

Time Distortions | Help Your Self

You ain't nuts. (probably)

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Put time in its relative place.

Let's first take one last quick dunk into "yeah, duh" territory talking about where these negative evaluations and assumptions about time come from.

I think we've already adequately covered a fact that seems obvious - if you live in the negative past, your perception of time and access to emotions are going to be negative now and as long as it persists into the future. And your future will feel very distant, while your present feels very impossibly long - yet somehow *combined* with the past.

This is the danger of having a "trauma-self" personality part. Of living in perpetual anger. Of carrying around still-unprocessed events that are dragging your brain into 2 decades of unpleasant memories. Rumination and depression live here.

Now, revisiting one of our articles from last time, we can pull some additional basic, helpful, information that helps frame the way our brain frames our time on the planet. Let's go back to:

Time Perspective and the Subjective Passage of Time in Patients with Borderline Personality Disorders

Giovanna Mioni, Marc Wittmann, Elena Prunetti and Franca Stablum

2019

In this study, our research authors tell us:

"A more pronounced past-negative time orientation in healthy individuals has been shown to be related to more negative life experiences, such as more boredom or having more routines in life, and is associated with negative moods and less life satisfaction.

BPD patients had higher scores in the past-negative and present-fatalistic dimensions. Accordingly, patients deviated significantly more from the 'ideal' balanced time perspective than controls."

Remember the ideal balanced time perspective? The ability to re-orient oneself in relative time, as needed in the moment? Well, researchers have more information to provide on that, saying...

"In theory, a balanced pattern of time orientation is derived from higher scores on the past-positive dimension (interpreted as being at ease with one owns past),

moderately-high scores on the future (a dimension related to efficient everyday planning), and the present-hedonistic time orientation (behaviour related to short-term pleasure),

and lower scores on the past-negative (related to dissatisfaction with one's personal life history), and the present-fatalistic time perspective (a generally passive attitude and pessimistic outlook on life).

On average, patients with BPD deviated more from this ideal than control subjects, which pertains to the association between negative affect in individuals with a stronger past-negative orientation and a slowing down of subjective time and expansion of duration."

And the point of reiterating this is... to simplify what we really need to do in our attentional control center to make this Ideal Time Balance Perspective more of a reality in our own lives.

[Ya know, as much as time can be considered 'real,' which is a whole other conversation. Meet me in my new hypothetical project, TMFRs CULT where we talk about this simulation we live in.]

To simplify it, researchers tell us...

DON'T concentrate on your negative past, or fatalistic present.

DO concentrate on the positive past, "open to interpretation" present, and your future planning.

Which... you know... is 10k times easier to say than to do. But it isn't IMPOSSIBLE.

It's just going to require a lot of brain retraining.

How do you do that?

It's exactly what "retraining" sounds like, honestly. Catching the unwanted behavior - thinking too hard and too negatively in any direction - and correcting it. Over and over and over again. Until you get more astute at noticing your attention slipping into shit territory and start to automatically redirect. And then your thoughts eventually form a bridge that passes over the pits and analyzes life less nihilistically, from the get-go.

To do this?

I don't recommend you try to replace 100% negative thoughts with 100% positive thoughts. I find that to be an unrealistic goal. AND it isn't really serving the same function as your brain's bad behavior was. Which means, it won't really satiate the brain mechanism taking place. And the unwanted ruminatory or worrying behavior won't be offset by the new, more positive action. Instead, you'll just oscillate between the TWO behaviors, rather than teaching the new one as a replacement. Know what I'm saying?

SO. Probably don't try to go all roses and butterflies after you were all rusty needles and flaming bags of feces.

If we're being honest, the purpose of ruminating about the past and being fatalistic about the future is... that "expectations" component we talked about last time. Your brain's inherent need to decide what it thinks is coming next.

Drawing your attention to the plans of the future is your best bet. NOT a rainbow, happy go lucky future that feels fake. BUT, just the idea of A future, with a completely neutral fate.

Think of it like a blank canvas or computer screen. Ready to be populated with data you collect. The data, itself, isn't positive or negative. The meaning you GIVE to the data is what matters.

But the future, itself? It exists (for now, at least). It isn't pre-determined. It seriously (and I need you to hear this) ISN'T dependent on your past.

It IS dependent on your present.

But I don't mean the past five minutes to be "your present." I mean this moment, this moment, this moment. The ever-changing present, which is essentially impossible to grasp because its gone by the time you notice it.

Which means...

Focus on your future, just by telling yourself that it's undetermined.

