



# Clocks, Calendars, and Couples: Time and the Rhythms of Relationships

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# Why Think About Time in Couples?

- ☀ Many couples report not enough time or feel “out of synch”
- ☀ All activities and interactions occur in time
  - ❖ Time side to all problems
  - ❖ Time an ever-present resource for change
- ☀ Some degree of temporal coordination necessary for relationships to sustain
- ☀ Temporal patterns quickly reveal issues around power and closeness



# The Power of Time

## Transitive Principle

$$A = B$$

$$B = C$$

$$*$$
  
$$* \quad *$$

$$A = C$$



# The Power of Time

Time = Money

Money = Power

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Time = Power

Question: What are the implications for couple conflicts around income, domestic labor and childcare, and temporal influence in the family?



# Premises of the Theory

- ✦ Experienced meaning of patterns more important than particular quantitative relationships between variables
- ✦ The experience of temporal differences often changes over time from positive to negative
- ✦ Temporal coordination can be associated with satisfaction or distress
- ✦ Temporal coordination can separate or bring partners together



# Premises of the Theory

- ✦ Temporal patterns can lead to or follow from distress. There is typically a bidirectional or recursive influence
- ✦ Time issues are rarely the only issues
- ✦ Time issues may be the presenting problem or underlie other issues
- ✦ Couples choose some temporal patterns and find themselves in others without deliberation



# The Five Temporal Attributes Plus Rhythm

- ✦ Position of Occurrence
- ✦ Duration
- ✦ Pace
- ✦ Frequency
- ✦ Sequence
- ✦ Rhythmicity



# Temporal Ideation

- ★ Time Perspective
- ★ Time Valuation
  - Monitoring use and passage of time
  - Punctuality



# Systemic Sources of Temporal Patterns

- ✦ Biological and health factors
- ✦ Families of origin
- ✦ Cultures of origin and present context
- ✦ Work and social commitments
- ✦ Technology



# Impact of Work Hours: Time Poverty

- ☀ Time pressure and time poverty constrict, disrupt, and stress relationships, resulting in individual stress and associated mental and physical health symptoms
- ☀ We need interventions at both the personal and institutional/societal/cultural levels to create more time for relationships



# Definition of Stress

An imbalance between demands of a situation and response capability of a person or a system.

McGrath & Tschan, 2004, p. 69



# Time Poverty & Pressure as a Stressor: Example of Work

- Objective qualities
  - How many hours of work?
  - How little vacation time?
- Temporal aspects of the stressor events
  - Single vs. multiple: Asked to stay late once? Or Repeatedly?
  - Frequency: How often in a week/month/year?
  - Duration: How late?
  - Periodicity/Predictability: More in certain “seasons” than others? Or no rhythm to it?
  - Controllability: Any input into work hours?
  - Number of simultaneous events: Long hours and large number of important projects?
- Individual perceptions of meaning of the situation and goals:
  - Importance of work identity
  - Concerns about job security
- Coping resources/experience with the situation
  - Ability to take breaks
  - Ability to sustain healthy relationships despite time crunch



# Time Poverty and Pressure: Work Relationships

- ❖ Long hours
- ❖ Erratic schedules
- ❖ Little or no leave or vacation time
- ❖ Multitasking
- ❖ Multiple routes of high-speed communication
- ❖ Juggling work and personal responsibilities
- ❖ Lack of temporal boundaries on work



# Time Poverty and Pressure: Personal Relationships

- ✦ Demanding and dyssynchronous work schedules
- ✦ Lack of temporal boundaries on work (role of technology)
- ✦ Negative spillover from work (negative physiological/emotional arousal)
- ✦ Overcommitment to organized child activities (sports teams, lessons)
- ✦ Overuse of technology for recreational purposes
- ✦ Techno-Speed as metaphor for good life
- ✦ Problems due to larger temporal context become misattributed to relationship and its members



# Impact of Time Poverty and Pressure on Relationship to Work

- ✦ Sense of fragmentation and hecticness
- ✦ Decreased sense of efficacy
- ✦ Decreased enjoyment of work coupled with increased sense of obligation -- > resentment
- ✦ Increased negative physiological and emotional arousal



# Impact of Time Poverty and Pressure on Personal Relationships

- ✦ Decreased time together
  - Reduced time for protective factors (pleasure, intimacy, friendship, mutual understanding)
  - Reduced time for distress prevention (problem discussion)
- ✦ Loss of opportunity for spontaneity and serendipity
  - Leads to emphasis on small amounts of “quality time”
- ✦ Increased Need for Soothing



# Explicit Time Problems

- ✦ One partner prefers more time for shared activities, other wants more time alone or for work
- ✦ Partners conflict around pace of one or more activities
- ✦ One partner complains about the long work hours of the other



# Implicit Time Problems

- ★ “Communication problems” due to unnamed differences in pace of speech, sequence of problem discussions with other activities, discussion duration, frequency of discussions, lack of time to talk
- ★ “Lack of intimacy” – yet there’s not a free moment in the couple’s schedule to make intimacy happen!
- ★ “Differences in life goals” centering on when (rather than whether) to achieve them



# The “Four As” of Putting Time and Rhythm to Work in Relationships

☀ **Awareness** of Time and Influences on Time

☀ **Affirming or Altering** Temporal  
Patterns

☀ **Activism** Changing Influences on Time



# Question the 4 Myths

## ☀ The Myth of Spontaneity

- Reality: Fun & Sex Must be “Rhythmized”

## ☀ The Myth of Infinite Perfectibility

- Reality: Set Priorities – you can’t “have it all” – at least not all at the same time and preferred durations
- Time Management is not the answer

## ☀ The Myth of Total Control

- Reality: Forces external to the individual and relationships control your time – change them or accept them

## ☀ The Myth that Family Time $\neq$ Chores

- Find time together in everyday tasks of family life as well as more fun-oriented activities



# Create “Rhythms of Relationship™”

- ✦ Regularly occurring periods of connection across days, weeks, months, years
- ✦ Not necessarily as special as “rituals”
- ✦ Rhythm connotes something different than “schedules” or “routines”
  - ❖ “Rhythm” linked to music, the body, the seasons, and ancient traditions
  - ❖ “Schedules” and “routines” linked to Industrial and Post-Industrial production



# Techniques to Help Couples with Time

- ☀ Time Pies
- ☀ Life Pace Questionnaire
- ☀ Projected Life Chronologies
- ☀ Decompression Chamber
- ☀ Sixty Second Pleasure Points
- ☀ Creative Family Time “Multitasking”

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