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The Perceived Duration of Vast Spaces

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Abstract: Experiencing awe may make us believe we have more time (Rudd, Vohs, & Aaker, 2012). Awe can be evoked by encountering a vast experience (Keltner & Haidt, 2003), for example an endless ocean or large mountains (Klatzky, Thompson, Stefanucci, Gill, & McGee, 2017). Vast environments may lead to distortions in perceived time that are reported after awe experiences. Participants reproduced the perceived duration of images of natural environments that varied in vastness and estimated the degree awe they would experience in those spaces. Results show that as actual duration increased, perceived duration of the image decreased, whereas estimated awe increased. The perceived duration of highly vast images was underestimated less than other images. Participants reported they would experience more awe in highly vast images compared to low and medium vast images. These findings suggest that distortions of time associated with awe may be related to the vastness of the environment.