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Living in Time: The Construction of Temporal Passage and Its Role in Agency, Coping, and Meaning-Making

Ramon George O. Atento, PhD

Abstract

Human beings experience time as flowing, directional, and open toward the future, yet prominent accounts in physics do not require that time pass. This paper sets that contested question aside and asks a behavioral one: how does the constructed experience of temporal passage shape agency, coping, and meaning-making, and what does its disruption reveal about its function? Using a conceptual integrative review design, the paper synthesizes recent research on time perception, mental time travel and future self-continuity, time perspective, temporal disruption during crisis and distress, and the social structuring of time. The synthesis indicates that judgments of the passage of time are dissociable from judgments of duration, are more closely tied to affect, contextual change, and social context, and are more consistently altered under isolation and distress. On this basis, the paper argues that felt passage is better understood as an experiential register of engagement than as an imperfect clock. It proposes a four-layer framework in which experiential, self-representational, dispositional, and social layers of temporal experience jointly scaffold agency, coping, and meaning-making. A typology distinguishes four patterns of temporal disruption: the stalled present, the foreclosed future, the dominant past, and the compressed present. The analysis further suggests that social connection may supply much of the material from which a moving present is constructed, and that the consequences of changes in social tempo depend on temporal fit. Six propositions are advanced for empirical testing, with implications for coping under uncertainty, identity, and social isolation. Because the underlying evidence is largely correlational and geographically concentrated, the framework is interpretive rather than confirmatory, and it makes no claim about the physical nature of time.

Keywords: *subjective time; passage of time; temporal experience; future self-continuity; time perspective; social isolation; meaning-making*

1. Introduction

Few features of human experience seem as self-evident as the passage of time. The past appears settled, the present vivid, and the future open. People remember yesterday but not tomorrow; they plan, wait, regret, and hope, and in doing so they experience themselves as moving forward through a sequence of moments that arrive and then recede. Yet this felt structure sits uneasily with prominent accounts in physics. In relativistic physics there is no universally shared present, since observers in different states of motion can disagree about which events are simultaneous. In addition, the fundamental dynamical laws are largely indifferent to the direction of time. Some physicists and philosophers have taken these features to support a "block" conception in which all moments are equally real and passage is not a feature of the world itself (Putnam, 1967; Rovelli, 2018). That inference remains contested within the philosophy of physics, and accounts in which temporal becoming is real continue to be defended. More generally, foundational physics has repeatedly produced results that sit uneasily with everyday intuition, as two centuries of work on the double-slit experiment illustrate (R. G. Atento, 2026a).

The present paper does not enter that debate. Its point of departure is a narrower observation that holds whichever physical account eventually prevails. The experience of temporal passage is not simply delivered by the world; it is

assembled by the person. Even if passage were a fundamental physical fact, the lived sense of a moving present, a receding past, and an approaching future would still depend on memory, anticipation, attention, emotion, and social coordination. The physics of time is therefore relevant here only because it makes a behavioral question visible. If the flow of time cannot be taken for granted as a straightforward reading of physical reality, then its pervasiveness and stability in human experience require explanation. The guiding question accordingly shifts from whether time is real to what experienced time does for human beings, and what happens when it ceases to do it.

Contemporary conditions make this question more than a philosophical curiosity. During pandemic confinement, large numbers of people reported that time had become distorted: days seemed to stretch or collapse, weeks blurred together, and the ordinary markers of temporal progression lost their force (Chaumon et al., 2022; Ogden, 2021). Social acceleration is a second condition. Despite the proliferation of time-saving technologies, it is associated with a pervasive sense of time scarcity and with the feeling that the present is continually slipping away (Rosa, 2013). Prolonged uncertainty, whether economic, political, or personal, is a third, because it can make the future feel foreshortened or closed. Digitally mediated environments are a fourth, since they fragment attention and blur the boundaries between temporal phases of daily life. In each case, alterations in temporal experience are bound up with whether people can plan, persist, cope, and find coherence in their lives. How time is experienced is therefore a behavioral and social matter with practical consequences.

Clarity on terms is needed at the outset. *Temporal passage* refers here to the felt sense that the present moves and that events recede into the past. *Temporal experience* is broader. It encompasses the perception of duration and order, the felt quality of passage, and the subjective character of past, present, and future as they figure in awareness. *Temporal orientation* refers to the relatively stable tendency of individuals to attend to and weight the past, the present, or the future in thought, feeling, and behavior (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). *Temporal disruption* denotes conditions under which the ordinary structure of temporal experience is altered: time stalls or accelerates, the past comes to dominate the present, or the future loses its perceived openness. These distinctions matter because the literature frequently conflates the perception of duration, the experience of passage, and dispositional orientation toward time, although each raises distinct behavioral questions.

The scholarly problem lies in the fragmentation of the relevant research. Studies of time perception have examined how durations are estimated and how attention, arousal, and emotion distort subjective time (Cui et al., 2022; Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2021). Research on mental time travel has shown that remembering the past and imagining the future draw on closely related cognitive and neural capacities (Teghil et al., 2025). Time-perspective research has documented associations between temporal orientation and psychological wellbeing (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021). Work on future-self continuity suggests that the degree to which people feel connected to their future selves is related to their intertemporal choices (Yang et al., 2024). The sociology of time, in turn, has analyzed how clock time, social coordination, and acceleration structure collective temporal life. Each literature illuminates part of the phenomenon, but few connect the cognitive construction of passage to the behavioral functions that passage appears to serve. Much of the time-perception literature also treats subjective temporal distortions primarily as departures from clock time. That framing is methodologically useful, but it can obscure the question of what temporal experience accomplishes for the person who has it.

The unresolved intellectual problem, then, is the absence of an integrated account of temporal experience as a behavioral-social infrastructure. On the interpretation developed in this paper, felt passage functions as a kind of scaffolding. Agency appears to depend on a future experienced as open and on a self experienced as continuous across time. Coping appears to depend on the capacity to locate distress within a present that passes and to imagine a time beyond it. Meaning-making appears to depend on the narrative ordering of experience into past, present, and anticipated future. If this interpretation is sound, then disruptions of temporal experience become analytically revealing rather than incidental: they expose the functions that ordinary temporal experience performs precisely when those functions begin to fail.

