on satisfaction in that “planning imparts a greater sense of control over one’s life” (Prenda & Lackman, 2001, p. 214). This seems to imply that an individual’s perception and perspective of the future allows the person to visualize future outcomes and their relation to present action and thus allowing for a greater sense of control.

Consideration of Future Consequences

A similar way of framing Time Perspective is to look at “the extent to which individuals consider the potential distant outcomes of their current behaviors and the extent to which they are influenced by those potential outcomes” (Strathman, *et al*, 1994). This approach looks at an individual’s perception of the importance of immediate outcomes as opposed to future outcomes and how that perspective influences present behavior. Alan Strathman and his colleagues’ Consideration of Future Consequences (CFC) instrument is a single dimension measure of time perspective that identifies how consideration for future consequences affects their decisions about current behaviors. Items on this survey instrument included “Often I engage in a particular behavior in order to achieve outcomes that may not result for many years.” and “Since my day to day work has specific outcomes, it is more important to me than behavior that has distant outcomes.” As part of the validation and reliability procedures, a comparison was conducted using the Conscientiousness dimension of the Big Five Personality Inventory, the Life Orientation Test, the Hope Scale, and the Stanford Time Perspective Inventory as independent variables related to concerns for general future health, smoking rates, alcohol use, and environmental behavior. These health concerns, like heart disease, AIDS and some cancers, have aversive consequences in the distant future, which are associated with present behaviors. The results indicated that the CFC instrument was an effective measure that predicted variances in health behaviors and beliefs. Similar results were obtained regarding a person’s beliefs about the environment. When presented with a persuasive argument about oil drilling in a fragile ecosystem, individuals with a short future time perspective were more easily swayed by the condition that included arguments emphasizing the short-term benefits of drilling, and less swayed by the condition that emphasized the long-term effects toward

the environment. Those with long future time perspective were more easily swayed by arguments emphasizing the long-term consequences and less swayed by the condition emphasizing the short-term benefits.

Investment in School, Investment in the Future

Schools, by their very nature, represent a future-oriented investment (Phalet, Andriessen & Lens, 2004). Their stated purpose is to prepare students with academic, career, life and citizenship skills (CHS, 2004; SFPS, 2003), instill attitudes of lifelong learning (CHS, 2004; SFPS, 2003), and enhance future success (GHS, n.d.; SFPS, 2003). In short, education goals are to provide the student with academic, personal and social preparation so that the student can successfully engage in a successful future. With this clear assumption in mind, a better understanding of how the students' views about their futures relates to their level of investment in school is important.

Thea Peetsma (2000), of the University of Amsterdam, investigated this link between Future Time Perspective and School Investment in secondary education students ($n = 606$) by comparing questionnaires on future time perspective to objective and subjective measures of school investment, including grades, locus of control, fear of failure and school investment. The results of this study indicate that there is a positive connection between school investment and future time perspective regarding school career and professional career. The results also suggest that future time perspectives tend to be object related. For example, time perspectives about school and career were related to school investment, but general time perspectives and perspectives about leisure activities were not significant. "The relation between future time perspective and school investment clearly does not include all life domains (Peetsma, 2000, p. 183).

Time Perspective Intervention

So far this article has presented measures of time perspective that are purported to be relatively stable and also presented evidence that time preference imparts an influence on motivation, decision making, goal setting, school investment, achievement, and life satisfaction. For the educator, this information might be of limited value, unless the student's time perspective might be manipulated in order for the student to benefit from the extended future time perspective observed above.

Peter Hall and Geoffery Fong (2003) conducted an experiment designed to increase FTP-connectedness (using Shell & Husman's terminology) in undergraduates taking an aerobics class ($n = 18$, *female* = 94%) to see if presenting a time perspective

intervention would increase the amount of moderate to vigorous physical activity the students reported. Aerobics classes were randomly assigned to one of three conditions including a time perspective intervention, a general goal-setting intervention, or a no intervention control group. In both the time perspective and goal-setting interventions the cost and benefits of physical activities were presented but in the time perspective intervention, temporal aspects of costs, benefits and decision-making were emphasized. "Inevitably, participants discover that almost all of the costs associated with physical activity appear at the time of decision-making, while almost all of the benefits accrue over long periods of time" (Hall & Fong, 2003, p. 690). Presentations and activities were designed to sensitize the students to the connection of present behaviors and futures benefits and decrease the connection between present behaviors and perceived present costs. The results of the study indicate a significant beneficial effect of the time perspective intervention over the control group and a significant, but more moderate, effect over the goal-setting group. An interaction between time perspective and goal setting is already established and an intervention focusing on goal setting would be expectedly be received more readily by those already possessing a more futures orientation.

