

Honouring the Scientific and Human Legacy of Professor Doctor Willy Lens Psychology of Motivation and Future Time Perspective

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“Content and extension of future goals affect the quantity and quality of motivation”
(Lens et al., 2012 p. 321)

Introduction and Tribute

Driven by profound gratitude, this *dossier* is a heartfelt tribute to the enduring legacy of Professor Doctor Willy Lens, a highly respected psychologist whose research into the psychology of motivation and Future Time Perspective (FTP), continues to inspire current research. Professor Lens left us in 2014, and this year marks eleven years since his departure, serving as an occasion to acknowledge not only the ongoing influence of his scientific contributions, but also the human and intellectual gifts he generously shared with future generations.

A passionate researcher, supportive mentor, and a rigorous thinker, Professor Lens persistently highlighted the principle that theory and practice must be inseparably linked. Throughout his career, he shed light on the importance of understanding how individuals' future perspectives shape their current motivation and behaviors, particularly within educational settings. His scholarly contributions expanded critical areas in motivation psychology and introduced integrative frameworks that remain widely cited and applied today. As stated in a memorial tribute by his colleagues, all of whom were his doctoral students: “With his contagious enthusiasm and caring mentorship, Willy was an example for our academic community, and with this tribute we express our gratitude for the privilege to have collaborated with him.” (Vansteenkiste et al., 2016).

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<https://doi.org/10.18800/psico.202502.014>

This *dossier*, published in the *Revista de Psicología* of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), aims to honor Professor Lens's outstanding contributions. It begins with a concise conceptual overview of Future Time Perspective and its motivational relevance, followed by a carefully curated set of articles that illustrate the depth and sustained influence of his work in motivation science.

Future Time Perspective (FTP) and Motivation

The concept of Future as a psychological variable, has been considered crucial for describing, explaining, and predicting human behavior. Following the thinking of pioneering researchers such as Lewin in the 20th century, the future is understood as a subjective image represented in the present life space (Lewin, 1948, 1952). This idea has existed for centuries, preceding psychology's formal and systematic inquiry. Today, the scientific literature demonstrates a longstanding interest in this construct due to two very relevant considerations: First, the constructed future images possess significant motivational power; and second, they vary according to human developmental periods (Seginer & Lens, 2015).

It is noteworthy that diverse terminology is used when studying the psychological future or time perspective. This diversity may reflect a persistent attempt to achieve greater conceptual precision. Although these multiple approaches enrich the field, they can, if not carefully integrated, become overly diverse and potentially confusing. In this sense, it becomes essential to clarify and unify these different conceptualizations to build a coherent framework that supports both research and practical applications (Coscioni et al., 2020; Seginer, 2009).

As scientists, we know that diversity creates new options, but we must be aware of the differences in terms of our theoretical approaches. The refinement of theories depends on contrasting and sharing different perspectives, but on some occasions, we refer to different phenomena using the same term, and sometimes we use different terms

to refer to the same phenomenon. This issue requires clarification in order to establish a common language and build a strong theory. Dr. Rachel Seginer (2009) proposed categorizing the various theoretical perspectives on future-related constructs as athematic and thematic. The athematic perspective “subsumes several approaches that focus on either structural characteristic of the constructed future life space or on personal disposition to consider the future and orient behavior toward it regardless of situations settings or life domains” (p. 5). In contrast, the thematic view “uses the basic premise that the future (...) is not an empty temporal space (...) past, present, and future, are imagery-based and defined by their content” (p. 9). Incorporating this distinction could help establish a shared conceptual language for both our research processes and outcomes.

Within this categorization, Professor Lens’s theoretical proposal suggests that Future Time Perspective (FTP) has a motivational effect, as both its content and extension matter. His main research purpose was to deeply investigate the fundamental forces that drive individuals to behave and structure their activities. There is still a need to unify the concept of “content” across different theoretical perspectives and to align these views regarding the thematic approach. Nevertheless, acknowledging the importance of content and its motivational value — especially in terms of how psychological future influences present behavior — brings together various theoretical orientations. This *dossier* represents a serious effort in that direction, by presenting diverse papers that reflect and provide empirical evidence within this motivational field.

Selected Articles on the Role of the Future in Motivational Psychology

We will present seven manuscripts submitted by distinguished scholars. These papers will be presented in a sequence that begins with theoretical and empirical contributions highlighting the relevance of

the psychological future. This is followed by empirical evidence on the socialization processes and the acquisition of future orientation. Next, variations in future orientation across developmental periods are addressed, along with considerations related to its measurement during different life stages. Finally, the dossier concludes with an intervention study, illustrating applied psychology in the field of motivation and emphasizing the role of the psychological future within this framework.

