

## INVISIBLE GORILLA EXPERIMENT

In 1999, Daniel Simons and Christopher Chabris conducted a psychological experiment on attention at Harvard University. The study set out to prove that when people are asked to deal with one task, they focus so strongly on that element that they may miss other important details.

In order to prove their hypothesis, Simons and Chabris recruited 228 volunteers (mostly students) to take part in the study. They were either given a large candy bar for doing so or were paid for taking part in a number of studies. The observers were organized into 16 groups of 12 individuals. They were tested individually and gave informed consent.

Participants were told they'd be watching a video with two teams of three players in white or black t-shirts passing basketballs. They were instructed to pay attention to the white or black team and to count the number of passes made by either. They were then asked to write down the number of passes they counted. A controlled observation also took place, in which 12 different participants watched a different video. Because of the pace of the video, keeping track of the passes was a relatively easy task.

Mid-way through the experimental video, a big, hairy gorilla (really a woman in a gorilla suit) walked through the scene, stood in the middle of the court, pounded its chest for nine seconds, and left.

Following this task, participants were asked several questions: Did you notice anything unusual in the video? Did you notice anything other than the six players? Did you see the gorilla? More than half the time, they answered no; they missed the gorilla completely. Even after the participants were told about the gorilla, they were certain they couldn't have missed it.

The result of Chabris and Simons' experiment was that almost half of the participants failed to notice the gorilla despite how strange it was: 54% of participants noticed the gorilla, while 46% did not. These findings showed how limited human attention is. People can easily overlook even someone in a gorilla suit when they are focused on a specific task. Psychologists now call this "inattention blindness," the inability to notice unexpected objects when attention is focused on something else.

The Invisible Gorilla Experiment has become one of the most famous psychology experiments of the past 50 years. It has been publicized in media outlets around the world, including NBC's Dateline and an episode of CSI.

### Sources:

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