Accordingly, this paper pursues five interrelated aims. It first distinguishes time as a physical parameter from time as lived experience, without adjudicating debates in the physics of time. It then synthesizes research on the cognitive and affective mechanisms through which temporal passage is constructed. Third, it examines how temporal orientation and the representation of the future self relate to decision-making, coping, and wellbeing. Fourth, it analyzes conditions under which temporal experience is disrupted, including uncertainty, collective crisis, isolation, and social acceleration. Finally, it develops an integrative framework that positions temporal experience as an infrastructure for agency, coping, and meaning-making. The principal question guiding the analysis is how the

constructed experience of temporal passage shapes human agency, coping, and meaning-making, and what its disruption reveals about its behavioral-social function.

The argument advanced is that experienced passage is best understood as a constructed behavioral achievement rather than a perceptual error awaiting correction. It is produced by cognitive processes, stabilized by dispositional orientations, and calibrated by social rhythms. Whatever its standing at the level of physical reality, it is behaviorally real and functionally consequential. The paper develops this argument through a conceptual integrative design. Section 2 reviews the relevant literatures thematically and identifies their points of convergence, tension, and omission. Section 3 describes the conceptual approach. Section 4 develops the analytical synthesis and proposed framework, Section 5 discusses its implications and boundaries, and Section 6 concludes.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 The Psychological Construction of Temporal Passage

Research on subjective time increasingly distinguishes two forms of temporal judgment that everyday language tends to merge. Duration judgments concern how long an interval lasted. Passage-of-time judgments concern how quickly time seemed to move while it was being lived. The distinction matters because the two judgments respond differently to the factors that shape experience, and their divergence is central to understanding felt passage as constructed rather than simply registered.

The literature on emotion and duration illustrates the problem. Emotional arousal frequently lengthens perceived duration, especially for brief stimuli and in tasks that require explicit estimation (Au & Tang, 2026; Zhao & Zeng, 2022). Meta-analytic evidence nonetheless indicates that the effect is moderated by valence, stimulus type, and temporal paradigm, and that the arousal effect specifically is inconsistent across studies (Cui et al., 2022). Reviews add that arousal has been operationalized in heterogeneous ways, which complicates any simple mapping between arousal and temporal distortion (Gable et al., 2022).

Studies that measure both judgments within the same design sharpen this ambiguity. Emotional imagery and standardized emotional pictures have been found to leave duration estimates largely unchanged while substantially altering passage-of-time ratings (Bratzke, 2026; Huang, Jacucci, et al., 2026). Retrospective duration judgments of immersive videos likewise appear resistant to physiological arousal (Micillo et al., 2026). On this evidence, emotion acts more reliably on how fast time feels than on how long time seems.

A growing body of work supports the conclusion that the two judgments are non-interchangeable. Experiments designed to test their relationship report neither interference between them nor a consistent correlation (Droit-Volet, 2026). Studies using emotional pictures, autobiographical reviviscence, and naturalistic event sequences report distinct sensitivity profiles for each (Bratzke, 2026; Cécillon et al., 2026; Lamprou-Kokolaki et al., 2024). The dissociation appears strongest at short timescales (Bratzke & Hansen, 2023; Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2022, 2023). Some coupling emerges for longer intervals, but even there felt passage is not simply the inverse of estimated duration (Bratzke, 2025; Droit-Volet & Hallez, 2022).

Attention to what drives felt passage reinforces a constructive interpretation. Passage-of-time judgments accelerate with positive affect, higher arousal, task difficulty, and denser perceptual change, even when objective duration is held constant (Jording et al., 2022; Lamprou-Kokolaki et al., 2024; Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2021). In children, these judgments track happiness and arousal before they track elapsed time, which suggests the construct is grounded early in experiential change rather than in timekeeping (Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2023). For short intervals, duration judgments are better predicted by attentional factors, whereas passage judgments are better predicted by emotional states such as boredom. At timescales of minutes, both draw increasingly on memory and emotion, but passage remains especially sensitive to boredom, sadness, and social context (Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2022; Nicolaï et al., 2024).

Methodologically, this literature is dominated by laboratory paradigms and brief intervals. Temporal experience across days, weeks, or life periods is comparatively underexamined, and that is the scale at which passage is most plausibly connected to agency and meaning. Even so, the theme supports the paper's foundational premise. Felt passage is not a readout of elapsed time but an experiential product assembled from affect, attention, contextual change, and memory. It therefore appears to function as an evaluative register of how life is going, not only as a measurement of how long it has taken.

2.2 Mental Time Travel and the Future Self

If felt passage is constructed, the capacities through which people project themselves into past and future are a primary site of that construction. Converging meta-analytic, developmental, electrophysiological, and neuroimaging evidence indicates that remembering the past and imagining the future rely on largely shared cognitive and neural resources. These include a recurring network of hippocampal, midline, and parietal regions, and the processes of self-projection, scene construction, imagery, and episodic binding (Colás-Blanco et al., 2022; Sulpizio et al., 2025; Teghil et al., 2025). Developmental and lesion evidence points the same way: impairments of episodic recollection frequently co-occur with impairments of future simulation (Nyhout & Mahy, 2023; Pendleton & Clayton, 2026).

The overlap is substantial but not complete. Future thinking appears to depend more heavily on recombining remembered details into novel scenarios. It also recruits additional semantic, goal-related, and monitoring processes, with differences expressed as graded regional engagement rather than discrete systems (Cona et al., 2023; Messina et al., 2026; Teghil et al., 2025). Temporal distance modulates past and future representations asymmetrically: near-future events draw more on episodic simulation, and the two directions differ in monitoring demands (Colás-Blanco et al., 2022). Theoretical work has correspondingly moved beyond a strictly episodic account toward models in which mental time travel draws on hybrid episodic–semantic representations (Addis & Szpunar, 2024). The prevailing picture is therefore a unified temporal self-system with graded specializations, not two separate faculties. The imagined future is built, in part, from the remembered past.

A second strand concerns how people relate to the selves they project into the future. Future self-continuity, the felt connectedness between present and future selves, is generally associated with lower delay discounting and a greater willingness to choose delayed rewards (Sun et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). Large-sample evidence describes the distribution and correlates of continuity in the general population (Hershfield et al., 2025). Neural evidence links the continuity–discounting association to insula–anterior cingulate connectivity (Zhao et al., 2024). The association is moderated by age (Liu et al., 2025). Among adolescents, continuity appears to carry part of the relationship between depressive symptoms and intertemporal choice (Wang et al., 2026), a finding that anticipates the disruption literature reviewed in Section 2.4.