You have no idea what's going to happen. And you really, really, really don't need to try to predict it. It's a waste of time, because 9.9999999 times out of ten, you're going to be wrong. So you don't want to assume it's all negative, but you also won't benefit from pretending it's all positive.

You just want to believe that the future is possible. That it is coming. That it is unshaped material, waiting for your experience and interpretation to make stories out of it. And you'll figure out whatever happens in it, as the future becomes the present.

But, uh... how to do that?

Well, here are some suggestions that might help you improve your relationship with time the way they've helped me. As usual, maybe not. But generally speaking, we find one brain isn't so different from another.

Level out

So, just keeping with the trend of low hanging fruit first... if your nervous system is shot, so is your sense of time.

If you're upregulated into a sympathetic response, your heart is going to be pounding twice as fast as the rest of the planet and so is your estimation of time. I think it'll feel very fast until you get a 10% decrease in hypertension and suddenly find that it's stopped moving at all. On the other hand, if you're down regulated into a parasympathetic place, time is probably going to crawl until it suddenly snaps into semi-reality and then seems to race by.

So, keep that nervous system in order.

Notice energy changes taking place - plenty of episodes on that already. Try to pull them into the opposite direction when they're askew.

Too much bodily energy? Pull your energy down into your gut and feet. Ground yourself.

Too little? Push your energy up, from your guts and through the top of your skull. Move yourself.

Try to get back to a steady state homeostasis, where you feel balanced and centered around some energy that lives calmly in your chest and stomach. Notice the bottoms of your feet. Use deep outbreaths to regulate your heartbeat. And make this a regular practice, finding some even middle ground in your nervous system.

On the same token, you're going to need to keep your emotional world in control. Big emotions create big and small senses of time.

This is where I recommend you try to focus on what you KNOW versus what you FEEL in more challenging times. As in, what do you unquestionably KNOW to be true based on what you've seen and determined so far. Rather than what you FEEL in this second or that one - which, let's be honest - is often going to change that rapidly.

Sometimes we have to rely on historically derived beliefs and logically defined conditions, moreso than what our animal brains are telling us. Because we have pretty easily upset animal brains.

SO, similar to finding an even homeostasis in your CNS, you'll probably want to practice finding an even, grounded, centrally-located energetic home in your guts. A place where you KNOW you're okay, even if it doesn't FEEL that way right now.

The point of all this? You're creating your own sense of consistency. Every time you pull yourself into the same "mode of existence" you pull yourself into the same time signature. It becomes more and more standardized, as your inner world does. You start to have a steady sense of what 5 minutes feels like, because you're experiencing 5 minutes in a consistent condition.

AND you build faith that you can always "jump into" this time train, even when things start to feel too fast or too slow.

So. Pointer one, which is a lot of work over a long period of time... but will make that time a lot more pleasurable and easy to exist in...

- Keep that CNS in order
- Notice energy changes, fix them
- Focus on what you "know" not what you "feel"

Now, for an easier point - something you can do right away that really helps me, as a visual information organizer.

Get a physical planner

Yes, I know, we all have google calendars at this point. They're convenient for using all the devices and keeping your email tethered to your plans. BUT. For me, at least, they don't do something that's pretty important... They don't help me to visualize, manipulate, and absorb time.

I've found that I need several ocular methods for representing time, in order for my brain to "get it." To fit this measurable time within the constraints of that measurable time, and how this obligation leaves me with this much empty room, which is just as long as THAT filled window.

So, I love planners. I like to see my time laid out, so I can see how one task equals another, even if they feel totally different. How there's ACTUALLY this big open opportunity over here, even if my head would rather waste it with pre-activity anxiety before THAT time even arrives. How Friday FEELS ten years away, but it's just as distant as Monday if we're sitting on Wednesday.

It's just... helpful for me. It gives me ways to regulate the COGNITIONS around my time, more so than I'm even regulating my schedule.

Again, it's not that I FORGET my obligations - uh, ever, really - it's that I MISREPRESENT and MISESTIMATE them in my head. And then everything gets dizzying and preoccupying.

This is another reason writing things out, in general, is really helpful to me. It's a way to "offload" information I'm carrying around, which is often eating up mental and emotional energy to keep it in a "holding place." Putting plans on paper, with realistic representations of exactly how much excruciating time they'll really eat up? It keeps the brain clean and less likely to fall into ruminatory patterns.

I like to create "blocks" of time in my planner. I like to point out free time, and find useful ways to fill it. I like to look at the week and month, overall, to help create and regulate my concept of time passing. I like to regularly look back and write out how one week led to this one, plus how this week will lead into the next.

I account for the time I've spent. And I give myself an outline for the time that's coming.

