

Ask Alix!



Sociologists for
Women in Society

Member-to-Member Advice

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Send your questions for future issues to AskAlixSWS@gmail.com

In response to our survey about relaunching “Hey Jane!”, a colleague suggested the name was not very inclusive, and we agreed, so we changed it! The goal of “Ask Alix!” is to offer useful tips and strategies for navigating all things career on all career paths for members. Please take [our survey](#) which is linked below—we look forward to your input. —SD

What is time, anyway?

Mathematician and journalist Joseph Mazur (2020) describes the question of time as “partly mathematical, partly conceptual, and significantly imaginary,” saying that despite “time” being the most commonly used noun in English, its meaning is persistently elusive. Our dilemmas with perceptions of time, it seems, are not new, yet the pandemic is likely the first time many of us have experienced such dramatic shifts in our sense of time. Here, we answer some of your questions about how perceptions of time have been altered surrounding the pandemic, how those altered perceptions have affected us personally and professionally, and how we can help ourselves, our families, and our students or clients find our new grooves.

Q: *Hey Alix!* My sense of time seems to have changed as a result of the pandemic. It feels as though everything takes longer while time is also moving faster. Is it just me?

A: It is definitely not just you! Our sense of time depends upon many factors including emotions, heart rate, and level of physical activity, just to name a few. During the pandemic lockdown, for instance, many of our usual activities were forfeited or replaced with online activities. Those who lost jobs during that time may have enrolled in college, spent more time with relatives or roommates, or tried their hand at breadmaking. Most of us saw an increase in our social media use, television watching, and sleeping. Those with children may have been thrust into homeschooling roles and spent more time with their kids due to school closures. While some of these consequences of lockdown were great, they left many of us with less time to accomplish our work. This

reconstruction of daily routines, including inherent changes to the context/space in which we did our work or attended classes, led to a lot of missed deadlines. Simply put, our priorities changed.

Though much of the uncertainty surrounding SARS-Cov-2 has been addressed, the virus is still killing about 500 people a day in the U.S. alone; we know it is not over. The sense of impending doom remains just below the surface of what looks like pre-pandemic normality but does not *feel* much like it. This illusion of normality juxtaposed with the constant hum of low-level fear continues to confuse our sense of time.

So, what can we do to better manage our time now and minimize the effect of the fear rumbling just between this veneer of normalcy? Read on...

Q: *Hey Alix!* A lot of self-help strategies have emerged since the beginning of the pandemic. Yoga, meditation, and phone apps that offer tools for relaxation and mindfulness have become mainstream. Do any of these things actually help reduce stress and evoke a more stable sense of time?

A: Perhaps the most important evidence that research into these phenomena has revealed thus far is that movement impacts our perception of time, and environment plays an important role in those perceptions. The accuracy and

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precision of our time estimates is significantly impacted by movement, which provides information that is crucial to our temporal perceptions. Speed, duration, and territory covered in our movements provide information for estimates of elapsed time. Auditory inputs are more precise than visual cues and tactile inputs are between these two in accuracy. Movements affect all of these domains of perception, improving the precision of our time estimates. The less we move, the more our sense of time is distorted due to limited perceptual output.

This indicates that we can perhaps improve our perception of time, smoothing out the flow of our days, by undertaking deliberate movement to provide additional sensory inputs. More sensory inputs leads to better time estimates. Activities such as yoga, walking, or even making bread—which all provide multi-sensory input with movement—may improve our temporal perceptions and help us use time more efficiently.

If done consistently, movement can also help with slowing down, calming your mind and body, and improving focus. Endorphins are released in our brain with sustained physical activity, leading to an improved sense of well-being, relaxation, and a slowing of metabolic processes when at rest. A slower heartrate is calming emotionally, which gives us greater mental clarity. Movement also improves symptoms of depression and anxiety, and can contribute to improved quality of sleep.

Regulating our own sensory inputs is a great way to manage stress and improve our temporal perceptions. In addition to movement, there are dozens of strategies that have been proven effective for many people. You can even help your students with these strategies...

Q: Hey Alix! The number of students missing deadlines, asking for extensions, and not completing assigned coursework seems to have increased since the pandemic began. How do I support my students in adapting to new routines, such as hybrid classes, without shrinking overall course objectives?

A: Like us, our students are struggling with the systemic changes to our environments as a result of the pandemic. For some of them, that means grappling with depression, anxiety, or other exacerbated medical and mental health conditions. Some students are still actively grieving for parents and grandparents who succumbed to the pandemic. Still others may be working more hours to cover the inflationary rise in the cost of living, and even those who have expenses covered may have a general sense of overwhelm. As emerging research shows, there have been dramatic changes in physical activity, sleep, time use, and mental health symptoms for students as there have been for many of us.

Regulating sensory inputs can help to mitigate many of these symptoms for them and for us and improve time

management and focus. [Revelations in Education](#) provides many free evidence-based resources to help you and your students feel renewed and capable as we engage the next semester or season of our work. We found the visual aids for Sensory Regulatory Practices and the Adult Nervous System (a reframing exercise) particularly helpful. They could be added to your course resources on your learning management system and perhaps introduced in a brief lesson. If you are working in an applied environment, these practices may be helpful not only for you but also your co-workers and clients. [Check them out!](#)



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Future issues will be sent via the listserv. Read issues from this publication's predecessor, *Hey Jane*, at <https://socwomen.org/heyjane/>

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