The intervention evidence introduces an important tension. Interventions can increase felt continuity reliably, but their effects on economic patience are inconsistent. Some improve broader outcomes such as valued living without altering discounting (Blom et al., 2026; Grekin et al., 2025). The continuity–choice relationship is thus well established correlationally, while its causal leverage remains uncertain.

A further limitation is the narrowness of the dominant outcome measure. Delay discounting captures one form of forward-looking behavior, but it is a restricted operationalization of agency. Relatively little of this literature examines how continuity with the future self relates to coping with adversity, persistence under uncertainty, or the construction of meaning. For the present argument, the theme establishes two points. First, temporal experience is integrated at the level of the self, not only at the level of perception. Second, the experienced connection between present and future selves appears to be one of the conditions on which forward-oriented action depends.

2.3 Temporal Orientation and Psychological Functioning

Where the previous themes concern momentary experience and representational capacity, research on time perspective addresses the relatively enduring ways people weight the past, present, and future. The most consistent finding is that a balanced time perspective is associated with higher psychological wellbeing, greater life satisfaction and flourishing, and lower distress. This is supported by meta-analytic, systematic-review, and primary-study evidence (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021; Erguler et al., 2023; Fuentes et al., 2022). Across these studies, past-positive and future orientations tend to accompany better wellbeing, whereas past-negative and present-fatalistic orientations tend to accompany worse outcomes (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021).

Person-centered research suggests that temporally expansive profiles score highest on time-related wellbeing dimensions across adulthood (Sgaramella et al., 2026). Balanced time perspective and mindfulness also appear to operate jointly as components of adaptive self-regulation (Fuentes et al., 2022). The evidence base is, however, predominantly cross-sectional. One of the few intervention designs suggests that savoring practice may promote a more balanced perspective (Gao et al., 2025), but causal claims remain weakly grounded.

The evidence on future orientation and coping is supportive but less uniform. Among young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, positive future orientation clustered with optimism, meaning in life, and lower negative

functioning (Sica et al., 2024). In a wartime context, clearer and more active images of the future accompanied resource-seeking and positive reframing as coping strategies (Dobrynina, 2023). In older adulthood, a more expansive future time perspective was associated with greater re-engagement with goals when circumstances changed (Wilton-Harding & Windsor, 2021).

Two qualifications follow. First, some evidence suggests that balance across temporal orientations matters more for adaptive coping than future orientation alone (Olivera-Figueroa et al., 2022). Second, future orientation may predict intentions without overcoming material constraints, as research on climate adaptation among farmers indicates (Shaffer-Morrison et al., 2025).

The most consequential qualification concerns context. The meaning of future orientation appears to vary culturally: it is linked more to family obligation in collectivist settings and more to personal achievement in individualist ones (Shilova, 2025). Broader analyses associate traditional and agrarian settings with more past-oriented conceptions of time, and industrialized settings with more future-oriented and accelerated ones (Yeganeh, 2024). Temporal focus has been found to mediate the relationship between cultural values and happiness (Zabelina et al., 2022). Subjective socioeconomic status appears to operate through different temporal pathways in different national contexts (Ma et al., 2026).

Crisis conditions also reshape temporal profiles rather than merely revealing fixed traits. During the Ukrainian political crisis of 2014–2015, future orientation rose in one region but declined in the region closest to armed conflict, alongside increases in past-negative and present-fatalistic orientations (Senyk et al., 2022). Under extreme living conditions, a past-positive profile, not a future-dominant one, appeared to be the most resourceful (Meshcheryakova, 2025).

These findings unsettle the trait framing that dominates the field. Orientations that predict poorer wellbeing may partly reflect adversity rather than disposition, and the adaptive value of a given orientation appears to depend on circumstance. The theme therefore establishes a dispositional layer of temporal experience, but a contingent one. It is responsive to conditions, culturally inflected, and positioned between the cognitive processes reviewed above and the social structures examined below.

2.4 Disrupted Temporality under Uncertainty, Crisis, and Distress

Research on disrupted temporal experience offers a particularly revealing perspective on its ordinary functions. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a large-scale natural setting for this research. Across countries, substantial majorities of respondents reported that time was passing unusually quickly or slowly during lockdowns rather than at its normal pace (Brenlla et al., 2022; Ogden, 2021; Rioux et al., 2022; Wessels et al., 2022). The direction of distortion was not uniform. It varied by country and by phase of the pandemic, with some longitudinal samples showing an early slowing that eased over time and others leaning toward accelerated passage (Brenlla et al., 2022; Cravo et al., 2021; Wessels et al., 2022).

What predicted distortion is more theoretically informative than its prevalence. Subjective isolation predicted slower felt passage more consistently than objective restrictions did: the lonelier people felt, the more slowly time seemed to move (Chaumon et al., 2022; Rioux et al., 2022). In a large French sample, social disorientation predicted temporal disorientation better than anxiety, depression, or indicators of physical confinement (Fernández Velasco et al., 2024). Lockdown also altered other temporal judgments, including the felt distance of near-future dates and the perception of sleep duration (He et al., 2021; Rioux et al., 2022). Slowed passage was repeatedly associated with boredom, sadness, disrupted routine, and dissatisfaction with social contact rather than with elapsed time as such (Brenlla et al., 2022; Chaumon et al., 2022; Droit-Volet et al., 2023).

Research on low mood and depression shows a related but more contested pattern. Depression is generally associated with an experience of time dragging or slowing (Baron et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023). Philosophical analysis has interpreted such reports as a loss of the felt dynamism of time rather than a change in its estimated quantity (Baron et al., 2023). During the pandemic, depressive symptoms became a stronger predictor of slowed passage in later phases than in earlier ones. This suggests a shift from situational disruption toward more enduring internal distress (Droit-Volet et al., 2023; Ogden, 2021). The association is not universal, however. Several nonclinical samples report weak or null relationships between depressive symptoms and passage judgments, possibly reflecting restricted symptom ranges (Huang, Le, et al., 2026; Thönes et al., 2021; Wessels et al., 2022).

The most consistent pattern across this theme mirrors the dissociation identified in Section 2.1. Distress appears to alter felt passage more reliably than measured duration. Longitudinal data from Brazil recorded marked changes in time awareness during isolation without corresponding changes in interval production (Cravo et al., 2021). Findings on duration estimation in depression are mixed, with some studies reporting timing alterations and others reporting none (Huang, Le, et al., 2026; Mavrogiorgou et al., 2022; Mura et al., 2025). Recent reviews accordingly argue that passage-of-time judgments and interval timing should be treated as conceptually distinct, particularly under affective strain (Narodova, 2026).

