

Exploring the link between time perspective and life satisfaction in adulthood

August 7 2024, by Ingrid Fadelli



Credit: Aron Visual, Unsplash.com.

Humans can relate to the passage of time differently, experiencing a multitude of thoughts and emotions about their past, present and future. In psychology, these time-related mental representations are collectively

referred to as "time perspective."

Time perspective is typically described as the extent to which an individual emphasizes a particular temporal period (i.e., past, present or future) in their mind. Past studies suggest that time perspective is closely linked to well-being.

In other words, people's mental representations of the past, present and future appear to be associated with how satisfied they are with their lives. Specifically, findings suggest that a keen focus on one of these time frames over the others (i.e., often overthinking about the past, present or future) is linked to lower well-being, while a balanced time perspective is linked with higher well-being.

Researchers at Friedrich Schiller University in Germany recently carried out a [longitudinal study](#) aimed at better understanding the associations between time perspective and life satisfaction during adulthood. Their findings, [published](#) in *Communications Psychology*, unveil new specific dimensions of time perspective that are often associated with higher or lower life satisfaction.

"How time is represented is subject to developmental change," Maria Wirth, Markus Wettstein and their colleagues wrote in their paper. "A time perspective dominated by the future is increasingly replaced by one focused on the present and past as the remaining lifetime decreases. These age-related changes supposedly are associated with higher subjective well-being."

Past studies exploring the link between time perspective and life satisfaction attained consistent results. Nonetheless, these studies often examined a single dimension of time perspective, as opposed to various aspects simultaneously, and often only included participants from a specific segment of the adult population, such as younger, middle-aged

or older adults.

Wirth, Wettstein, and their colleagues set out to explore the relationship between time perspective and well-being in more depth and over a 10-year period. Their study focused on four different dimensions of time perspective.

The first two dimensions they examined are past-orientation (how people interpret their [past experiences](#)) and concreteness of future time (i.e., how tangible the future feels to them). The other two are obsolescence (i.e., the extent to which past experiences become less relevant over time) and attitudes towards finitude (i.e., an awareness or acceptance of death).

"We investigated how changes in four facets of time perspective (past-orientation, concreteness of future time, obsolescence, and attitudes towards finitude) were related to changes in life and domain-specific satisfaction and if these relations were moderated by age," wrote Wirth, Wettstein and their colleagues. "We used 10-year [longitudinal data](#) from an age-diverse sample comprising 459 participants (30–80 years)."

When they analyzed the data they collected, the researchers found that people's concreteness of future time was most closely related to life satisfaction. In other words, participants who perceived the future clearly and with specific goals and plans in mind were found to be more satisfied with their lives, while those with an uncertain perception of the future tended to be less satisfied.

"Concreteness was most consistently related to satisfaction," wrote Wirth, Wettstein and their colleagues. "Individuals with overall higher concreteness reported higher life satisfaction and higher life satisfaction was reported on measurement occasions with higher concreteness. An age moderation was only found for satisfaction with mental fitness.

Among younger but not [older adults](#), satisfaction with mental fitness was higher on measurement occasions with higher concreteness."

This recent study by Wirth-Wettstein and their colleagues offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between time perspective and well-being throughout adulthood. In the [future](#), it could serve as a basis for further investigations that examine how other specific nuances of [time perspective](#) relate to [life satisfaction](#).

More information: Maria Wirth et al, Longitudinal associations between time perspective and life satisfaction across adulthood, *Communications Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s44271-024-00118-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s44271-024-00118-0)

© 2024 Science X Network

Citation: Exploring the link between time perspective and life satisfaction in adulthood (2024, August 7) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-exploring-link-perspective-life-satisfaction.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.