Selective Attention / Invisible Gorilla Experiment: See Through Your Focus --
Psychology Series | Academy 4 Social Change

Selective Attention / Invisible Gorilla Experiment: 
Lesson Plan

Topic

The Invisible Gorilla Test is a study first conducted by Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris in 1999 at Harvard University to test people's awareness. Participants were asked to watch a video and count the number of passes made between basketball players wearing white. While participants agree that the task is relatively simple and easy, over half failed to spot a person in a gorilla suit walk in between the players, stand in the center, and beat their chest before walking off-screen.

This test helped demonstrate how powerful selective attention can be. Selective attention is an individual's capacity for noticing and reacting to certain stimuli when multiple occur at the same time. Since it's impossible to focus on all stimuli, selective attention allows an individual to fully focus on a fraction of those stimuli at the expense of not processing the remainder of simultaneous stimuli.

Possible subjects/classes | Time needed
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Psychology Sociology | 30-45 minutes

Video link:

https://academy4sc.org/topic/selective-attention-invisible-gorilla-experiment-see-through-your-focus/

Objective: What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- Define selective attention.
- Articulate how the Invisible Gorilla Test was designed and why people so often fail to notice the gorilla.
- Identify the limits of their attention span and consequently approach tasks more safely and efficiently.

Key Concepts & Vocabulary
Stimuli

Materials Needed

Worksheet

Before you watch

Before class, make a few changes to your classroom environment. For example, switch the placement of posters, or switch out certain posters for different ones.

If possible, show your students [this short video](Movie Perception Test - Conversation by Daniel Simons) under the guise of a memory test. Pause the video at about the 50 second mark and see if students can provide any of the consistency errors in the video. Then resume the video and discuss its findings. Ask students why people fail to notice such stimuli in their environment.

Then ask students if they noticed anything different about the classroom. Compare and contrast the memory test with your classroom environment test.

While you watch

Answer questions 1-3 on the corresponding worksheet

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Have you ever experienced selective attention where you didn't notice a change in your environment?
2. Do we notice the unexpected and unusual more often than the expected and mundane when it comes to changes in our environment? Explain your reasoning.
3. Can we focus on and perform multiple tasks at once? How efficiently and safely can we do so? Explain your reasoning.
4. Do our expectations affect what we see? Explain.

Activity Ideas

1. Answer and discuss questions 5-7 on the worksheet
2. Have students work in groups to design an experiment that could test someone's selective attention

Sources/places to learn more