Methodologically, the disruption literature relies heavily on self-report and online samples, and on the uncontrolled conditions of a historical crisis. Causal direction between distress and temporal experience is therefore difficult to establish. Treated as behavioral rather than clinical evidence, the theme nonetheless supports two inferences central to this paper. Disruption concentrates in the experiential organization of time, not in the capacity to estimate it. And the social conditions of a person's life, especially felt connection or isolation, appear to be among the strongest determinants of whether that organization holds.

2.5 The Social Structuring of Time

Temporal experience is also shaped by the collective rhythms, institutional demands, and technological environments within which individuals live. The clearest evidence concerns time pressure. Across large surveys, diary studies, and occupational samples, greater perceived time pressure is associated with lower subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction and with more symptoms of distress (Chen et al., 2022; Nan & Tsai, 2022; Ogden et al., 2025). The relationship is not simply linear. Large-scale evidence indicates that too little discretionary time predicts lower wellbeing through stress, and that too much can also reduce wellbeing when it erodes a sense of productivity (Sharif et al., 2021). The temporal pattern of pressure also appears to matter: unstable or rising weekly trajectories carry wellbeing and sleep costs beyond those of average workload (Rigotti et al., 2021). Related research in a Philippine student population has examined sleep quality, academic stress, and time management together, finding poorer sleep quality associated with higher academic stress (Quinto, Del Mundo, et al., 2026).

The pandemic evidence again proves informative, this time in a direction that complicates Section 2.4. Large-scale data link periods of social distancing to experiences of deceleration that were accompanied by lower stress, better sleep, and improved wellbeing for some respondents (Schad & Rabovsky, 2022). The same collective slowing of social life that produced distressing temporal stagnation for isolated individuals appears to have produced relief for others. This suggests that the behavioral meaning of a temporal change depends on the person's prior situation and social resources, not on the change itself.

Evidence on digital technology is more heterogeneous than the popular image of technology-driven acceleration implies. Log data from daily life do not support a general acceleration account: social media use was associated with decelerated time perception, while messaging showed no overall effect (Ross et al., 2023). Experience-sampling research indicates that work-related communication and notifications predict feeling rushed, with social media use an exception to this pattern (Van Gaeveren et al., 2025). Purpose and pattern of use, not exposure alone, appear to shape online temporal experience (Varsori & Pinho, 2026). Among Filipino Generation Z students, for example, engagement was characterized mainly by passive scrolling and by the use of social media for emotional regulation, preparation, and recovery (Dancel et al., 2026). Even brief digital deprivation can make passive waiting feel slower and more boring than either smartphone use or an engaging non-digital task (Meteier et al., 2025).

Clearer distortions appear under specific conditions. Viewing a smartphone during activity has been found to alter both interval production and retrospective duration estimates (Davis et al., 2025). Problematic or addictive social media use is associated with timing deficits and broader experiences of time distortion (Vinci et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). Related work has examined habitual use and emotional and psychological dependence as dimensions of social media engagement among Filipino college students (Ruela et al., 2026). In student samples, the link between problematic smartphone use and time distortion appears to operate partly through loneliness and fear of missing out (Zhu et al., 2025).

The recurrence of loneliness here is analytically significant, because it links technologically mediated temporality to the isolation findings of Section 2.4. Across institutional and technological contexts alike, the quality of social connection appears to shape the experiential organization of time. As in the preceding themes, however, the evidence is largely correlational, and the direction of influence between problematic use, loneliness, and temporal

distortion remains unresolved. The theme establishes that temporal experience is socially calibrated: individual cognition operates within collective rhythms whose structure can either sustain or strain it.

2.6 Synthesis of Literature

Taken together, the five literatures converge on a picture of temporal experience as layered, constructed, and socially sensitive.

The first point of convergence is the dissociation between felt passage and estimated duration. Passage-of-time judgments respond to affect, perceptual change, boredom, and social context more reliably than duration judgments do (Bratzke, 2026; Droit-Volet, 2026; Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2022). Under crisis and distress, it is felt passage rather than interval timing that is most consistently altered (Cravo et al., 2021; Narodova, 2026). The experiential organization of time thus appears to be both the most responsive layer and the most vulnerable one.

Second, temporal experience is integrated at the level of the self. Remembering and imagining draw on a largely shared system (Teghil et al., 2025), and felt continuity with the future self accompanies forward-oriented choice (Yang et al., 2024).

Third, at the dispositional level, a balanced orientation toward past, present, and future is associated with better wellbeing (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021). The adaptive value of any single orientation, however, appears to depend on circumstance (Meshcheryakova, 2025; Senyk et al., 2022).

Fourth, a recurring and largely unremarked thread runs across Themes 4 and 5. The quality of social connection appears among the strongest correlates of whether temporal experience holds together, whether through lockdown isolation (Chaumon et al., 2022; Fernández Velasco et al., 2024) or through the loneliness associated with problematic smartphone use (Zhu et al., 2025).

The evidence also conflicts in instructive ways. Arousal effects on duration are inconsistent (Cui et al., 2022). The link between depression and slowed passage weakens in nonclinical samples (Huang, Le, et al., 2026; Wessels et al., 2022). Digital media appear to decelerate as often as accelerate felt time (Ross et al., 2023). Collective slowing during the pandemic accompanied distress for some people and relief for others (Schad & Rabovsky, 2022). Each of these conflicts suggests that the behavioral meaning of a temporal change depends on the person's situation and resources, not on the change alone.

Methodologically, the field divides between controlled laboratory paradigms using brief intervals and self-report surveys conducted under uncontrolled crisis conditions. Both rely predominantly on correlational designs, and measures are fragmented across duration tasks, passage ratings, time-perspective inventories, and discounting paradigms.

2.7 Gaps in the Literature

Five gaps follow from this synthesis.

The first is an integration gap. Research on time perception, mental time travel, time perspective, disrupted temporality, and the social structuring of time has developed largely in parallel. Studies of felt passage rarely connect their findings to dispositional orientation or self-continuity, and time-perspective research rarely engages the mechanisms through which passage is constructed.

