

# Are you missing the gorilla in the room?

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Most people assume that when we look at the world around us – our health, our home, relationships we have – we are seeing things as they are. Many times we are correct; but some of the time, we miss the obvious. Unfortunately, many of us are less aware of our surroundings than they think.

In the scientific community, the effect of missing something right in front of you is called “inattention blindness” and was made famous by Dr. Daniel Simon’s Invisible Gorilla Study. In this famous study, subjects had to count how many times players in white shirts passed a basketball. The instructions are simple but the task isn’t -- as

players in white and black shirt weave around and around, throwing many balls back and forth. But by focusing attention only on the balls thrown by white shirted players, ½ of all people taking the test do not notice when a large guy in a hairy gorilla suit saunters through the game. Sounds impossible, but the test’s findings have been repeated over and over since it was first done in 1999, with the same conclusions.

The study shows that when you ask someone to focus their attention on something specific, other things – sometimes very obvious ones – are blocked out. It is our brains, not our eyes, which are responsible for shaping what we see and what we don’t see.

Just recently, another team of psychological scientists has taken the Invisible Gorilla Study one step farther. In a study by Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston with

findings to be published in an upcoming issue of Psychological Science, researchers decided to test “inattention blindness” on a group of people who are experts in seeing and interpreting what they see, and most importantly, whose accuracy can have life and death consequences.

Radiology is a medical specialty that employs the use of imaging to both diagnose and treat disease. Radiologists, the subjects of the Brigham and Women’s study, use an array of imaging technologies such as X-rays, ultrasound, CT scans, PET scans, and MRIs to diagnose or treat diseases. The radiologist then interprets or “reads” the images and produces a report of their findings and impression or diagnosis which is the given to a patient’s physician.

Researchers wondered if somehow being so well trained in searching would make them immune to missing something unusual or unexpected. A

match booked-size image of a man in a gorilla suit was superimposed on a series of large slides that radiologists typically looked at when they're searching for lung cancer. The radiologists were asked to review the slides to find cancer nodules. Most found the cancer nodules, but amazingly 83% of the radiologists missed the gorilla. The study concluded, "What we're thinking about –

what we're focused on – filters the world around us so aggressively that it literally shapes what we see."

What does each of us miss when we look at our lives? When familiar things become so expected, are we missing important information about life changes or the unexpected? If you are trying to handle the complexities of increased and

changing health issues or trying to care for an aging parent with a intricate set of needs, having a new unbiased set of eyes can be important so that the unseen can be seen and the unexpected can be discussed before it becomes a crisis. Geriatric Care Managers are experts at helping families evaluate and manage their current life circumstance so that no one misses the hairy gorilla in the room

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