Chapter 11

If It Ticks Like a Clock, It Should Be Time Perspective: Shortcomings in the Study of Subjective Time

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the concept of time perspective has acquired a prominent position within the psychology of time. After Zimbardo and Boyd’s seminal work, thousands of papers have cited its work and within the last decade; several books and papers of other authors have been dedicated to exploring and expanding its theory. Even when considering other relevant authors about this topic, such as Nuttin and Lens, among many others, Zimbardo’s theory has become a synonym of time perspective research. This chapter represents an effort to identify some of the existent shortcomings in subjective time research and more specifically in time perspective topics. This chapter intends to encourage a mostly needed discussion about what the actual state of the research being developed is and what precautions should be taken into consideration in future researches.

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INTRODUCTION

It’s long recognized the interest of human beings about time and its impact in individual’s actions. Psychology doesn’t escape this trend, focusing in varied aspects of the individual experience of time, from its biological basis to societal behaviours structured by collective notions about time. Within Psychology of Time, exists an aggregate of topics, mostly referred as Subjective Time, which in Lloyd and Arstila’s words represent “…the experience of temporality itself” (2014, p. 657).

Within Subjective Time topics, Time Perspective (TP) has acquired a prominent position. After Zimbardo and Boyd’s seminal work (1999) thousands of papers have cited its work and within the last decade, several books of other authors have been dedicated to exploring and expanding its theory (Kostić & Chadee, 2017; Paixão, da Silva, Ortuño, & Cordeiro, 2013; Stolarski, Fieulaine, & van Beek, 2015). Even when considering other relevant authors about this topic, such as Nuttin and Lens (1985), among many others, Zimbardo’s theory has become a synonymous of Time Perspective research.

Previously, Paixão (1996) stated that in the domain of the study of human temporality, a multiplication of the theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives has occurred; this panorama raises difficulties to a possible effort of developing a coherent discourse about which is the better paradigm, and currently these problems are far from being solved.

This work represents an effort to identify some of the existent shortcomings in Subjective Time research and more specifically in Time Perspective topics, mostly due its theoretical dominance at this moment. The goal of this work is not to diminish or blindly criticize any author or concept, but to encourage a discussion about what the actual state of the research that’s being developed nowadays and what precautions should be taken in future researches.

HOW MANY TIME PERSPECTIVES EXIST?

A key barrier to the development of research and knowledge in Subjective Time and more specifically in Time Perspective topics is the vast aggregate of definitions and operationalisations that this concept has presented throughout the years. As Wallace (1956) points out, several temporal concepts such as time sense, time orientation, time perspective and time perception are frequently used without a proper conceptual and operational characterization. Therefore, it has been complex to reach a consensus among researchers about how many temporal dimensions exist...
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