The second is a functional gap. The literature documents what alters temporal experience far more thoroughly than what temporal experience does for the person. Outcomes are typically narrow, such as delay discounting or global wellbeing scores, and agency, coping processes, and meaning-making are seldom examined directly as functions of temporal experience.

The third is a timescale gap. The dissociation between passage and duration is best established for intervals of seconds and minutes, whereas the temporal experience most plausibly linked to agency and meaning unfolds across days, months, and life periods.

The fourth is a theoretical gap concerning social connection. Isolation and loneliness recur as correlates of temporal disruption, but no account explains why social connection should organize the experience of time.

The fifth is a contextual and causal gap. Evidence is concentrated in a limited range of national settings, with comparatively little from Southeast Asia. Cultural variation is documented but rarely theorized, and causal direction between temporal experience and psychological functioning remains largely unresolved.

2.8 Contribution of the Present Paper

The present paper addresses these gaps conceptually rather than empirically. It integrates the five literatures into a framework that treats temporal experience as a layered behavioral-social infrastructure. In that framework, an experiential layer of felt passage, a self-representational layer of continuity across time, a dispositional layer of temporal orientation, and a social layer of collective rhythm and connection jointly support agency, coping, and meaning-making.

The framework reframes temporal distortion as a disruption of these functions rather than as a perceptual error measured against clock time. It offers an interpretation of why social connection recurs as a determinant of temporal experience. Finally, it derives propositions suitable for future empirical testing across longer timescales and more diverse contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This paper employs a conceptual integrative review design combined with theoretical synthesis and framework development. It does not collect or analyze primary data, and its findings are interpretive rather than empirical.

The design was chosen because the central research problem is integrative in character. Evidence relevant to how temporal experience shapes agency, coping, and meaning-making is distributed across literatures that have developed largely in isolation from one another. These are cognitive research on time perception, work on mental time travel and future-self continuity, personality and social research on time perspective, studies of temporal disruption under crisis and distress, and sociological and media research on the social structuring of time. An integrative review allows these literatures to be read against one another, so that convergences, tensions, and omissions can be identified that are not visible within any single field. Framework development then follows from that synthesis rather than preceding it.

3.2 Literature Orientation and Retrieval Strategy

Literature retrieval proceeded thematically. Five themes were defined in advance to provide the intellectual architecture required by the research question, moving from the construction of temporal passage, through its self-representational and dispositional dimensions, to its disruption and its social structuring.

For each theme, two closed-form guide questions were formulated, each answerable in principle as yes or no on the basis of published evidence. Examples include whether judgments of the passage of time are distinct from judgments of duration, and whether perceived time pressure is associated with lower well-being. Each question was framed to identify a specific relationship or distinction without presupposing its answer. This closed-form strategy served two purposes. It disciplined retrieval toward evidence bearing directly on the relationships the argument required, and it made the direction of the evidence, including null, mixed, and contradictory findings, explicit for each theme.

The guide questions were used to conduct structured searches of a large-scale academic search index covering peer-reviewed literature across the psychological, behavioral, social, and health sciences. Retrieved studies were examined for their findings, their methods, and the conditions under which their results held. In addition to this structured retrieval, a limited number of foundational theoretical works were drawn upon to frame the conceptual territory in the Introduction. These include works in the philosophy of physics, the sociology of social acceleration, and the original formulation of time perspective. They provide context for the argument rather than evidence for its claims.

3.3 Source Selection Principles

Sources were selected on the basis of relevance to the guide questions and contribution to the argument rather than through exhaustive inclusion. Priority was given to meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and large-sample or

longitudinal studies where these were available. Primary experimental and survey studies were also included where they clarified mechanisms, boundary conditions, or contradictory findings. Emphasis was placed on recent literature, reflecting the rapid development of research on the passage of time and on temporal experience during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three further principles governed selection. First, studies were retained regardless of whether their findings supported the paper's argument, and null and mixed results were treated as analytically informative. Second, studies drawn from clinical populations, particularly research on depression, were included only insofar as they illuminated temporal experience as a behavioral phenomenon. They were not used as a basis for diagnostic or therapeutic claims. Third, a small number of preprints were retained where they offered longitudinal evidence not otherwise available, and philosophical analyses were included where they offered interpretive accounts of experiential reports. Both are identified as such in the text or reference list and weighted accordingly.

3.4 Theoretical Lenses

The primary lens is the cognitive and behavioral psychology of temporal experience. It is supplemented by the sociology of time, which situates individual experience within collective rhythms, institutional demands, and technological environments. Phenomenological accounts of time-consciousness are drawn upon sparingly to interpret the lived structure of passage.

The physics of time is bracketed deliberately. It motivates the research question but is not used to adjudicate any claim, and the paper takes no position on whether temporal passage is a feature of physical reality.

3.5 Analytical and Synthesis Procedure

Analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage was within-theme synthesis. For each theme, the literature was examined for recurring findings, areas of disagreement, moderating conditions, and methodological tendencies, and the overall direction of evidence for each guide question was assessed.

The second stage was cross-theme comparison. Constructs and patterns recurring across themes were identified, such as the dissociation between felt passage and estimated duration and the recurrent association between social connection and temporal disruption. Apparent contradictions were examined for whether they reflected differences in timescale, measurement, population, or context.

The third stage was conceptual integration. The cross-theme patterns were organized abductively into a layered framework of temporal experience, and conceptual propositions were derived where the synthesis supported a theoretically meaningful relationship. Abductive reasoning, or inference to the best explanation, is a routine means by which scientific inquiry posits structures that are not directly observed but are required for explanatory coherence (R. G. Atento, 2026c). Throughout, a distinction was maintained between what the reviewed evidence establishes, what it suggests, and what the present paper proposes interpretively.

3.6 Limitations of the Approach

Several limitations follow from this design. Retrieval relied on a single academic search index, so relevant studies indexed elsewhere may have been missed. The review is integrative rather than systematic. It did not employ exhaustive search protocols, formal screening procedures, or standardized quality appraisal, and its coverage should not be read as complete. The emphasis on recent literature may underrepresent earlier foundational studies. Retrieval was conducted in English, which limits access to research published in other languages, a constraint that bears directly on the paper's attention to cultural variation.

Because much of the underlying primary evidence is cross-sectional and correlational, the framework developed in Section 4 is interpretive and generative rather than confirmatory. Its propositions require empirical testing. Finally, the construction of themes and the integration of findings necessarily involve authorial judgment, which the guide-question strategy constrains but does not eliminate.

