Being in Balance or Stuck in Time:
Exploring Facets of Time Processing in Relation to Mental Health

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal Nbvh 1031, Norra beteendevetarhuset, fredagen den 27 april, kl. 10:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

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Department of Psychology
Title
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Abstract
Time is central in human functioning and crucial for adaptive behavior. The aim of the current thesis was to investigate aspects of people’s subjective experience of time and their relationship with mental health, specifically anxiety and subjective well-being. Two time concepts were of key interest in the thesis: time estimation, which refers to the ability to estimate time durations; and time perspective, which refers to people’s habitual way of relating to the past, the present, and the future.

The thesis comprehends four studies. In the first three studies, time perspective and time estimation were investigated in persons with varying degrees of anxiety, ranging from mild symptoms to anxiety disorders. The results of these studies showed that in particular negative past time perspective and negative future time perspective were associated with anxiety. These time perspectives were further strongly associated with the tendency to ruminate and worry. Time estimation did not largely deviate between persons with anxiety and healthy controls, although there was some evidence that subcomponents of anxiety might be differentially related to time estimation. More specifically, state anxiety was moderately related to retrospective time estimation, such that higher levels of state anxiety was associated with judging time intervals in retrospect as longer.

In the final study of the thesis, balanced time perspective (BTP) was examined in relation to subjective well-being and age. BTP can be described as an optimal way of relating to the past, the present and the future and has been suggested to facilitate mental health and well-being. However, there are several ways to measure BTP, and there are also indications that what constitutes a BTP is not completely age-invariant or equally associated with well-being across age. The fourth study of the thesis thus aimed at examining three methods of measuring BTP, and each method distinct association with subjective well-being and age were examined. The study was conducted in a population-based sample of older adults (age range 60 – 90 years of old). Results of this study indicated subjective well-being is strongly related to BTP, particularly methods of measuring BTP that incorporates negative future time perspective. However, the strong (and inverse) relationship between negative future time perspective and subjective well-being diminished with increasing age. Instead, and among the oldest participants in the sample (80+ years), fatalistic views of the present had more bearing on subjective well-being.

Keywords
time perspective, time estimation, anxiety, anxiety disorder, balanced time perspective, mental health, subjective well-being