

Acknowledgment

I am deeply honored by this special gift to me on my 80th birthday from Urszula Tokarska and Joanna Kossewska, and their Human Development Support Unit of the Psychology Department at the Pedagogical University in Krakow, Poland.

They have given me the most precious gift, the gift of time, or more precisely the gift of imaginative and important research on the psychology of time perspective. In this brief volume, readers will be entertained and informed by the writing of 20 authors from 11 different countries, across four continents, in the dozen chapters that appear here for your delight.

I will take a few moments of your time to mention my involvement in this topic.

It all began in my childhood growing up in poverty in the inner city of the South Bronx, New York, from a family with a Sicilian heritage. My father was a brilliant man, although uneducated, whom I felt could do almost anything mechanical or musical, but often did nothing but enjoyed the present hedonistic life style that he created. It was obvious to me that the only way out of poverty was through education, which in part meant through developing a focus on the future, with clear plans for how to get from the terrible present to those positive future goals. With much hard work, but without much family support, I managed to realize that goal of becoming extremely well educated, very future oriented, and financially successful.

However, that personal experience seemed to be not idiosyncratic of me, but typical of many people around the world. How was it that someone developed a temporal focus on the past, or the present, or the future, and once they did, what were the consequences of living in a particular time zone rather than another one?

These generic questions encouraged me to begin a systematic program of research at Stanford University mainly with my student John Boyd, and several others, to discover the causes, and correlates, and consequences of time perspective. Although I am basically a research social psychologist who focuses on the power of situational forces to influence individual behaviour, I realized that it was critical to first develop a valid and reliable scale to measure individual differences in time perspective. After many years of trial and error, we succeeded in realizing that goal and published in 1999 our seminal article on that scale and its associated research. Since then, an enormous amount of research erupted in academic, clinical, and business settings around the world to understand the hows and whys of time perspective.

Our initial scale of 56 items that identified five different time factors, as well as a sixth factor (transcendental future) in an associated scale, has been reduced to 36 items that are universal across two dozen nations, as well as a 15-item short form.

I am also currently in the process of developing another time perspective factor – that of the holistic expanded present – as in Zen mediation.

I now firmly believe that time perspective is a most fundamental aspect of human nature that is fundamental, even foundational to much of our motivations, judgments, decisions and actions – both mundane and grandly significant. It is precious in our personal life and essential in our business life.

The concept of time is one of the most basic, yet rather curious in human thought. We often think about time as if it were a commodity, a thing, and a resource that we say can be saved, can be wasted, can be spent, and can be misused. And of course, in our current time-pressured cultures around the world, time is our most precious asset, which we want more of, can't have enough of, and resent anything that makes us lose some of it – such as the burden of waiting for anything not instantaneously available to us.

In most cultures we have proverbs or sayings in which time is central, such as “a stitch in time will save nine” (saving many later stitches if done correctly and soon enough the first time). We also say “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” meaning to take what is available in the present rather than plan for something that might be better in the future. But we also acknowledge “haste makes waste”. In addition, there is an endless number of songs that feature basic time themes, such as: As time goes by; Your time is now; I didn't know what time it was; Time after time, and many others. Interesting to me is the discovery that in Bali, Indonesia, the word for time translates into “rubber time,” meaning that time is stretched to fit human affairs, is modified to accommodate religious and artistic events. This seems to be the opposite of time concepts in most Western cultures where human affairs are compressed to fit the fleeting time that presses us, that crunches us into an ever more narrow time zone.

I wish to end this brief acknowledgment with the declaration of my new mission life, as a **Time Maker**: Encouraging everyone to learn how to practice making time work for them rather than against them. What time?

*making time for family
making time for friends
making time for fun
making time for nature
making time for spirituality
making time for culture
and especially
making time for more romance in our lives.*

Philip G. Zimbardo