4. Analytical Synthesis and Conceptual Discussion

4.1 From Illusion to Infrastructure: Reframing Temporal Passage

The question that motivated this paper arose from physics. If prominent accounts of physical time do not require that time flow, why does flow dominate human experience so completely? Within behavioral science, the analogous move has often been to treat subjective time as an error, measuring felt duration against clock time and interpreting the discrepancy as distortion. The synthesis in Section 2 suggests that this framing, though methodologically useful, misidentifies the standard by which temporal experience should be evaluated.

Felt passage is poorly predicted by elapsed time. It is better predicted by affect, attention, the density of contextual change, boredom, and social context (Lamprou-Kokolaki et al., 2024; Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2022). Under crisis and distress, it is felt passage, not interval timing, that is most consistently altered (Cravo et al., 2021; Narodova, 2026). If felt passage were primarily an attempt to track physical time, these findings would describe a measuring system that fails exactly when it matters most. A more coherent interpretation is that felt passage is not principally a measurement at all. It appears to register something other than duration: the rate and quality of a person's engagement with a changing world.

On this interpretation, calling temporal passage an "illusion" is, for behavioral purposes, a category mistake. Whatever the physical status of passage, its behavioral adequacy is not a matter of correspondence to physical time. It is a matter of whether it supports the activities that depend on it. This paper therefore proposes that temporal experience be understood as *infrastructure*. It is a largely unnoticed structure that enables other functions, and like other infrastructures, it becomes most visible when it breaks down. The remainder of this section specifies that infrastructure, the functions it supports, and the patterns in which it fails.

4.2 The Layered Architecture of Temporal Experience

The reviewed literatures can be integrated into four interacting layers. Each is distinguished by its timescale, its characteristic processes, and the function it contributes.

The experiential layer is the moment-to-moment sense of time's passage. It is assembled from affect, attentional engagement, event density, and memory (Jording et al., 2022; Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2021). Its contribution is evaluative. It signals whether experience is moving, stagnating, or rushing, and so registers the person's ongoing engagement with circumstances.

The self-representational layer is the capacity to project the self into past and future through a largely shared system of mental time travel, together with the felt continuity between present and future selves (Teghil et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2024). Its contribution is integrative. It makes the future a domain in which the person's own action has consequences, and it makes the past a resource from which that future can be imagined.

The dispositional layer is the relatively stable pattern by which individuals weight the past, present, and future (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021). Its contribution is allocative. It distributes attention and evaluation across temporal horizons, and balance among those horizons appears to accompany better functioning.

The social layer consists of collective rhythms, institutional demands, technological environments, and the quality of social connection within which individual temporality unfolds (Chaumon et al., 2022; Ogden et al., 2025). Its contribution is calibrational. It supplies the events, shared markers, and demands against which personal time is organized.

The layers are not independent. The social layer feeds the experiential layer: isolation and loneliness are associated with slowed passage (Chaumon et al., 2022), and time pressure with a sense of being rushed (Van Gaeveren et al., 2025). The dispositional layer responds to social conditions rather than remaining fixed, as regional divergence in temporal orientation during political crisis suggests (Senyk et al., 2022). Distress at the experiential level appears to coincide with weakened continuity at the self-representational level (Wang et al., 2026). None of the four layers is adequately evaluated by its accuracy relative to clock time. Each is better evaluated by whether it sustains the person's capacity to act, endure, and understand.

4.3 Temporal Experience as Scaffolding for Agency, Coping, and Meaning-Making

The infrastructure described above appears to support three behavioral functions. Each depends on a distinct combination of layers.

Agency appears to depend most directly on the self-representational and dispositional layers. To act toward a future, a person must experience that future as reachable and as belonging to the self who will inhabit it. The association between future self-continuity and forward-oriented choice (Sun et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024) is consistent with this interpretation. So is the association between an expansive future time perspective and re-engagement with goals when circumstances change (Wilton-Harding & Windsor, 2021). Agency, on this reading, is temporally scaffolded: it requires not only intention but an experienced connection between present action and future consequence.

Coping appears to depend on the experiential and self-representational layers together. Enduring adversity seems to require two things. One is the capacity to experience present distress as passing. The other is the ability to envisage a time beyond it. Clearer and more active images of the future accompany resource-seeking and positive reframing under severe stress (Dobrynina, 2023), and positive future orientation clusters with optimism and meaning during collective crisis (Sica et al., 2024). Social resources also appear relevant: in a Philippine student sample, stronger perceived social support was associated with greater use of coping responses (Magnaye, 2026). Conversely, distress is associated with the experience of time dragging (Ogden, 2021; Ren et al., 2023). The inference drawn here is that when the experienced present ceases to move, distress may lose its temporal boundary. It is then experienced less as a difficult period and more as a condition without visible end.

Meaning-making appears to depend on the integration of all three temporal horizons, sustained by the dispositional layer. Meaning involves locating present experience within a narrative that connects a past to an anticipated future. In a Philippine higher-education sample, employees located meaning primarily in relationships, small daily aspirations, and perceived responsibility, while employment precarity was described as a salient challenge (Aguilar, 2026). The consistent association between balanced time perspective and wellbeing (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2021; Sgaramella et al., 2026) may be interpreted, in part, as reflecting this narrative integration. The finding that a past-positive profile was the most resourceful under extreme living conditions (Meshcheryakova, 2025) suggests that when the future is constrained, meaning may be sustained by drawing more heavily on the past.

4.4 Patterns of Temporal Disruption

If temporal experience functions as infrastructure, its disruptions can be classified by which layer is primarily affected and which function is most compromised. Table 1 proposes a heuristic typology of four patterns. The patterns are not mutually exclusive and may co-occur, particularly under prolonged crisis.

Table 1. *A Heuristic Typology of Temporal Disruption*

Pattern	Experiential signature	Primary layer(s)	Function most compromised	Illustrative evidence
Stalled present	Time drags; days blur; little sense of movement	Experiential; social	Coping	Chaumon et al. (2022); Ogden (2021); Baron et al. (2023)
Foreclosed future	Future feels distant, closed, or not one's own	Self-representational; dispositional	Agency	Senyk et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2026)
Dominant past	Negative weighting of the past crowds present and future	Dispositional	Meaning-making	Diaconu-Gherasim et al. (2021)
Compressed present	Time feels scarce; persistent rushing	Social; experiential	Agency and wellbeing via overload	Ogden et al. (2025); Sharif et al. (2021); Van Gaeveren et al. (2025)

Note. The typology is heuristic and derived from the conceptual synthesis in Sections 2 and 4; the patterns are not mutually exclusive and may co-occur. Cited studies illustrate each pattern and do not constitute a direct empirical test of the typology.

