The Power to Control Time: How Power Influences How Much Time (You Think) You Have

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Powerful individuals believe they have control over outcomes that they could not possibly control, such as the outcome of a die roll. Across five studies, we found that this illusory control leads high-power individuals to perceive having more available time than low-power individuals. Implications of the power-time link are discussed.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Time is commonly described as the "ultimate resource." Unlike other resources, such as food or money, time is constantly being spent and can never be replaced. Because of the irreplaceable nature of time and all of the things that people want to accomplish, people often complain that they don't have enough time, and this time pressure is a substantial stressor. Though power has been defined as control over resources, time appears to be a unique resource that equalizes all people, high and low in power alike.

Although everyone objectively has the same amount of time, could power increase individuals' subjective perceptions of the amount of time they have? We propose that power leads people to feel as though they have more control over their time, which results in more optimistic time-availability assessments. In fact, powerful individuals believe they have control over outcomes that they could not possibly control, such as the outcome of a die roll (Fast, Gruenfeld, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2009). If powerful individuals also feel they have control over their time, it stands to reason that they may also feel they have more time.

While no research has explicitly examined power and perceived time availability thus far, a growing literature on power and time-related phenomena converges with the idea that power may increase one's perception of time. For instance, high-power individuals, compared to low-power individuals, have been found to be especially biased in underestimating the amount of time they expect tasks to take (Weick & Guinote, 2010). This effect could partly be due to an increased sense of available time. That is, if high-power individuals feel they have more time, this could result in optimistic predictions about how long tasks will take. Power has also been found to decrease temporal discounting (Joshi & Fast, 2013). Because past research has indicated that having an expanded time horizon (i.e., feeling as though you have more time) leads to less discounting (Zauberman, Kim, Malkoc, & Bettman, 2009), power could lead to decreased temporal discounting partly by way of an increased sense of available time. Although each of these studies has identified various separate mediators, all of these effects could potentially be cohesively explained by the underlying mechanism of increased perceived time availability.

In the present research, we tested the hypothesis that power increases one's perceived amount of time, due to increased perceptions of control over time. We tested whether perceived control over time mediated the power-time link both by measuring the mediator in Study 3 and by experimentally manipulating the mediator in Study 4 to examine its effects on perceived time availability.

Study 1

Study 1 (N = 56) examined the relationship between trait power and perceived time availability. Higher trait power was significantly associated with greater perceived time availability, $r(56)=.38$, $p=.004$.

Study 2

Participants were asked to visualize themselves in an interview scenario in which they were asked to imagine themselves as either the interviewer (evaluating the outcomes of the interviewee; high-power role, n = 50) or the interviewee (being evaluated by the interviewer; low-power role, n = 52). Participants were also shown a picture of an interview room and asked to imagine themselves in the chair that an arrow pointed to (a high-power or low-power chair). After this task, participants reported their state perceived time availability. As expected, high-power participants felt they had significantly more time ($M=4.51$, $SD=0.93$) than low-power participants ($M=3.98$, $SD=1.01$), $F(1, 96)=7.10$, $p=.01$.

Study 3

Study 3 (N = 103) aimed to replicate Study 2 using a community sample (MTurk) and to investigate whether the underlying mechanism for the relationship between power and perceived time availability is perceived control over time. The procedure and materials for Study 3 were the same as Study 2 with the addition of a state measure of perceived control over time. High-power participants felt they had more control over their time ($M=4.95$, $SD=1.06$) than low-power participants ($M=4.41$, $SD=1.18$), $F(1,94)=5.48$, $p=.02$. Replicating Study 2, high-power participants also felt they had more time ($M=4.74$, $SD=1.25$) than low-power participants ($M=4.16$, $SD=1.12$), $F(1, 94)=5.64$, $p=.02$.

As hypothesized, perceived control over time fully mediated the effect of power condition on perceived time availability. That is, the effect of the power condition on perceived time availability was no longer significant when taking perceived control over time into account, and using bootstrapping indicated that the indirect effect was significant. Therefore, Study 3 provided evidence that power influences perceived time availability through increased perceived control over time.

Study 4

Though Study 3 offered correlational evidence that perceived control over time mediated the power-time link, in Study 4, we sought to provide experimental evidence for our mediator. Therefore, we used an experimental casual chain link as suggested by Spencer, Zanna, and Fong (2005). In particular, in Study 3, we found that power influenced perceived control over time. In Study 4, we manipulated perceived control over time to examine its effects on perceived time availability.

Participants were first asked to recall a time in which they had (high control condition, n = 44) or did not have (no control condition, n = 57) control over their time. Then, participants reported how much time they felt they had. Participants in the high-control condition felt they had more time ($M=4.69$; $SD=1.40$) than participants in the no-control condition ($M=4.04$; $SD=1.11$), $F(1, 99)=6.57$, $p=.01$.

Table 1: Summary of Results

	Results
Study 1	Trait power is associated with increased perceived time availability.
Study 2	Manipulating power increases perceived time availability.
Studies 3 & 4	Perceived control over time mediates the power-time link.

Across four studies, we found that power leads to an increased sense of available time by boosting powerful individuals' percep-

tions of their control over time. Increases in perceived time availability has many important implications. In addition to decreased stress, greater perceived time availability has been linked to more time spent helping others (Darley & Batson, 1973, Rudd et al., 2012), consumption of more experiential (vs. material) goods (Rudd et al., 2012), and increased willingness to commit to future engagements (Mogilner, Chance, & Norton, 2012). Given the importance of subjective time availability, future research should examine the implications of feeling like you have (or don't have) time.

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