

The Pace of Life: Time to Stop and Sense the Humor¹

Dave Korotkov² | Lydia Amir³ | Arie Sover⁴

There is more to life than simply increasing its speed.
— Mahatma Gandhi⁵

The importance of time and how we come to experience it in everyday life can in one sense be understood by simply examining how society discusses it. For example, consider the following time-honored sentiments echoed by various individuals of repute: Ralph Waldo Emerson with, *The years teach much the days never know*⁶; Aristotle with, *Time crumbles things; everything grows old under the power of Time and is forgotten through the lapse of Time*⁷; and Virginia Woolf with, *For while directly we say that it [the length of human life] is ages long, we are reminded that it is briefer than the fall of a rose leaf to the ground*⁸. Of related significance, is what can be said about how we come to cope or live with the potentially and ever so daunting, tiresome pace or *squeeze* of life (see e.g., Southerton & Tomlinson, 2005). In shaping a response to this, a perusal of the extant literature reveals a limited and at times confusing, though somewhat insightful, fascinating body of research. For example, according to Garhammer (2002), although time pressure appears to be a major social concern, there is a paradox that pace of life does not necessarily translate into diminished happiness and life satisfaction levels. However, according to Levine and colleagues (1989; see also Levine & Bartlett, 1984), a fast paced life appears to be linked to the death rate from heart disease

¹ We are pleased to announce that the ISJHR is now registered with the Directory of Open Access Journals:

<http://www.doaj.org/>

² St. Thomas University, Canada

³ College of Management Studies, Israel

⁴ Ashkelon Academic College, Israel

⁵ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/time?page=2>

⁶ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/time?page=5>

⁷ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/time?page=8>

⁸ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/time?page=9>

(across the U.S.A).⁹ Viewing time from a more psychological perspective, Levine and colleagues further suggest that time urgency is linked to the Type A Behavior Pattern (e.g., aggressiveness, competitive achievement striving, chronic time urgency), a style of being that appears to predict a host of health related variables (e.g., heart disease; risk-related health behavior; Korotkov et al., 2010), but within the context of city life (i.e., the *Type A City* and heart disease). Relatedly, in their research concerned with the pace of life in large cities and across 31 countries, Levine and Norenzayan (1999) found that life in the *big city* was linked to higher death rates due to heart disease, as well as smoking rates, and surprisingly, subjective well-being. Yet in more recent research, feelings of *always being rushed* appear to be decreasing while those pressured by the wrath of time still report feeling unhappy (Robinson, 2013).

While our experiences with time and its accompanying pressures stare us square in the face and may potentially be fatal, we should remind ourselves however, that how we see and feel time is to some extent subjective and individual. For example, in a fascinating series of studies and with a growing body of literature to back them up, Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd (1999) of Stanford University developed and validated a paper and pencil measure of Time Perspective (TP), defined as the

...often nonconscious process whereby the continual flows of personal and social experiences are assigned to temporal categories, or time frames, that help to give order, coherence, and meaning to those events....Thus, we conceive of TP as situationally determined and as a relatively stable individual-differences process. Overreliance on particular temporal frames is multiply determined by many learned factors, with cultural, educational, religious, social class, and family modeling among the most prominent.

In developing their measure, Zimbardo and Boyd found that TP was best conceptualized as five relatively distinct attitudinal constructs¹⁰: (1) *The Past-Negative* which reflects a somewhat negative view of the past that is suggestive of trauma, regret, and pain; (2) *The Present-*

⁹ Keep in mind that in both urban life and in a broader sense, in economically productive countries, the pace of life is normed at a more rapid pace than in rural settings (see also Levine & Norenzayan, 1999 and Lowin, Hottes, Sandler, & Bornstein, 1971).

¹⁰ Interestingly, although not part of their original set of studies, TP was expanded to include the Transcendent perspective.