The typology carries two analytical implications. First, disruptions that appear similar at the experiential level may differ in origin. Slowed passage during isolation and slowed passage associated with depressive distress share an experiential signature, but the former appears more closely tied to the social layer (Fernández Velasco et al., 2024) and the latter to more enduring internal states (Droit-Volet et al., 2023). Second, the same objective change may produce different patterns for different people. Collective deceleration during the pandemic was associated with stagnation for some individuals and relief for others (Schad & Rabovsky, 2022). This suggests that disruption is better understood relationally than as a property of external conditions alone.

4.5 An Integrative Framework and Conceptual Propositions

The preceding analysis supports an integrative framework. Temporal experience is a four-layer behavioral-social infrastructure whose experiential, self-representational, dispositional, and social layers jointly scaffold agency, coping, and meaning-making. Its disruption is best understood as a failure of those scaffolding functions rather than as an inaccuracy relative to clock time.

Two interpretive elements of the framework require explicit statement, because they extend beyond what the reviewed evidence directly establishes.

The first concerns why social connection recurs as a correlate of temporal experience. The reviewed studies show that event density accelerates felt passage (Lamprou-Kokolaki et al., 2024), that boredom slows it (Martinelli & Droit-Volet, 2022), and that subjective isolation predicts slowing more consistently than objective restriction (Chaumon et al., 2022; Rioux et al., 2022). Taken together, these findings suggest that social interaction may function as a principal source of the contextual change and shared temporal markers from which felt passage is constructed. If so, isolation would slow time not merely because it is unpleasant, but because it depletes the material from which a moving present is assembled. This interpretation is advanced as an inference, not a demonstrated mechanism.

The second element is the concept of *temporal fit*. The contradictory effects of deceleration and acceleration across the literature suggest that a change in social tempo is neither beneficial nor harmful in itself. Its consequences appear to depend on the relationship between temporal demands and the person's resources, including social connection, discretionary time, and existing orientation (Schad & Rabovsky, 2022; Sharif et al., 2021).

From the framework, six conceptual propositions are derived for future empirical examination.

Proposition 1. Felt passage of time will be more strongly associated with indicators of agency, coping, and meaning-making than estimated duration is.

Proposition 2. Subjective social connection will be associated with felt passage partly through the event structure and shared temporal markers it supplies, independently of objective constraints on activity.

Proposition 3. Future self-continuity will partly account for the association between disrupted felt passage and diminished forward-oriented action.

Proposition 4. Flexibility and balance across temporal orientations will be more consistently associated with adaptive coping across contexts than the dominance of any single orientation.

Proposition 5. The wellbeing consequences of changes in social tempo will depend on temporal fit: deceleration will tend to benefit the time-pressured and to burden the socially isolated.

Proposition 6. Disruptions of temporal experience will be more evident in judgments of passage across extended timescales of days and weeks than in short-interval timing.

These propositions are conceptual. They organize the reviewed evidence into testable relationships but do not claim empirical support beyond what the cited studies establish. The underlying evidence is largely correlational and concentrated in a limited range of national contexts. The framework also makes no claim about the physical nature of time. Its argument holds whether or not temporal passage proves to be a fundamental feature of reality.

5. Discussion and Implications

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The framework's principal theoretical implication concerns the standard by which temporal experience is evaluated. Much research on subjective time has implicitly adopted accuracy, meaning correspondence to clock time, as its reference point. The analysis developed here suggests that adequacy is the more appropriate standard for behavioral science: whether temporal experience sustains the activities that depend on it. This shift does not invalidate timing research. It does relocate its significance, because estimated duration is not the dimension of temporal experience most closely linked to psychological functioning. Felt passage appears to be the more consequential variable, and it warrants treatment as an outcome and predictor in its own right rather than as a by-product of timing.

A second implication is integrative. Time perception, mental time travel, time perspective, and the sociology of time have largely operated as separate research programs with distinct measures and theoretical vocabularies. The four-layer framework offers a common structure within which their findings can be related. It suggests, for example, that a dispositional measure such as time perspective and an experiential measure such as passage-of-time ratings may capture different layers of the same infrastructure, and that their joint examination could clarify findings that each alone leaves ambiguous.

The framework also brings the social dimension of temporality into the psychology of time more directly than is customary. If social connection supplies much of the material from which felt passage is constructed, then temporal experience is not adequately understood as an individual cognitive phenomenon. It is partly a social achievement, sustained through interaction and shared rhythm.

5.2 Implications for Coping and Agency under Uncertainty

The analysis implies that temporal experience may be an underrecognized dimension of how people respond to uncertainty. Prolonged uncertainty can produce two of the disruption patterns identified in Section 4.4. In a stalled present, distress lacks a felt temporal boundary. In a foreclosed future, action loses its experienced connection to consequence. Both patterns bear directly on coping and agency, yet neither is captured by measures that address only mood or appraisal.

This has implications for how efforts to support people through difficult periods are conceived. It suggests that attending to the felt structure of time may be as relevant as attending to its contents. Such efforts might help people re-establish a sense of movement in the present, restore felt continuity with a future self, or draw on positive aspects of the past when the future is constrained. Related scholarship on caregiving similarly treats adaptive coping and

meaning-making as capacities that support frameworks can cultivate rather than merely supplement (Quinto, Bermido, & Atento, 2026). The evidence on such efforts is limited, however, and the recommendation should be read proportionately. Interventions targeting future self-continuity reliably increase felt continuity, but their effects on behavioral outcomes such as delay discounting are inconsistent (Grekin et al., 2025). Some appear to benefit broader outcomes such as valued living without altering economic patience (Blom et al., 2026). This pattern suggests that the outcomes against which temporal interventions are evaluated may need to be broadened to include coping and meaning, not only intertemporal choice.

5.3 Implications for Identity and Meaning-Making

Because the self-representational layer links present, past, and future selves, the framework treats identity as temporally extended and therefore vulnerable to temporal disruption. When continuity with the future self weakens, the difficulty is not only motivational. The person's sense of who they are becoming may lose definition. The finding that a past-positive orientation was the most resourceful profile under extreme conditions (Meshcheryakova, 2025) suggests that identity and meaning under constraint may be sustained less by projection forward than by narrative reconnection with the past. This qualifies the tendency in both research and popular discourse to equate psychological health with future orientation. Balance and flexibility across temporal horizons, rather than forward focus alone, appear to be the more defensible ideal.