The first paper was prepared by Jenefer Husman & J. Matthew C. Graham. It is important to mention here that Dr. Husman closely collaborated with Dr. Lens since the 90s and published together. According to Husman and Lens (1999), FTP is defined as “the degree to which and the way in which the chronological future is integrated into the present life-space of an individual through motivational goal-setting processes” (p.114). This concept highlights the importance of anticipating and incorporating the future into current motivation and actions.

In this dossier, the first manuscript is a proposal of Reconceptualizing Future Time Perspective Extension through Episodic Future Thinking. Some concepts are initially clarified, Future time perspective extension is conceived as an individual’s perception of the psychological distance between future goals. According to the authors, “the concept of extension can be expanded to include how far into the future an individual habitual time space extends and the diffusion of goals within that time space. This alignment and distance may be related to the individual episodic future thinking, the pre-experiencing of future events”. While research on FTP and EFT has typically been siloed, considering both together offers deeper insights into future-oriented thinking and potential for educational interventions. The manuscript collected students’ information from a scholarship program supporting their transition from community college to science and engineering degrees at a research university. Using a qualitative approach, researchers analyzed future life narratives collected via interviews (plus a survey on future time perspective). Findings showed that students with more extended, vivid, and specific future career narratives demonstrated

higher career commitment and self-efficacy. The study concludes that understanding the intersection of FTPE and EFT can inform interventions to help students visualize and plan their careers, especially in science and engineering fields

The second paper, led by Toshiaki Shirai, Atsuko Higata, Tomoyasu Nakamura, Lucija Andre and Thea Peetsma, examines the dynamic processes through which individuals construct their Future Time Perspective (FTP) in everyday contexts and throughout life-span development. Inspired by Lens and colleagues, in the manuscript FTP is understood as a cognitive-motivational construct defined by its content and its extension. A long and well-structured FTP has been associated with adaptive outcomes such as increased motivation, well-being, and health (Andre et al., 2018; Lens et al., 2012). Following Lens's legacy, the present study examines how individuals actively construct their FTP through daily experiences and long-term interactions with their personal contexts. The results highlight both the commonalities and differences in the functioning of goal-directedness and hope across yearly and daily contexts.

The third paper, prepared by Rachel Seginer and Adi Yoavi, presents the concept of Future Orientation instead of the more specific notion of Future Time Perspective. As Dr. Seginer explicitly noted in a joint publication with Dr. Lens, the thematic approach supports the idea that the future is not an empty space and that content matters (Seginer & Lens, 2015). This view was clearly endorsed by Dr. Lens, who recognized and emphasized its importance. In the manuscript titled "What mothers wish for their children: Mother-constructed higher education future orientation and its antecedents" the authors, considering the interactive socialization process, investigate the higher education future orientation that mothers envision for their children, as well as several related antecedents: (1) mothers' educational attainment, (2) mothers' educational expectations, and (3) mothers' motivation-related socialization goals, specifically their wish to promote either autonomous or controlled motivation in their children. Based on a review of earlier research, Dr. Seginer & Yoavi proposed a multi-step model suggesting that mothers' educational attainment influences their

educational expectations, which in turn shape the future orientation they wish their children to develop. This influence operates indirectly through mothers' desire to transmit either motivational autonomy or control. In a sample of Israeli Jewish mothers, the model supported the impact of mothers' wish to transmit motivational autonomy — but not motivational control — on their desired education-related future orientation for their children. The study highlights the importance of future thinking in shaping present educational attitudes, emphasizing that mother-constructed future orientation may influence mothers' behavior to support academic achievement, as well as children's academic outcomes. The authors call for further testing of this model in diverse populations.

Following the three previous manuscripts, and considering that the future, as psychological variable, varies according different developmental periods, Tomas and Vásquez-Echeverría present a manuscript titled "Self-projection in early childhood: a study on the congruence between episodic memory, episodic future thinking, theory of mind and visual perspective taking." In this study, the authors explore how children's understanding of mental states and their temporal and spatial perspective-taking abilities change substantially during early childhood. It has been proposed that these abilities converge on common mechanisms based on self-projection. Moreover, remembering and prospection are thought to jointly support the human capacity for mental time travel, which is central to the psychological future. This capacity was constantly remarked by Professor Lens. The present study examines the behavioral congruence of these abilities by assessing episodic memory, episodic future thinking, theory of mind, and visual perspective-taking in a sample of young children in Uruguay. The findings revealed no overall associations among these abilities, except for a connection between theory of mind (false beliefs) and episodic future thinking. These results are discussed in light of their conceptual implications, and the authors emphasize the need to enhance task equivalence in future research to further advance our understanding of the psychological future in early development.