Hedonistic attitude which can be construed as a hedonistic and risk-taking mode of being in relation to life and time; (3) *The Future* attitude which essentially is a general orientation to the future; (4) *The Past-Positive* perspective whereby we view our past in a warm and sentimental way; and (5) *The Present-Fatalistic* mode of being in which we see life and the future as lacking in hope.¹¹ In addition to providing a fascinating psychological portrait of time, Zimbardo and Boyd's constructs have been linked to a host of psychosocial variables such as personality, grade point average, happiness, lying, age, well-being, and friendliness. Given these dimensions, Zimbardo and Boyd (2008, p. 297) suggest that the optimal approach to life is to adopt a balanced TP, one that espouses a strong focus in the past-positive, a weak emphasis in being present-fatalistic and past-negative, and lastly, having a moderately strong focus in both future and present-hedonistic attitudinal tendencies.

Of particular importance is the possible role that humor might play in considerations of time. Despite a limited body of research with some correlates, humor has been related to such variants of time as time urgency and the Type A Behaviour (Goldstein, Mantell, Pope, & Derks, 1988; Martin & Kuiper, 1999), as well as stress (e.g., Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). In spite of such linkages, we are not aware of any study directly connecting it with Zimbardo and Boyd's TP conceptions. In any case, one possibility is that humor and laughter may be influenced, at least in part, by the present-hedonistic perspective, that is, by living and enjoying present pleasures we may be at our best in our use of humor. Correspondingly, we may reminisce on our humorous adventures as we look back at life when in the past-positive state. Of course, although our use of humor may be a function of our TP, it may, hypothetically, also be influenced by the style of humor we tend to use. For example, one can imagine being in the past-negative state and using aggressive or self-defeating humor. Conversely, while in a past-positive moment, one may construe or hypothesize that TP may be more indicative of the use of affiliative or self-enhancing humor (see Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003). Interestingly, Zimbardo and Boyd's research is loosely suggestive of such connections, linking the present-hedonistic self to, for example, creativity and extraversion, variables both related

¹¹ An online version of their TP questionnaire, with feedback, is available at <http://www.thetimeparadox.com/surveys>.

to humor. Further, in research by Peterson and colleagues (2007), the character trait of humor was found to predict a eudaimonic (hedonic) motive in relation to wellness, suggesting that time may be linked to mirth. Of course, these are mere speculations subject to testing but they do raise an interesting and important point to query: that how we think of time and the pace of life, may influence our use of humor and laughter, whether in situations dictating approach or in those governing escape. That time may influence how we approach life and experience it, and how we use humor and laughter to cope with a *time squeeze* (Southerton, & Tomlinson, 2005), is an intriguing thought experiment, as well as a legitimate empirical test question. The implications should be clear. That is, it may be *time to stop and sense the humor* in those situations where the pace of life may be catching up to us.

In considering the pace of life, time, and humor, we are fortunate to have a series of articles that are loosely aligned to these sentiments. For example, in *Time Limitation Theory (TLT) as the Basis for Humor Creation*, Arie Sover presents a fascinating theoretical perspective in arguing that humor creation (e.g., incongruity) is founded in life expectancy and the activities within it, in particular, the violation of specific contextual norms. In Macdonald L. Ryntathiang's paper, *Khasi Humour*, the author provides an insightful introduction and history of the Khasis cultures' use of humor. While developing and spreading in the Khasis culture and embedded in emergent folklore, the use of verbal and nonverbal humor has become a significant source of entertainment for this population; with great fascination, Khasis humor has also mixed with various other cultures within their society (e.g., Bengalis, Nepalis). In an interesting, applied article tying the comic to organizational structure and process, *Comics as a Learning Tool in Organizations and Companies*, Ruth Wolf contends that the comic can provide those within organizations with the tools for learning, through for example, storytelling and games. We are also fortunate to present our readers with an article by Denise Skarbek and Terry L. Shepherd entitled, *Knock, Knock: Who's There? The Funny Teacher: The Funny Teacher Who? Exactly!: The Need to Use Humor in the Special Education Classroom*. In acknowledging the benefits of classroom humor from the perspective of the educator, Skarbek and Shepherd examine the extent to which special education teachers use humor. Further, in a very readable and intriguing article by Liat Steir-Livny and Adia Mendelson-Maoz entitled *From the Margins to*