5.4 Implications for Contemporary Social Life

Three implications for social life follow. First, social isolation may be understood not only as a relational or emotional deprivation but also as a temporal one. If interaction supplies event structure and shared temporal markers, then isolation may slow and blur the experienced present in ways that compound its other effects. Research on isolated and confined environments, including Antarctic stations and long-duration space analogs, points in a similar direction: it identifies environmental monotony and disrupted circadian rhythms among the stressors of prolonged isolation, and gives structured schedules and sustained communication some of the strongest operational support as countermeasures (R. G. Atento, 2026b).

Second, the social distribution of time matters. Perceived time pressure is consistently associated with lower wellbeing (Ogden et al., 2025), and both scarce and excessive discretionary time appear costly (Sharif et al., 2021). Temporal fit therefore varies across social positions, and the same collective change in tempo can relieve some groups while burdening others.

Third, the evidence on digital technology cautions against a uniform acceleration thesis. The temporal consequences of smartphone and social media use appear to depend on purpose, pattern, and severity of use (Ross et al., 2023; Van Gaeveren et al., 2025). Analyses of digitally mediated temporality would therefore benefit from attending to how technology is used and what social connection it does or does not provide, rather than to exposure alone. Conceptual work on ghosting adds that digital mediation can sustain exposure to visibility cues that prolong relational ambiguity rather than resolve it (A. G. Atento et al., 2026).

5.5 Theoretical Boundaries and Limitations

The framework operates within several boundaries. It makes no claim about the physical nature of time, and its argument is compatible with any account of whether passage is a fundamental feature of reality. It is not a clinical framework. Findings from clinical populations were used to illuminate temporal experience as a behavioral phenomenon, and the framework does not support diagnostic or therapeutic conclusions.

The four layers are analytical distinctions. They are not claims about separable psychological or neural systems, and their boundaries may prove less distinct empirically than conceptually. The interpretation of social connection as a source of temporal structure is an inference from convergent correlational findings, not a demonstrated mechanism, and the framework may overweight social connection relative to factors the reviewed literature did not examine. Finally, the evidence base is concentrated in a limited range of national contexts and in short timescales, and is predominantly correlational. The framework's generality across cultures, its applicability to life-scale temporal experience, and the causal direction of its proposed relationships all remain open questions.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

This paper asked how the constructed experience of temporal passage shapes human agency, coping, and meaning-making, and what its disruption reveals about its behavioral-social function. The puzzle that motivated it came from physics, where prominent accounts do not require that time flow. The paper's answer, however, does not depend on how that puzzle is resolved. Whatever the physical status of passage, the experience of passage is behaviorally real, actively constructed, and functionally consequential.

Three conclusions follow from the integrative analysis. First, felt passage is not principally a measurement of elapsed time. The reviewed evidence consistently dissociates judgments of passage from judgments of duration. Felt passage tracks affect, attention, contextual change, and social context more closely than it tracks time itself, and it is felt passage rather than interval timing that is most consistently altered under crisis and distress. Felt passage is therefore better understood as an experiential register of a person's engagement with a changing world than as an imperfect clock. On this basis, the paper concludes that describing passage as an "illusion" is a category mistake for behavioral purposes. The relevant standard is not accuracy relative to physical time but adequacy to the functions temporal experience supports.

Second, those functions can be specified. Temporal experience operates as a layered infrastructure with four layers: an experiential layer of felt passage, a self-representational layer of continuity across past and future selves, a dispositional layer of temporal orientation, and a social layer of collective rhythm and connection. Together these layers appear to scaffold three behavioral capacities. Agency depends on a future experienced as reachable and one's own. Coping depends on a present experienced as passing. Meaning-making depends on the integration of past, present, and future into a coherent narrative.

Third, disruption is analytically revealing. The typology developed in this paper distinguishes four patterns: the stalled present, the foreclosed future, the dominant past, and the compressed present. Each compromises a different function. Across these patterns, two findings stand out. Social connection recurs as one of the strongest correlates of whether temporal experience holds together, which supports the interpretation that interaction supplies much of the material from which a moving present is constructed. And the same change in social tempo can relieve some people while burdening others, which points to temporal fit rather than tempo itself as the relevant consideration.

These conclusions carry important limitations. The framework is conceptual and interpretive; it has not been empirically validated. The evidence on which it rests is predominantly correlational, concentrated in brief laboratory intervals and in crisis-period self-report, and drawn from a limited range of national contexts. The account of social connection is an inference, not a demonstrated mechanism. The framework makes no claim about the physical nature of time and does not support clinical conclusions.

6.2 Recommendations

For future research, four directions are recommended. First, the propositions advanced in Section 4.5 should be tested directly. Of particular value would be designs that measure felt passage, estimated duration, and future self-continuity together, alongside direct indicators of coping, agency, and meaning, rather than relying on delay discounting or global wellbeing alone.

Second, research should extend the timescale of inquiry beyond intervals of seconds and minutes toward experience-sampling and longitudinal designs that capture felt passage across days, weeks, and life transitions. These are the timescales at which its links to agency and meaning are most plausible.

Third, studies should examine the social mechanism directly, testing whether social interaction shapes felt passage through the event structure and shared temporal markers it supplies, and distinguishing subjective connection from objective contact.

Fourth, the contextual base should be broadened. Comparative work across cultural and socioeconomic settings, including Southeast Asian contexts that are underrepresented in the reviewed literature, is needed to determine how far the framework generalizes and how the adaptive value of temporal orientations varies with circumstance.

For those whose work involves supporting people through uncertainty, transition, or isolation, the analysis suggests a proportionate recommendation. The felt structure of time deserves attention alongside its emotional content. This may mean recognizing when a person's present has stalled or their future has closed, and supporting the re-establishment of shared rhythm, felt continuity, and connection with positive aspects of the past. Such efforts should be evaluated against broad outcomes of coping and meaning, since the existing intervention evidence remains limited.

More broadly, the paper suggests that the oldest question about time, whether it truly passes, may matter less for understanding human behavior than a more tractable one: what experienced time enables people to do, and what is lost when that experience fails.

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