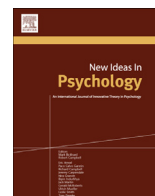




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New Ideas in Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/newideapsych

Discussing normative features of Future Time Perspective construct: Renewing with the Lewinian approach from a sociocognitive perspective



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A B S T R A C T

Keywords:

Future Time Perspective
Normativity
Social value
Social norm

Since the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI), an important body of research emerges on the Time Perspective (TP) construct and more specifically on the Future Time Perspective (FTP) dimension. However, a gap is growing between the psychosocial Lewinian approach to TP and the dispositional way it is operationalized in many studies nowadays. One way of underlining the psychosocial roots of TP and to show the problematic use of FTP in a personalistic manner is to highlight normative aspects of FTP. From a sociocognitive perspective, present research aims to examine the social valorization of FTP and to determine the type of social value associated with it in a French context. Results reveal the social valorization of FTP-ZTPI dimension and permit to discuss the normativity of this construct. We suggest that FTP might be normative because it refers to certain social expectations and ideologies in the context of contemporary Western societies.

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«What then is Time? If nobody asks me I know; but if I were desirous to explain it to someone that should ask me, plainly I know not » (Saint Augustine, Confessions, Book XI, Chapter 14).

Time is a classical and fundamental topic in human thinking and behaviour. However, the problem of the definition of time has not been completely solved since Saint Augustine and still remains a theoretical question in all fields of research from physics to philosophy. How is time defined, measured and used as a scientific construct in human and social sciences? What relevant aspects of the individual time experience are related to objective, subjective or social time? By its inner ontological characteristics, time experience constitutes a valuable subject to

promote a psychosocial approach in the psychological study of time. This paper analyses the current development of psychology research about the Time Perspective construct and highlights the need to consider normative aspects of the Future Time Perspective by providing original empirical evidence.

1. Theoretical roots of the Time Perspective

From a sociological point of view, time could be considered as a permanent framework for mental life (Durkheim, 1912), a collectively shared representation allowing for collective organization of society. Bourdieu (1977) argues on the analogy between time structure and social organization structure in a given society. In psychology, time experience is mainly conceptualized through the Time Perspective (TP) construct (Lewin, 1942) defined as an interface between the psychological and the social reflecting “the totality of the individual’s views of his psychological future and psychological past existing at a given

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time” (Lewin, 1951, p.75). Following the Lewinian theoretical framework, TP had been considered, in a broad conceptualization of psychological time, as a foundational process in both individual and societal functioning (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Thus, numerous contributions highlighted the deep social and cultural anchoring of the TP construct (Bond & Smith, 1996; Jones, 1994; Levine, 1997; Lewin, 1951; Nuttin, 1977; Seginer & Halabi, 1991; Teahan, 1958). More recently, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) stated that TP is acquired by socialization, intervenes in the elaboration of goals and has dynamic influence on numerous judgements, decisions and actions.

2. When the measurements reawaken the concept

The research work on TP seems to have benefited from a renewed interest in the last years, and nowadays generates an important amount of publications. A research by keywords in the PsycINFO database by searching “Time Perspective” keyword in title or abstract, indicates 751 articles with peer review from 1932 to 2013 (Fig. 1). Among these articles, 391 have been published since 2000 that is 52% of the whole database on TP. This particular attention for the TP construct occurs at the same time as the arrival of a valid and reliable scale, the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI, Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Among the 391 selected articles, 112 specified in their title or their abstract the instrument used for measuring TP. The ZTPI scale was mentioned by 76 of them (68% of the selected articles). This scale was validated through an exploratory and a confirmatory analysis which demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties (internal and test-retest reliability, for more details see Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Nowadays, the ZTPI is one of the most widely used measures of TP (Teuscher & Mitchell, 2011). The numerous adaptations and validations of the instrument in many countries attest of the scientific community’s interest to dispose of a general TP scale: France (Apostolidis & Fieulaine, 2004); Spain (Díaz-Morales, 2006); Mexico (Corral-Verdugo, Fraijo-Sing, & Pinheiro, 2006); Australia (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007); Brazil (Milfont, Andrade, Belo, & Pessoa, 2008); Lithuania (Liniauskaitė & Kairys, 2009) Portugal (Ortuno & Gamboa, 2009); Greece (Anagnostopoulos & Griva, 2011); Czech Republic (Lukavská, Klicperová-Baker, Lukavský, &