Prime Time: Israeli Arabs on Israeli Television: The Case of Sayed Kashua's 'Arab Labour,' the authors discuss the role of minority Arab Israelis in Israeli culture and television by examining the *shattered identity* of the former in the television series *Arab Labour*, a sitcom developed by Sayed Kashua. We are also pleased to have an article written by Amnon Raviv on medical clowning. In the article, *Medical Clowning: A Training and Evaluation Model*, Raviv presents us with a training and evaluation model for those versed in medical clowning. In addition, Raviv discusses the functions of the medical clown and six elements of the clowning performance that we suspect, may help patients, for example, to live in and enjoy the moment while distracting them from the vagaries of their illness. In our last paper, Albrecht Classen provides a balanced and well written review of the book, *Comedy Boom in Japan: Performative and Media Framing of Humor in the Current Popular Culture*, authored by Till Weingärtner. According to Klassen, although critiquing the text's limitations, Weingärtner's work is framed as a positive contribution to the literature:

There is no doubt that Weingärtner's analysis has given us excellent insight into this obviously important Japanese form of media entertainment especially from the last decade or so, but ultimately his conclusions would have to be tested in a broader context, unless we would have to say that Japanese laugh about the same issues and concerns as all other people in the West do.

Overall, these articles provide the readership with a taste of the theoretical and practical applications of humor and laughter within a broad cultural mosaic of scholarly discourse. The view that humor is best understood when we examine it from a variety of multidisciplinary and cultural lenses continues to drive the ISJHR agenda.

In sum, we would like to once again thank the authors and the Board/reviewers for their scholarly contributions to the ISJHR. We would also like to express our appreciation to those who enabled us to access and review the Weingärtner text. Lastly, we would like to encourage our readership to submit their research to the ISJHR. We thank all those who have contributed to helping us more closely understand this very important dimension of the human experience. We look forward to hearing from you.

Continued...

References

- Garhammer, M. (2002). Pace of life and enjoyment of life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 3, 217-256.
- Goldstein, J.H., Mantell, M., Pope, B., & Derks, P. (1988). Humor and the Coronary-Prone Behaviour Pattern. *Current Psychology: Research & Reviews*, 7, 115-121.
- Korotkov, D., Perunovic, M., Claybourn, M., Fraser, I., Houlihan, M., MacDonald, M., & Korotkov, K.A. (2011). The Type B Behavior Pattern as a moderating variable of the relationship between stressor chronicity and health behavior. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 16, 397-409.
- Levine, R.V., & Bartlett, K. (1984). Pace of life, punctuality, and Coronary Heart Disease in six countries. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 15, 233-255.
- Levine, R.V., Lynch, K., Miyake, K., & Lucia, M. (1989). The Type A City: Coronary Heart Disease and the pace of life. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 12, 509-524.
- Levine, R.V., & Norenzayan, A. (1999). The pace of life in 31 countries. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 30, 178-205.
- Lowin, A., Hottes, J.H., Sandler, B.E., & Bornstein, M. (1971). The pace of life and sensitivity to time in urban and rural settings: A preliminary study. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 83, 247-253.
- Martin, R.A., & Kuiper, N.A. (1999). Daily occurrences of laughter: Relationships with age, gender, and Type A personality. *Humor*, 12, 355-384.
- Martin, R.A., & Lefcourt, H.M. (1983). The sense of humor as a moderator of the relationship between stressors and moods. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 1313-1324.
- Martin, R.A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37, 48-75.
- Peterson, C., Ruch, W., Beerman, U., Park, N., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2007). Strengths of character, orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2, 149-156.
- Robinson, J.P. (2013). Americans less rushed but no happier: 1965-2010 trends in subjective time and happiness. *Social Indicators Research*, 113, 1091-1104.

Southerton, D., & Tomlinson, M. (2005). 'Pressed for time' – the differential impacts of a 'time squeeze.' *The Sociological Review*, 215-239.

Zimbardo, P., & Boyd, J. (2008). *The time paradox: The new psychology of time that will change your life*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Zimbardo, P.G., & Boyd, J.N. (1999). Putting time in perspective: A valid, reliable individual-differences metric. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 1271-1288.