Discussion

As described previously, time perspective and individual orientation to the depth and significance of future consequences can be observed and measured. Furthermore, researchers are beginning to explore multiple aspects of time perspective. This article has highlighted three instruments that measure time perspective. One views time perspective in a general past, present, and future framework. One takes a near vs. far focus of future time as it applies to consequences, and finally, one separates future time perspective into the relative value of future consequences have for the individual, and the connectedness or instrumentality those consequences have for the individual.

Future time perspective appears to have connections to multiple forms of motivation including decision-making, goal-setting, school investment, consideration of consequences, control beliefs, and life satisfaction. This demonstrates the far-reaching importance of this line of investigation as a practical way of understanding human motivation, and as pointed out, the ability of educators to exhibit influence on student's perspective on time enables us with a tool to help students better grasp the long term benefits of their education and see beyond the short term cost of effort and perceived irrelevance of their present academic activities.

References

- Ancona, D. G., Goodman, P. S., Lawrence, B. S., & Tushman, M. L. (2001). Time: A new research lens. *Academy of Management Review*, 26, 645-663. Retrieved October 13, 2005, from the University of California at Los Angeles, Anderson School of Management Web site: http://www.agsm.ucla.edu/documents/areas/fac/hrob/time_research_lens.pdf
- Atance, C. M., & O'Neill, D. K. (2001). Episodic future thinking. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 5, 533-539. Retrieved September 18, 2005 from the California Institute of Technology, Division of the Humanities and Social Sciences Web site: <http://www.hss.caltech.edu/~steve/files/atance.pdf>
- Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist*, 44, 1175-1184.
- Cibola High School (CHS) (2004). *General school information*. Retrieved April 24, 2006, from <http://www.cibolacougars.com>.
- Eppel, E. S., Bandura, A., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1999). Escaping homelessness: Influence of self-efficacy and time perspective on coping with homelessness. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 29, 575-596.
- Gadsden High School (GHS) (n.d.). *1999-2000 School report card*. Retrieved April 24, 2006, from <http://www.gisd.k12.nm.us/DRC/1999-2000/GadsdenHS.html>.
- Hall, P. A. & Fong, G. T. (2003). The effects of a brief time perspective intervention for increasing physical activity among young adults. *Psychology and Health*, 18, 685-706. Retrieved January 23, 2006, from the University of Waterloo, Faculty of Arts Web site: <http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/~gfong/HallandFong2003.pdf>
- Husman, J. & Lens, W. (1999). The role of the future in student motivation. *Educational Psychologist*, 34, 113-125.
- Kauffman, D. & Husman, J. (2004). Effects of time perspective on student motivation: Introduction to a special issue. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16, 1-7.
- Keough, K. A., Zimbardo, P. G. & Boyd J. N. (1999). Who's smoking, drinking, and using drugs? Time perspective as a predictor of substance use. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*. 21, 149-164.
- Peetsma, T. T. D. (2000). Future time perspective as a predictor of school investment. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 44, 177-192.
- Phalet, K., Andriessen, I. & Lens, W. (2004). How future goals enhance motivation and learning in multicultural classrooms. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16, 59-89.
- Santa Fe Public Schools (SFPS) (2003). *Our mission*. Retrieved April 24, 2006, from <http://www.sfps.k12.nm.us>.
- Shell, D. F. & Husman, J. (2001). The multivariate dimensionality of personal control and future time perspective beliefs in achievement and self-regulation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 26, 481-506.
- Strathman, A., Gleicher, F., Boninger, D. S., & Edwards, C. S. (1994). The consideration of future consequences: Weighing immediate and distant outcomes of behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66, 742-752.
- Suddendorf, T. & Busby, J. (2005). Making decisions with the future in mind: Developmental and comparative identification of mental time travel. *Learning and Motivation*, 36, 110-125.
- Zimbardo P. G. & Boyd J. N. (1999). Putting time in perspective: A valid, reliable individual-differences metric. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 77, 1271-1288.

APA Style Reference:

- Jackson, W. H. (2006). *Time perspective and motivation*. Retrieved (date retrieved), from <http://internet.cybermesa.com/~bjackson/Papers/Jackson2006TimePerspectiveMotivation.pdf>