

Psychology Today Column: Our Invisible Work Authors Link Inattentional Blindness to Uncompensated and Undervalued Labor

Janelle E. Wells, Ph.D., & Doreen MacAulay, Ph.D. write that invisible work doesn't register when family, friends, and co-workers are blinded daily events

TAMPA, FL, UNITED STATES, November 19, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the world focused on the back-to-back hurricanes that devastated the

southeast this fall, many residents were engulfed with evacuations, preparations, and the aftermath. But others, even as the destructive events unfolded, stayed preoccupied with their daily tasks until they couldn't any longer. They were likely influenced by "inattentional blindness," a psychological phenomenon causing people to miss unexpected stimuli.

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*Janelle E. Wells, Ph.D., and
Doreen MacAulay, Ph.D.,*

(In)visible Work is available [HERE](#).



A new [Psychology Today column](#) by authors, academics, and workplace experts Janelle E. Wells, Ph.D., and Doreen MacAulay, Ph.D., explores the relationship between invisible work and inattentional blindness. In August, they published a new book, *Our (In)visible Work*, which examines the causes and dangers of invisible work. Their extensive research and expertise explain how unseen labor often forces people to undertake chores, duties, and responsibilities without recognition or compensation. Our

Awareness of inattentional blindness grew after a series of remarkable experiments demonstrating that while people were engaged in a simple counting exercise, they failed to notice a person in a gorilla suit beating their chest, a woman holding an umbrella, or loud electronic noises. Researchers revealed that although we may feel as though we are fully perceiving the world around us—simultaneously hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling—in truth, the human brain processes only a tiny fraction of the sensory information available at any given

moment.

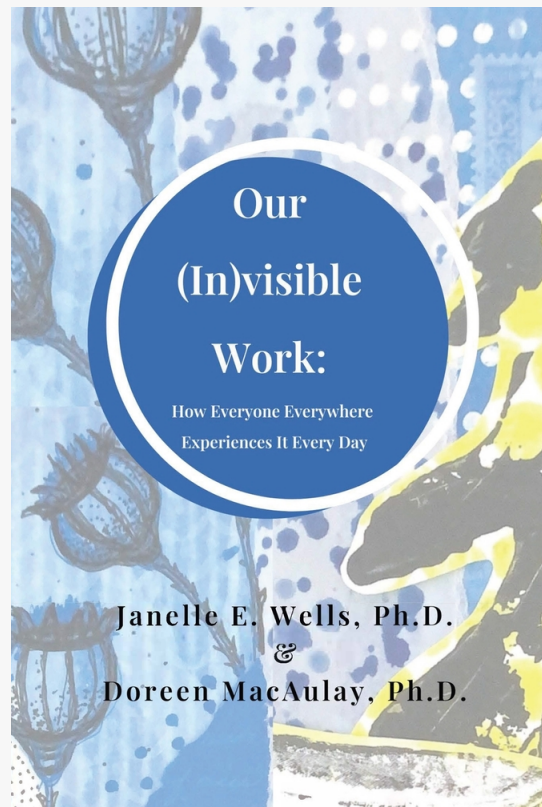
In their Psychology Today column, Drs. Wells and MacAulay maintain that invisible work falls victim to inattentional blindness. “For example, it’s not that we don’t see the work of mothers, partners, coworkers, or friends—we just don’t register it because their contributions are constant, spun into daily life, and often hidden in plain sight “right in front of our eyes,” they write, adding that in 2022 Harvard scholar Jeremy Wolfe and colleagues referred to the phenomenon as “[normal blindness](#).”

“Consider the myriad of tasks throughout a day for parents: preparing meals, organizing schedules, cleaning, tutoring, Ubering the kids around, and so much more. Much of this happens in the background, and over time, we stop noticing until someone is not there, and things start to get missed,” they write.

Further, Dr. Wells and Dr. MacAulay assert that inattentional blindness can have severe consequences in the workplace. “Researchers remind us that when employees are focused on a specific task, they miss crucial details around them. While these unnoticed details may not be as obvious as a man in a gorilla suit, their consequences can be significant.”

For example, they cite the Space Shuttle Challenger’s O-Ring failure, Enron’s flawed financials, the Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, and the Champlain Towers South collapse. “These weren’t cases of willful ignorance but underscore the importance of noticing key information,” they write. “This raises critical questions about what vital details we, and the brain, may overlook in our work environments.”

The authors conclude that awareness of inattentional blindness is not just about seeing a gorilla in a video or noticing a building going up in your neighborhood. “It’s about recognizing the invisible work around us, whether it’s the labor of parents, the emotional support from coworkers, or the subtle changes in relationships that go unnoticed until it’s too late. Without this work, our communities would be disrupted.”



Dr. Janelle Wells and Dr. Doreen MacAulay

Dr. Wells and Dr. MacAulay seek to spur a collective effort to increase awareness and understanding of invisible work, its causes, and its consequences, believing that greater awareness and recognition is crucial for the smooth functioning of our society.

Dr. Wells and Dr. MacAulay The authors have created a groundbreaking interactive web space, wellsquest.com/ourinvisiblework, as a platform designed with empathy to foster a sense of community and understanding among those who endure invisible work.

For broadcast or print interviews with Dr. Wells and Dr. MacAulay regarding their new book, *Our (In)visible Work*, please contact Michael Frisby at Mike@frisbyassociates.com or 202-625-4328. Digital copies are available now for reviews.

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