Existential Social Psychology Lab

Anchored in Time: Exploring the Experience of Temporal Rootedness

TCU

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1 Introduction

Literature

- The phrase "what a time to be alive" is a common expression of temporal rootedness (TR).
- Temporal rootedness is the extent to which individuals feel they belong in the present moment.
- A sense of belonging in time is associated with positive well-being outcomes, including happiness, flourishing, and self-esteem.
- However, despite its relevance, TR remains conceptually underdefined.

Purpose

- This study aims to further define and investigate themes in Temporal Rootedness (TR) as well as explore how current social experiences can both affect and be affected by TR.
- Additionally, we compare participants' descriptions of what makes them feel TR across two time points (2019 & 2025) to assess whether these themes remain consistent with time.

2 Method

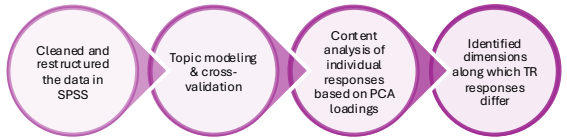
Participants

Writing sample 1: Collected April and September 2019

- MTurk: 18+
- N = 138, 60% Men, Age: M = 36.48, SD = 11.14

Writing sample 2: Collected July 2025

- Prolific: 18+
- N = 123, 52% Men, Age: M = 47.58, SD = 16.36



3 Results

Prompt

We'd like to know about the ways that you feel like you belong in the present time. Take a moment to think of a recent event or experience that made you feel like you are living in the right time, or that you belong in the present time. **What are some things about this experience that make you feel that you are living in the right time?**

Number of topics = 30 | Number of components = 4 – 5

Family and Close Relationships

"I think I'm living in the right time because of the family that I currently have. I would have never met my girlfriend or had the kids I've had in a different time frame. She's the love of my life, and I was born into the right time frame to be able to meet her."

Convenience of Everyday Life

"... I reflected on it later that evening and realized that grocery delivery was not something that I could get done when I was younger. I would have loved not having to drag three children to the grocery store with me each week."

Defining Culture

"I feel like I am in my prime of time with people around me and can be myself. It came to my mind when I was at a rally for LGBT rights. Me being gay and in the past not feeling accepted, gave me so much hope now. It made me feel like this is the time I was meant to fully be myself in. "

Technological Advancements

"Having the technological advances today makes me feel like I am living in the right time. We are on the course to being able to advance further in technology, AI and automation has created a world where things are becoming easier. I believe that AI will help with medical cures and medicine advancements..."

4 Discussion

Summary

- Using natural language processing, this study identified four recurring themes in participants' conceptualization of TR: relationships, convenience, technology, and culture.
- These findings suggest that the sense of security and belonging in time is linked to connection with others, ease of daily life, technological progress, and engagement with current cultural trends and issues.
- These themes emerged at two time points (2019 & 2025), indicating that the features of TR are recognizable despite changing social contexts.
- In all, these findings will guide future work aimed at measuring and manipulating TR to improve well-being.

Limitations & Future Directions

- The language analysis model identified different numbers of components across Sample 1 and Sample 2. This suggests limits to the theme stability or the need for a larger sample size.
- Within the defining culture theme, many participants referenced political topics. Future research should examine how political ideology relates to TR.
- While the present research examines the positive experience of TR, future studies should also investigate how people experience low TR, or the feeling that they are "out of place" in the present.

5 References

Baldwin, M., & Keefer, L. A. (2020). Being here and now: The benefits of belonging in space and time. *Journal of Happiness Studies: An Interdisciplinary Forum on Subjective Well-Being, 21*(8), 3069–3093. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-019-00214-7

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