

Does the Degree to Which an Experience Fulfills our Psychological Needs Affect How we Perceive the Passage of Time?: Linking Self-Determination Theory to the Experience of ‘Time Flying By’ When we are Engaged in a Satisfying Task.

Abstract

The current research sought to investigate how psychological need satisfaction and goal self-concordance are related to the subjective experience of time. This research also aimed to fill a gap in the time-estimation literature, by investigating the relationship between these constructs in the context of an active task (i.e. whitewater kayaking). Two studies were conducted to investigate this phenomenon. In ‘Study 1’, a sample of MTurk and Facebook users (with varying levels of whitewater kayaking related experience) (N=262) were asked to watch and estimate (in minutes and seconds) the undisclosed duration of a 40 second video of someone kayaking. The video was filmed from a first-person point of view and they were instructed to visualize themselves as the paddler. Participants then answered a questionnaire including questions related to self-concordance and psychological need fulfillment. In ‘Study 2’ a sample of expert white water kayakers (N=34) participated in what they considered to be a regular paddling session. Participants were asked to estimate (in minutes) the duration of a 20-minute period during which they had been kayaking. Following the paddling session, participants completed a brief demographics questionnaire and answered questions related to self-concordance and psychological need fulfillment. It was hypothesized that- regardless of experience level- individuals who experienced higher degrees of psychological need satisfaction and goal self-concordance from the tasks would perceive the time they spent engaged with whitewater paddling as passing more quickly than those who reported reaping less psychological fulfillment from this sport. A correlation analysis did not confirm these hypotheses; neither self-concordance nor psychological need satisfaction were demonstrated to be related to how people experienced the passage of time when engaged with white-water paddling. The study did reveal, however, that higher levels of self-concordance and greater degrees of psychological need satisfaction were related to having more fun during the activity, and to feeling more immersed in it. This information may be important to understanding human motivation, and has the potential to enhance the way we approach goal-setting and goal pursuit.

*A full description of the studies can be found on Dr. Johanna Peetz’s website: <https://carleton.ca/lifetools/>