Altogether, it really helps a brain like mine create some foundational basis for comprehending how, when, and the ways I exist. And time becomes a lot less mysterious or difficult to track.

Get a physical planner, write out your days on paper, or get good at manipulating a digital calendar to represent your life in a way that makes sense of your world. Start to make more consistent sense of your time.

Next up... one of my favorite things that the rest of the planet seems to do everything it can to avoid.

Spend time alone and un-distracted

Pretty hard to get a realistic, predictable, accurate sense of time when you're disassociating all the fucking time, isn't it? Well, staring at a phone, TV, computer, or another person is a great way to make sure your brain isn't really in the building, huh?

Scroll away, and watch those hours pass by, un-utilized, unrecognized, and therefore unrealized.

And... then wonder why you can't seem to get a grasp on the clock. Probably as shitty memories from the past rise up, overtake the system, and force you back into staring at your screen from 8 inches away from your face. Just keep jettisoning blue light directly into your visual cortex, and maybe the world will go away.

Well... it will. The present moment will be non-applicable. The past will be a sustaining, quick-sanding monster that you forever try to escape. The future will be perpetually arriving faster than you anticipate.

And then you'll be dead one day, having accomplished nothing. So. This is my technologically damning way to say - distractions are our way of being cowards, too afraid of owning up to life, and therefore never having an accurate grasp on it.

Spend some time by yourself, consistently, without escapism. Not only will you get a more predictable sense of time, when you're spending your time in a similar condition each day. BUT you'll finally get the focus you need to clear out all the fears and hangups that are creating time distortions and the need for distractions, in the first place.

Stop trying to treat the problem - painful and inconsistent-feeling time - by AVOIDING the problem - escaping from that miserable time - and thereby creating MORE of the problem -

ever-accumulating pileups of unpleasant information that makes time painful and inconsistent feeling.

Know what I'm saying?

Yeah, probably, but it sounds horrible and you don't want to spend time alone and undistracted, when that's been a number one avoidant goal in life thus far. I get it. I'm pushing you to escape the human condition, and that's an uncommon path to follow.

It takes bravery and openness to confronting the immediate obstacle that holds the key to everything moving a lot more smoothly. Trusting that time WILL pass. And that you WILL survive even the most terrible moments you've been avoiding.

But if you do it often enough, it will become addicting. And it will help regulate your time by establishing standards of time perception AND unraveling the need for all those present-moment-numbers.

Moving on...

Get right with the sun

You know what I've been super privileged to do in the past few years? Actually regulate my schedule based on what billions of years of evolution have dictated. Living by the patterns of the sun, instead of the patterns of capitalism and social obligation.

As in... I get up when the sun gets up. I go to bed when the sun disappears. And I find time a lot less torturous this way.

In the past, I think I had to battle time so often to meet expectations of others. Putting my energized morning hours into the "wasted" pile, by using that time to get ready for work obligations. Then, putting my "slow down and rest" hours into the "I fucking hate this pile" by feeling like I needed to be up late for the sake of other people, work commitments, or a few peaceful hours outside of the office.

I was always fighting against my biology, both in my body and brain. Not to mention, in my psychology - which honestly needed a lot of those obligated hours to deal with back-collected material it hadn't worked out yet. And that distorted my time in numerous directions.

I've found that my sense of time is a lot less fucked up if I just listen to my bioreactor protein suit and try to run my life the way the sun influences the whole system to operate.

Your circadian rhythm is so tied to hormonal regulation, which is so tied to... every single physical process in your body and cognitive control center... it's really foolish that humans try to do anything else. But we do. Because we think we're greater than biology.

Nah, Fuckers. We just battle our biology and ultimately lose.

I realize that not everyone can free-ball their schedule. I have about a million remote-work spinning plates in the air, slowly accrued over 5 years, to get to this point of flexibility. But there are always ways to help yourself.

Wake up with the sun. Use your energized morning hours. Taper off in the afternoons, as much as you can. Wind down in the evenings, unless you get that natural second-wind of energy to take care of your non-work-needs. Dim your activities as the light dims outside. And go to bed with the sun.

On seasonal basis, LET winter be slow and depressing, full of rest and re-strategizing. LET spring build energy and excitement as your days stretch out. EMBRACE the mania and extra energy of summer, expand your goals and utilize those longer days. And when you reach Fall, just start slowing down and re-orienting towards analytical processes again.

Don't fight nature. Don't believe this human 9-5 schedule, which is really like a 6am-9pm schedule, is the way you're "correct" in operating. Especially when those expectations are the same, regardless of the conditions and amount of light we even have to burn that midnight oil. We aren't robots. We're animals.

And our brains respond to our natural world - including the entire universe - whether we want to let them or not.