Zimbardo, 2011), Sweden (Carelli, Wiberg, & Wiberg, 2011), for example. All these studies showed adequate psychometric properties of the ZTPI and established the predictive, convergent and discriminant validity of the instrument among various sociocultural contexts. More recently, a cross-cultural research among a large sample ($N = 12,200$) of 24 countries confirmed ZTPI as a valid and reliable index (construct equivalence and invariant structure across cultural traditions and language adaptations, see Sircova et al., 2014). Thus, this “new old” concept is now well established in psychology and has become a major concern for an increasing number of researchers who use the ZTPI scale. Due to this particular link between TP and the ZTPI scale, the present article will be focused on TP as it is measured by this instrument.

More specifically, we will focus on the Future sub-dimension of the Time Perspective (FTP). Indeed, currently a consequent number of studies in the TP framework are focused on FTP. Among the previous 391 articles inventoried in the PsycINFO database since 2000 containing the keyword “Time Perspective”, 141 mentioned “Future Time Perspective in their title or abstract. Among those 141 selected articles dealing with FTP, 26 specified the instrument used for measuring FTP in their title or their abstract and FTP-ZTPI subscale was mentioned by 14 of them (54% of the selected articles). This scale is defined as planning and goal-oriented attitude, expectations and anticipations of future rewards (e.g. item “I believe that a person’s day should be planned ahead each morning” or item “I make lists of things to do”; see Apostolidis & Fieulaine, 2004 for the French version of FTP-ZTPI subscale). This future scale suggests that behaviour is dominated by a striving for future goals and rewards (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

Although the FTP subscale of the ZTPI showed its relevance to develop a deep trend of research on time perspective, it seems interesting to raise some issues about what is really measured by the ZTPI-FTP scale and how this construct is currently used in the scientific literature.

3. Future Time Perspective in current researches

The interest for this FTP construct could be explained to a large extent by the numerous studies which reported its

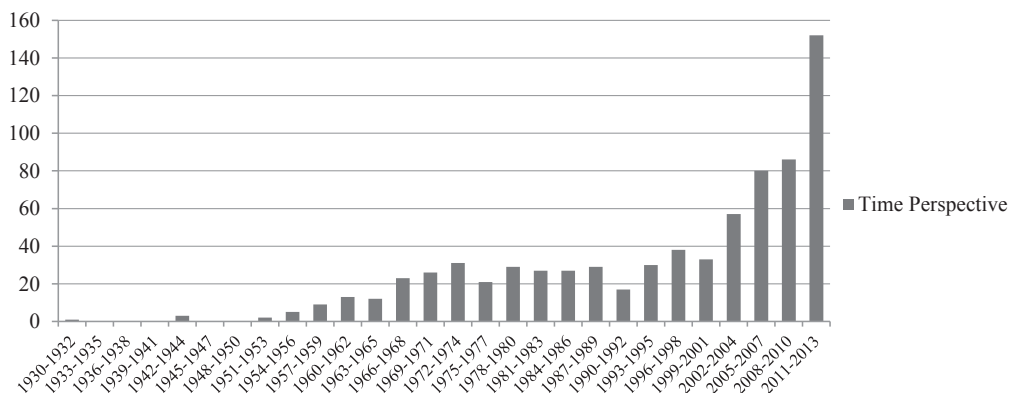


Fig. 1. Number of articles in PsycINFO database since 1930 which contained “time perspective” keyword in their title or abstract.

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