Shifting to another developmental period in South America, Ussif, Leal Melo-Silva and Coscioni prepared a manuscript analyzing the psychometric properties of the Future Time Orientation Scale (FTOS) in a Brazilian adolescent sample. Professor Dr. Willy Lens showed a clear interest in studying this age group, particularly because they are navigating a critical transition from secondary school to college (Herrera, 2019). In this manuscript, the FTOS is used to measure the extent to which individuals are influenced by their psychological future. Previous studies had gathered validity and reliability evidence for the FTOS in Brazilian and Portuguese contexts, but exclusively using adult samples. Given that future time orientation is known to vary with age, these findings cannot be generalized to adolescents without further validation.

Thus, this study aimed to examine the psychometric properties of the FTOS specifically in adolescents. Participants completed the FTOS in a school-based survey conducted in Ribeirão Preto, Brazil. Results from confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the original version of the FTOS fit the data well and performed better than an alternative unidimensional model. Internal consistency indices were generally acceptable, and no ceiling or floor effects were observed. Correlations with measures of life project provided additional evidence of validity. Furthermore, measurement invariance analysis comparing adolescent and adult samples supported metric invariance, although two intercepts differed across age groups. Overall, the findings suggest that the FTOS is a valid and reliable tool for assessing future time orientation in adolescents, while caution is advised when directly comparing results with adult samples due to potential intercept differences.

In terms of another developmental period—specifically in young university students—Chalen, Herrera and Lira prepared a manuscript titled “Future Orientation and Psychological Well-being: Unraveling the Dynamics in a University in Lima”. Professor Dr. Willy Lens was also deeply interested in studying this group (Herrera, 2019). This paper was developed under the consideration that focusing on the future is often linked to well-being, bringing benefits to both individuals and

society as a whole. However, research indicates that this relationship is not always straightforward. While studies in Lima have examined this connection from a subjective well-being perspective, it has not yet been explored using a psychological well-being framework.

This study examines the relationship between future orientation and psychological well-being (specifically, flourishing) among university students in Lima. The findings suggest that drawing on internal resources related to future career plans, approaching future goals with hope, and maintaining optimism about future family life are all positively associated with greater psychological well-being. The study discusses the implications of these results, acknowledges certain limitations, and proposes directions for future research.

Turning to the applied field Drs. Andre, Jansen in de Wal, Schuitema, van Alphen and Peetsma proposed and evaluated a school-based multicomponent intervention designed to enhance adolescents' Future Time Perspective (FTP) and Growth Mindset (GM) to reduce school stress and improve learning and motivation. The legacy of Professor Lens remained present through the FTP construct and results followed the expected direction. The intervention group showed lower anxiety, higher FTP, greater learning investment, stronger GM and higher intrinsic motivation. Although effects did not persist in the longitudinal follow-up, the study supports the combined potential of FTP and GM to influence academic outcomes.

Concluding Remarks and Legacy

Dr. Willy Lens is not physically among us anymore, but his “scientific spirit” is present. With this *dossier* we are honoring him and we can say at this time, according to the description, that the ancient Greek myth about Pygmalion who passionately worked on his art creation and made it real, was personalized by our Professor Lens who was, for many of us, our own Pygmalion.

I permit myself to express this reflection because I consider that, some persons vitalize and reinforce some paths and this *dossier* in which some academic and scientists are gathered has been possible due to the great support of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and for highly motivated people who are committed with this research line in order to explain in a better way human behavior. We are really grateful for the collaboration of our international professors and researchers who have supported us academically and generously send their manuscripts and research findings related with Future Time Perspective, Future Time Orientation of Future Orientation in order to define joint research paths for a continued academically growth.

Professor Willy Lens's research on motivation and Future Time Perspective remains foundational in psychology. His rigorous theoretical approach and commitment to understanding how the future, as psychological variable, shapes behavior continue to influence research and practice worldwide. This dossier honors his legacy and encourages continued exploration of FTP to foster motivation, well-being, and goal pursuit across diverse populations.

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* Open AI's ChatGPT (GPT-4) was used in the preparation of this manuscript for editing and language suggestions. All outputs were strictly reviewed and edited according the academic standards of the study.

Recibido: 08/07/2025

Revisado: 14/07/2025

Aceptado: 18/07/2025