Our time is BASED ON the circling of planets. AND YET we try to disregard it all, to impose our stupid, ignorant, species-worshipping "human will" on time, itself.

And, you know... this has all only come about in the past century or so, when the town clocktower started artificially forcing us into modes of daily operation that dismiss our biological roots and functions.

As usual... *sigh* capitalism. And *sigh* all the ways we sell our selves (and ultimately the time of our lives) to it. Which brings us to...

Get right with your Self

Ya know, as mentioned in the “quit distracting yourself” section... it seems like the majority of our time perception distortions come back to trying to avoid what we've decided is reality. Including, most prominently, what we've decided we believe about our SELVES.

Plus, how much control we believe our SELVES actually have in this life.

I think a terror of time comes from feeling like a paper air plane in a tornado, looking forwards and backwards at life so far. But most of those thoughts and feelings? Are kindof lazy brain determinations that need to be re-examined and rewritten, instead of accepted and avoided for the next 7 decades.

For me, at least, comprehending time has required getting rid of past pain points which are rapidly translated into future fearful fallacies. Undoing the hateful self-assumptions. And getting clear on what MATTERS in my time, so I stop fleeing from it and start working on molding it.

All those years of numbing out and escaping? I was just running away from my Self and my assumed failures that were still waiting to be actualized.

So, not that we need more talk about finding your Self around here... .but maybe we do.

Ask yourself, honestly... when you're suffering in time, and just trying to drudge through it, likely with distractions...

What are you avoiding? Is there something you're running away from? Trying to ignore? Probably... some inner critic shit mixed in with terrible memories.... Which circle back on the inner critic screamings, if I had to guess.

Well, that'll keep you in the past fatalistic orientation, trying to escape your present while being trapped in the past. Better to just deal with it, and establish a more realistic sense of YOU. One that you can live alongside.

Another question - How do you WANT to spend your time? What does your “truest inner vibe” tell you matters? And how do you want to interact with that?

Well, time is the medium of action, right? If you're terrified of the material, you're not going to finish that art project.

What do you WANT to accomplish? And how does that necessitate a balanced handle on time? How can you *spend* more of your time and waste less of it?

Think less. Act on your goals more. And you'll probably find that time isn't so scary and unpredictable - it's a resource you want to tap into.

And, lastly, you might want to inquire... are there any areas of lie where your Self is just "fronting?" As in, ACTING the way you feel pressured to, rather than BEING the way you feel genuine to?

Well, that's going to cause a lot of stress, stress causes a lot of excess obsessive attention plus nervous system upsets, and all of that will create time distortions.

Similar to the "live by the sun" point... you just gotta get right with your actual NATURE. If you're living a phony-feeling life, you'll have phony-feeling time. You'll push yourself to live "out of alignment" with the forces that be. And it will make a lot of moments grind by, as part of you thrashes against the prison it lives in while another part of you KEEPS THAT BARRED DOOR LOCKED.

I think we can all assume... being imprisoned is a time-skewing experience that isn't going to lean towards the "flying by" end of the spectrum. So don't lock yourself up.

Identify what isn't working for you that you've maybe felt pressured to embody. And then start mapping out the ways you can take steps - one at a time - that accumulate to much bigger changes, when compiled over the steady march of time.

It WILL pass, so what do you want to be doing with it?

What're you avoiding?

How do you want to spend your time?

Any areas you're "fronting"?

You might want to ask these big questions and work out the answers... first, intensively, when you have a lot of time to focus without other human influences fuckign you up. AND THEN, over the course of every day, for the rest of your life, to make sure you're staying on track. At least THAT will provide you some consistency in time. Not to mention... a method to actually determine and enact your purpose, instead of fleeing from it, even though its still going to be waiting right around the next corner.

And I think that's where we should end today.

With a reminder of the inevitability of time. The objective consistency of it. The meaning of it, which is just... a medium through which you can experience life. And a nudge to *make* your own experience - your brain is doing it automatically, whether you're regulating the story it creates or not.

SO you might as well control those stories, to control your experience, to create a life you want.

The subjective misinterpretation of time doesn't *define* you. It's just been a cognitive calculation error. Correct the variable in your human logic that creates your misperception... and you can start rewriting this whole math problem.

Concentrate on the neutrality and underdetermined nature of the future.

Get your emotional and nervous systems leveled out.

Get a physical planner or visual representation for time that works for you.

Spend time alone and undistracted.

Get right with the sun.

And get right with your Self.

And see... over time... if the clock stops feeling like such a fucking nightmare.

Good luck out there.

Hail your purpose.

And Cheers, time-space trippers.