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Research Report

SOEP-IS 2014 - Inattentional blindness

SOEP Survey Papers, No. 1096

Provided in Cooperation with:

German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin)

Suggested Citation: Conley, Dalton; Chabris, Christopher F.; Simons, Daniel (2022) : SOEP-IS 2014 - Inattentional blindness, SOEP Survey Papers, No. 1096, Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW), Berlin

This Version is available at:

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SOEP-IS 2014 – Inattentional Blindness

Dalton Conley, Christopher F. Chabris, Daniel J. Simons

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Please cite this paper as follows:

Dalton Conley, Christopher F. Chabris, Daniel J. Simons. 2022. SOEP-IS 2014 – Inattentional Blindness. SOEP Survey Papers 1096: Series H. Berlin: DIW/SOEP



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ISSN: 2193-5580 (online)

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SOEP-IS 2014 – Inattentional Blindness

**Module Title in SOEP Documentation: Inattentional
Blindness**

Dalton Conley, Christopher F. Chabris, Daniel J. Simons

Dear SOEP Science Council,

We propose to measure the prevalence of inattention blindness in the entire innovation sample, and to test whether inattention blindness is associated with the symptoms of ADHD and autism, and with socio-demographic variables.

Inattention blindness (IB) is the surprising failure to notice otherwise salient events while one is paying attention to something else (Chabris & Simons, 2010). One of the best-known demonstrations of IB was reported by Simons and Chabris (1999). Participants in their experiments watched a one-minute video of six people passing basketballs. Half of the people were wearing white shirts, and half were wearing black shirts. The participants had to count silently the number of passes made by the people in white shirts. About halfway through the video, a person in a gorilla suit walked through the action and thumped her chest at the camera. Participants counted the passes accurately, but approximately 50% of them completely failed to notice the gorilla. (An abridged version of this video can be seen here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo>)

This effect has been replicated in numerous studies using a variety of stimuli and participant groups, but it has never been measured in a representative population sample. Therefore our first goal is to measure the prevalence of IB and to test whether it is associated with accuracy in performing the primary (counting) task. We propose to use a computer-generated video of white and black squares and circles moving on a gray background, in which participants count the number of times one type of shape touches the side of the display area, and are asked whether they saw a new shape move across the screen. We prefer this to using the original “gorilla video,” for two reasons: (1) the gorilla video has become popular and many participants in this study may have seen or heard of it before; (2) the shapes video has fewer ambiguities and allows for better experimental control. In particular, we propose to randomly assign participants to pay attention to either the white shapes, the black shapes, the squares, or the circles. The unexpected object is a black circle, and should therefore be noticed more often when participants are paying attention to either black shapes or circles, than when they are paying attention to white shapes or squares. It is useful to include this randomized experimental component because the “similarity effect” just described would help to validate that true inattention blindness has been exhibited, since previous research has found that similarity between the attended objects and the unexpected object increases IB (Most et al., 2001, 2005). (A version of the proposed video can be viewed here: <http://perception.research.yale.edu/ib/IB-ShapeColor-BlackCircleUE.mov>)

Our second goal is to test for association between a set of socio-demographic variables and inattention blindness. Using IB (a dichotomous variable indicating whether or not the participant noticed the unexpected shape) as a dependent variable, we would analyze predictors of inattention blindness ranging from socioeconomic status to age to gender to birth parity (and interactions between these). Using IB as an independent variable, we would administer a short battery of questions meant to be diagnostic for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD),

autism-spectrum disorder, and related psychological morbidities (such as depression). ADHD and other behavioral disorders will be assessed through an abridged form of the Vanderbilt Assessment Scale in combination with other questions about daily experiences with concentration and focus (Hodges & Wong, 1996; O'Malley, Suh, & Strupp, 1983). Autism spectrum symptoms will be measured by the 10-item short version of the Autism Quotient scale (AQ-10; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001, Allison et al., 2012). Depression will be assessed using the CES-D self-rating scale (Radloff, 1977). We hypothesize that individuals who demonstrate inattention blindness will be *less likely* to demonstrate symptoms of ADHD, autism, and depression.

Collaborators: Dalton Conley, Christopher F. Chabris, Daniel J. Simons

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Dear SOEP Science Council,

I would like to propose exposing the entire innovation sample to the following video, selective attention test pioneered by Chabris et al. to detect situational blindness (Most, Simons, Scholl, & Chabris, 2000; Simons & Chabris, 1999). Roughly half of viewers who are instructed to count the number of basketball passes in the following embedded (Simons & Chabris, 1999) fail to notice the gorilla that walks through the scene.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG698U2Mvo>

While useful in demonstrating the internal validity of situational blindness, the substantial variance in response has never been socio-demographically investigated. Thus, I propose using the SOEP innovation sample to administer the test to a nationally representative sample for the first time. I would then use the dichotomous result—noticed the gorilla or did not notice the gorilla—as both a dependent and an independent variable.

As a dependent variable, I would analyze predictors of situational blindness ranging from socioeconomic status to age to gender to birth parity (and interactions between these). As a predictor, I would then administer a short battery of questions meant to be diagnostic for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and related psychological morbidities (such as depression). ADHD and other behavioral disorders will be assessed through deployment of an abridged form of the the Vanderbilt Assessment Scale in combination with other questions about daily experiences with concentration and focus (Hodges & Wong, 1996; O'Malley, Suh, & Strupp, 1983). Depression will be assessed using the CES-D self-rating scale (Radloff, 1977). I hypothesize that situationally blind individuals are less likely to demonstrate ADHD symptomology and depression.

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