

CAREER TIME PERSPECTIVE IN SPECIAL POPULATIONS

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The economically disadvantaged and the culturally different do not readily seek career planning help. This may be due to their feelings of hopelessness and their distrust of those who claim to offer hope and help. They lack hope because they expect that the future will merely repeat the present that they endure and the past that their families suffered. If they know that career planning assistance exists, then they view it as a service for middle-class, white males. They believe that counseling is provided by middle-class people who devised their models, methods, and materials to help other middle-class people. Their hopelessness and distrust stop these discouraged individuals from seeking help.

Sometimes people from special populations are recruited to youth agencies, displaced homemaker programs, and Private Industrial Council projects. Unfortunately, too many of these programs just provide traditional career planning services. Typical guidance, counseling, and placement services consist of helping clients make decisions. This focus on choice includes self-appraisal and occupational information to ease decision making. Such interventions benefit the model career services client who is trying to choose from among alternative futures. They want the counselor to help them make the right choice, that is, the choice that will maximize future success and satisfaction. The model career services clients benefit from these interventions because they are ready, or almost ready, to take control and shape their futures.

Unfortunately, traditional career planning services frequently do not help clients from special populations because they are not ready for them. Due to their situation, socioeconomic status, or socialization experiences, these clients focus attention on today and maybe next week but not next year. They must worry about surviving in the present—paying their rent and utilities, buying food, making clothing last, and so on. Little energy or interest is left over for preparing for tomorrow. In a sense, these individuals cannot process the content of traditional career services. Thus, they perceive these career planning services as irrelevant.

Many career planning service providers assume that each individual is aware that he or she has a career and wants help in developing it. Too often we forget that not everyone knows that they have a career. This is because we ignore our own definitions and use words like job and career as synonyms. The proper term for one's current work activity is position. For example, I occupy the position of career counselor. A job is a group of positions in one company whereas an occupation is a group of jobs in many companies. A career is the series of positions that an individual holds throughout his or her life cycle. Although everyone has an objective career, many individuals are not subjectively aware of their careers.

People from special populations often do not experience a subjective career. They do not think about their vocational past, present, or future, nor do they have occupational daydreams. If you don't have a future or a dream, then you don't want traditional planning services.

Subjective career awareness occurs within the framework of one's personal experience of time. In other words, there is a time perspective that facilitates career planning. Vocational psychologists call this construct future orientation or time perspective. Although the construct of time perspective has played a pivotal role in theories of vocational maturity or readiness to make realistic choices, it has drawn little attention from researchers.

Along with my colleagues and students at Kent State University, I have been conducting a program of research on career time perspective. We began by linguistically explicating and operationally defining the construct in hopes of devising interventions to facilitate its development among clients from special populations. This helped us devise interventions that increase the readiness to benefit from career planning services by helping clients look forward to the vocational future.

The personal experience of time structures one's career self-awareness and is distinct from objective time. Objective time means chronology—century, year, month, day, hour, minute, and second. Studies that deal with the psychology of objective time have addressed *time perception* variables such as time, duration, and estimation. In contrast, studies that deal with the psychology of temporal experience have addressed *time conception* variables such as time perspective and orientation, especially as these relate to psychopathology. The largest number of these studies was conducted by personality psychologists who investigated a variable called future orientation. Interest in this research peaked from 1955 to 1965 and has been minimal since then.

The first problem we encountered in studying career time perspective was the confusing literature on temporal experience. The literature offered no consistent theoretical framework. The construct definitions were metaphorical and conveyed many surplus meanings. The researchers used different constructs interchangeably (e.g., time sense, time orientation, time perspective, and time perception) with little attention to construct or operational definitions.

We addressed the problem of conceptual confusion by devising a comprehensive and standard definition of temporal experience and its dimensions. After several factor analytic and construct validity studies, I concluded that time experience included three substantive dimensions. The first dimension, orientation, refers to whether the past, present, or future is most important in decision making. The second dimension, differentiation, refers to both how extended each time zone is and how many events populate each time zone. The third dimension, integration, refers to how much overlap or connection exists between the time zones.

