The Time Lab investigates the theory, measurement, and application of time perspective (TP). TP refers to individuals’ thoughts and feelings about the past, the present, and the future. Dr. Mello has developed a theory that operationalizes TP, describes how it differs across individuals, and outlines how this variation is related to behaviors. The central idea is that TP leads one to make decisions that, in turn, affect our life.

Dr. Mello has developed the Adolescent Time Inventory (ATI) to examine TP in people aged 10 to 18. She chose this age group because adolescence is an especially important period of the life-span to study TP. Individuals have the capacity to think in new and more complex ways than compared to childhood. It also is a stage of life that is fruitful for intervention. Her research has shown that adolescents differ from one another in how they think and feel about time periods, and that such differences predict important indicators of wellbeing. She has demonstrated that adolescents who are oriented towards all three time periods have higher academic achievement and self-esteem, and less risky-behaviors than those who focus only on the future or the present.

Dr. Mello’s theory and measurement strategy has been applied internationally. She is currently involved in collaborations with scholars in America, China, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Nigeria, and Peru. These research projects will determine how much TP is associated with individual adolescents or with nations, and if TP differs in its relationship with health across these countries. Already, preliminary evidence indicates that Nigerian youth think more about the future than Americans, and that the relationship between TP and risky-behaviors are mostly similar between German and American adolescents. For example, adolescents who have more positive and less negative attitudes toward the past, the present, and the future also have less problem behaviors, such as conflict with peers or parents and getting into trouble with the police.

Future projects include designing an adult version of the ATI and investigating how TP predicts physical outcomes and academic achievement. Ultimately, Dr. Mello will work with teachers and prevention scientists to develop curricula and programs for individuals to learn to have the healthiest TP possible.

Above left: Erica Beth Walker (Undergraduate Research Assistant), Dr. Mello, & Christina Marguez (Graduate Student Research Assistant) examine the Adolescent Time Inventory (Mello & Worrell, 2007).

Below left: Victoria Paoloni (Undergraduate Research Assistant) describes the Time Relation Scale (Mello & Worrell, 2007).