Chapter 7
TIME PERSPECTIVE OF OLDER ADULTS: RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE

Elena Kazakina
Independent practice, East Brunswick, New Jersey, USA
ekazakina@comcast.net

ABSTRACT: Time perspective was investigated in 103 women and men aged 65 to 91 in relation to their well-being, distress and attachment style. Unlike prior research that frequently reduced time perspective to a single time orientation (e.g., future), or to a single temporal dimension (e.g., extension – projection into the future or past), my study investigated all three time orientations, past, present and future and along multiple dimensions (density, emotional valence, extension, time continuity, and temporal balance). The findings revealed that positive functioning in late life was associated with several “healthy” components of time perspective: positive attitudes toward the present and past, a sense of connection among time orientations and a balanced perception of positive aspects of one’s past, present, and future. Time perspective psychotherapy developed based on the concepts and findings of my research and the Zimbardo temporal model emphasizes the notion of balanced temporality in clinical work. The review of clinical strategies demonstrates how a time perspective approach can be integrated with cognitive-behavioral and psychodynamic interventions, enhancing the effectiveness of treatment. Clinical cases have demonstrated the alleviation of symptoms of psychological distress and enhancement of successful aging.

Keywords: older adults, time perspective psychotherapy, balanced temporality, successful aging.

Overview

Each research project has its own past, present and future. I left the former Soviet Union in 1989 before the Berlin Wall fell. I was heading into the future, leaving behind the past. In my professional life I did psychological research on actors’ creativity and self-actualization. I did not know I would become a psychologist again. The experience of transition and multiple cultural adjustments compelled me to understand how people perceive time, the time of our lives. The most gripping question was whether positive adjustment may allow one to hold on to all three time orientations, past, present and future, rather than sacrifice one for another, with future orientation dominating the temporal perspective, as American culture seemed to require. Could the connection or continuity among time orientations be possible in people facing challenges of change?

Three years later, enrolled in a doctoral program and struggling to formulate the topic of my dissertation, I brought my interest to the attention of my academic advisor, Dr. Winthrop Adkins. He encouraged me to pursue it. My school, Columbia University Teachers College, had a tradition of using doctoral dissertations to examine complex and novel topics. Perhaps this approach honored the philosophy and spirit of its famous alumnae Carl Rogers and Rollo May.