The orientation dimension is most important in the career time perspective of special populations. Their present orientation restricts interest in the future and preparation for it. They lack familiarity with and do not relate themselves to the future. Thus, they do not have a cognitive schema to sustain career dreams and vocational fantasies. The saying "if you can dream it, you can do it" says it clearly. The sentence starts with "if." Special populations cannot dream it, so they cannot do it. They are hopeless because all they have is the present.

Traditional career planning services address the second and third dimensions of temporal experience. They are devised for those who have hope. The interventions make the future "real" by populating it with anticipated events and goals that give the future shape and substance. The interventions help clients see the connection between their present behavior and the achievability of their future goals. Traditional career planning services aid the helpless and hapless to plan and manage their futures but can leave the hopeless more discouraged.

We have had initial success with intervention methods and materials based on this model of career time perspective in special populations. Techniques that help people think about their

futures have helped both groups of delinquent and economically disadvantaged youth become more optimistic about their futures and ready for traditional career planning interventions. A sample intervention technique is included herein as appendix A. Appendix B lists studies conducted by Kent State University students that more fully describe the results of our research program on career time perspective. We need more research, yet we are hopeful that dealing with career time perspective directly can augment existing techniques to help individuals from special populations develop themselves and their careers.

APPENDIX A:

A TIME PERSPECTIVE INTERVENTION

What were you thinking when you drew the circles as you have?
What do their size, relative position, and spaces in between mean to you?
Are you satisfied with your past, present, and future the way you see them now?
How would you draw the circles so that they would be ideal (just right)?
Would you like to get closer to that picture?
What are you doing now to get from your present circle to the future one?
What would you need to do?
How does the past circle influence the present and future ones?
How did the circles look one year ago? Five years?
How will they look in one year? In five years?
How would someone you admire very much draw the circles?
Would you like yours to look more like that?
What would you have to do to make that happen?
Draw a horizontal line in the circles marking the preparation for your career and when you actually start working.
Mark in the circle when you started primary school, high school, college.
Draw your past, present and future in other shapes that you think would more closely represent how you see them.
What would a picture of time look like to you? Describe or draw it.
How do the things you do in the present circle effect the things you will do in the future circle?
How do the things you will do in the future circle effect the things you do in the present circle?
Show me a point in the past circle when you knew or hoped something in the present circle would happen.
What is it that happened?
Show me a point in the present circle when you realized or hoped something in the future circle would happen.
What is it that happened?
Show me the point in any of the circles when you decided on a career choice.
Is it your current career choice?
Where did it change?
If that point of choice is in the future, what needs to happen in the present circle before you can decide on a career?

APPENDIX B:

CAREER TIME PERSPECTIVE DISSERTATIONS
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Lopez-Baez, Sandra	August, 1980	A Study of Career Consciousness: Temporal Experience and Career Maturity
Tout, Nancy	May, 1980	The Psychology of Career Consciousness: Vocational Adjustment and Temporal Experience
Waechter, Linda	December, 1980	A Study of Career Consciousness: Work Values and Temporal Experience
Collins, Eileen	August, 1981	The Psychology of Career Consciousness: Planfulness and Planning in Mid-Life
Silling, Marc	August, 1981	A Study of Career Consciousness: Content of Anticipated Future Events and Temporal Structure
Lucas, John	December, 1981	The Psychology of Career Consciousness: The Role of Self-Consciousness
Rios-Bonilla, Tonita	December, 1981	The Psychology of Career Consciousness: The Impact of Gender Difference
Hellwig, Jane	August, 1982	The Psychological Assessment of Temporal Orientation: A Validity Study
Gardner, Gerald	May, 1983	The Psychology of Career Consciousness: Temporal Experience and Leisure Decision-Making
Anuszkiewicz, Thomas	August, 1983	The Psychology of Career Consciousness: Modifying Temporal Experience
Madison, Michael	August, 1983	The Psychological Dimensions of Temporal Experience: A Multi-Instrument Analysis
Feinburg, Ruth	May, 1984	Creativity and Midlife Planfulness and Planning