



No time to worry: the relationship between worry, time structure, and time management

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between worry and time use among 130 undergraduate students. Participants were administered the Student Worry Scale (Davey et al., 1992), the Time Structure Questionnaire (Bond & Feather, 1988), and the Time Management Behavior Scale (Macan et al., 1990). Total TSQ scores and three of its factors (sense of purpose, present orientation, and persistence) were negatively related to worry. However, the TMB did not correlate with worry. The results were interpreted to indicate that perceptions of structure and purpose in time use, but not the use of actual time management behaviors, might be beneficial in decreasing worry.

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1. Introduction

Theoretical writings by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggest that occupying one's time with absorbing, interesting, and enjoyable activities can liberate psychological energy that might instead be "wasted on...worry" (p. 42). In other words, one who is engrossed in structured, enjoyable activities may worry less. Other writers have shared similar sentiments (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Hamilton, 1981). Indeed, in their counseling suggestions, Kelly and Miller (1999) suggested that providing structure might be beneficial in reducing individuals' worry.

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Kelly (2002b) further specifies that structuring one's time, not necessarily structure in general, may be a key element in reducing unpleasant psychological experiences. Previous research (Bond & Feather, 1988; Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips, 1990) supports this assertion. Thus, theoretically, structuring one's time might somewhat help to alleviate worry. However, empirical investigations to specifically test this possibility have not been conducted. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between worry and two time-related variables (time structure and purpose and time management).

Bond and Feather (1988) developed a measure of time structure and purpose (the Time Structure Questionnaire: TSQ), to measure the degree to which individuals order and have meaning in their time. Bond and Feather (1988) report that individuals scoring higher on the TSQ also score higher on measures of psychological well-being (self-esteem, purpose in life, and extraversion) and an orientation towards hard work, and lower on measures of distress (depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and neuroticism) and physical symptoms. Time structure and purpose (the TSQ) has also been negatively related to boredom proneness (Vodanovich & Watt, 1999).

The Time Management Behavior Scale (TMB; Macan et al., 1990) was developed to measure behaviors thought to be "critical to the construct of time management" (p. 761). The TMB is thought to measure different elements of time use than the TSQ (Macan et al., 1990). For instance, the TMB was designed to measure specific time management behaviors (e.g., planning and goal setting), while the TSQ measures more general time-related information (e.g., persistence in time use and present orientation). The authors of the TMB report that individuals reporting more time management behaviors (scoring high on the TMB) score higher on measures of Type-A personality, job and life satisfaction, academic performance, and lower on measures of stress. Additional research has indicated that time management behaviors (high scores on the TMB) are also related to more accuracy in predicting task duration (Francis-Smythe & Robertson, 1999), decreased work-tension and increased job satisfaction (Macan, 1994), and lower scores on trait-procrastination (Lay, 1992).

Worry has been related to two time-related constructs. Worry has been positively related to procrastination (Stober & Joormann, 2001), which can be defined as delaying certain activities and using current time for other purposes. Procrastinators are typically not well organized or structured in time use (McCown, Petzel, & Rupert, 1987). Worry has also been positively related to boredom proneness (Kelly, 2002a). Conceptually, boredom might be seen as having one's time empty or not engaging in interesting activities (Mikulas & Vodanovich, 1993).

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests that being able to organize one's consciousness in such a way that information coming into awareness is congruent with one's goals and self-concept reduces negative psychological activity, including worry. Organizing consciousness can be partly accomplished by creating order in the self and the environment. It seems possible, then, that structure and order of time might serve to decrease uncertainty and therefore the perceived danger in worriers' environments (Dugas, Gosselin, & Ladouceur, 2001). Providing some structure and order in the environment might serve to reduce the need to continually seek solutions and protection from outside threats, common behaviors of worriers (Kelly & Miller, 1999). If this were the case, then providing structuring and management of one's time should be associated with decreased worry. It was hypothesized, therefore, that in this study worry would negatively relate to time structure and time management.

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