

Factors of time perception while waiting: An experience sampling study

Isabell Winkler, Sarah Blum, Alena Engel, Katja Stäglich & Jacqueline Winter

Waiting is something we do quite a lot: waiting for a train to go, the start of a meeting or the end of a pandemic. Mostly, people know how to subjectively shorten their waiting times by using something to distract themselves. Also, prominent models of time perception predict the waiting experience by the amount of attention to time and the individual arousal level. However, do these factors hold, when it comes to predict the perceived passage of time in real waiting situations? In the current study, we used an experience sampling method to investigate real waiting situations. Over a duration of two weeks we asked our participants to complete a short online survey whenever they experienced a waiting situation of 5 minutes up to two hours. The participants rated how fast time had passed and how long the waiting period had felt. Also, they evaluated a lot of characteristics of the waiting situation as well as their inner states. 78 participants experienced altogether over 500 waiting situations. Indeed, the most important factor of the passage of time was how much the participants were able to distract themselves from time. Nevertheless, also the perceived fairness of the waiting situation as well as participants' ability for temporal metacognitive control play an important role. By contrast, negligible was how comfortable the waiting environment was evaluated, how much control the participants believed to have in the waiting situation and how important the event the participants waited for was.