

## Introduction

Kitty Genovese - murdered by Winston Mosely in early hours of morning during March 1964. 38 people are reported to have heard her cries for help or witnessed part of the event (over 30 minutes), but no-one intervened.

Press coverage of the time suggested failure to intervene was due to the apathy and indifference of New Yorkers (dispositional explanation)

**Darley and Latané** were not convinced by this view and through a series of lab experiments produced evidence to support a situational explanation.

*[Note: this is an example of the FAE!!]*

### In brief:

1. The more people witness an event, the less responsible each individual feels for taking action. There is therefore a diffusion of responsibility.
2. They also argue that there is a diffusion of blame - i.e. when several people are at fault for not intervening, each individual feels they were not to blame for the neglect.
3. If we cannot see the response of other bystanders, then we might legitimately conclude someone else has already gone to the person's aid.

From this, they predicted that as the number of bystanders increases, the less likely it is than any one of them will intervene, or if they do so, they will intervene more slowly.

Their research findings support this hypothesis.

Work is regarded as foundational in the field of bystander intervention.

## CRiSP Chapter 7 - Bystander Intervention

IV = situational factors (group size, participant gender)  
DV = response (likelihood of and speed of)

Lab experiments allow controlled conditions; e.g. by ensuring that many features of real emergencies are controlled for or eliminated, so that only manipulation of the IV has an effect on the DV.

Some things are difficult, if not impossible to control for though - e.g. participant attitudes, societal values of the time, specific personal history of participants and so on.

Unwritten assumption of experimentation is that explanations for social phenomena can be found by examining individual / group behaviour divorced from their 'normal' social context.

Critique of **Darley and Latané** is by **Cherry**, writing from a broadly feminist and discursive perspective.

Such writers/researchers were keen to point out that:

(a) Psychology, even though the mainstream tried to position itself as such, was not apolitical nor value free. Its methods subtly reinforced and legitimised oppressive attitudes and practices (power-relations in society at large and of researchers).

(b) Women's experience was distorted by research and theory (power-relations of the experimental method).

### Bystander intervention in emergencies

**Darley and Latané** - popular explanations for the event were dispositional - 'moral decay', 'dehumanisation caused by the urban environment', 'alienation', 'existential despair'.

Suggested rational and irrational fears about own safety needed to be taken into account too (as per **Milgram and Hollander**) as to why people did not help.

Suggested that the presence of other onlookers weakened the need for any particular individual to feel that they needed to help - diffusion of responsibility and diffusion of blame.

Also, if other bystanders cannot be seen, we may conclude that someone else is already helping.

To test their hypothesis, that as the number of bystanders increases, the less likely it is than any one of them will intervene, or if they do so, they will intervene more slowly, an experimental situation was set up.

Procedure & Method - taped 'stooge' / participant in isolated room, could only speak when 'stooge' was not speaking, other participants also on tape. Stooge 'has fit' and participant cannot speak to the other people via the radio set up.

IV = number of assumed group members (2, 3 or 6)  
DV = speed of response of real participant (marked as no response if > 6 minutes elapses before participant leaves room)

Participants - 59 female, 13 male psychology students at NYU

Variations - sometimes 'taped participants' were either male or female. One 'taped participant' said he was a medical student. 'victim' was always male.

### Results

Participants found the situation plausible - most were nervous when they reported the fit to the experimenter and were surprised to learn it was not real. The two exceptions were excluded from the analysis.

Effect of group size highly significant ( $p < 0.02$  for size,  $p < 0.01$  for rt) - if group size = 2 (participant and 'victim') 85% response,  $n=3$  62%,  $n=6$  31% with rt being 52, 93, 166 seconds respectively.

<p><u>Effect of group composition in 3 person groups</u></p> <p>Variations in sex and medical competence of ‘taped’ group member had no significant impact on likelihood of response or speed.</p> <p><u>Gender of participant</u></p> <p>No significant impact.</p> <p><u>Reasons for response / non-response</u> sought on a questionnaire:</p> <p>I didn’t know what to do: 18/65  I thought it was a fake: 20/65  I didn’t know what was happening: 26/65</p> <p>- but these are all post-hoc responses!</p> <p><u>Discussion</u></p> <p>(i) Participants genuinely believed fit to be real, regardless of if they intervened or not.</p> <p>(ii) Non-responders were not unresponsive - they were still trying to make their mind up if/how to respond and showed concern for the ‘victim’ when experiment was stopped.</p> <p>(iii) Participants experienced stress and conflict during the experiment - yet researchers claim participants found the experiment ‘interesting’ when debriefed and thought it was justified.</p> <p><u>Evaluation</u></p> <p>Positive features:</p> <p>(i) <u>Socially relevant</u> - research generated from concern over the way the murder of KG had been reported/explained by wider society.</p> <p>(ii) <u>Challenged popular ‘commonsense’ view</u> - intra-psychic explanation challenged by a situational view.</p>	<p>This is difficult - as it is easier for most to rationalise away non-intervention as being something wrong with others, rather than having a situational / societal root.</p> <p>(iii) Established a link between number of people present and likelihood/speed of response - again, a situational factor.</p> <p><u>Negative features:</u></p> <p>(i) Experimental method is <u>reductionist</u> - simplifying to IV and DV means that it <u>distorts</u> as people’s personal histories, values, beliefs and the moral climate of the society they are <u>situated</u> in cannot be taken into account. <b>Hepburn</b> - <u>de-contextualising of behaviour</u> criticism is relevant to this experiment.</p> <p>(ii) Experiments assume value freedom and objectivity are possible - but researchers have power over the research question they are asking and the experimental setup and their participants (perhaps some did not respond as they did not wish to ‘spoil’ the experiment?)</p> <p><u>Kitty Genovese and culturally embedded theorising</u></p> <p><b>Cherry’s critique</b> has two elements:</p> <p>(1) - Women are not adequately represented in psychological research - e.g. male researchers and participants; male behaviour is the norm.</p> <p>(2) - Challenges the objective and value free assumptions of the experimental method. Instead, socio-cultural factors have to be investigated too and reflexivity is also important in understanding how personal agendas and experiences impact research.</p> <p><b>Darley and Latané</b> - moved away from a socio-cultural analysis of the murder and towards behavioural phenomena through the use of the experimental method and representation of the event in terms of IV and DV.</p>	<p>Criticises academic (experimental) theorising as moving away from a specific event and turning it into an instance of a wider class of events - e.g. ‘bystander intervention’. <u>In the process of constructing the meaning of an event our vision is constricted.</u></p> <p><b>Cherry</b> situates herself as having been a student in the 1970s and having been unaware of any other analysis at the time than that of <b>Darley and Latané</b>. However, on returning to it in the 1980s after she had become a feminist did she find literature which shifted her understanding of the event from one being about ‘bystander intervention’ to one about ‘violence against a woman by a man’.</p> <p>Knowledge is therefore situated culturally and historically - and there is <u>researcher power present too</u>.</p> <p>Criticises bystander intervention experiment of D+L on this basis as:</p> <p>(1) None of their experiments (and those of other researchers) simulated a situation of attack</p> <p>(2) Sex/gender violence was abstracted away at the hypothesis formation stage</p> <p><u>Therefore, the salient feature of the KG murder being an attack on a woman by a man was no longer a component of the lab experiments that followed.</u></p> <p><b>Brownmiller</b> - writing in 1975 - also saw this event as being about violence towards women. By the 1980s, it could have been expressed as violence being directed at a woman by a man yet no-one intervened.</p> <p>The way in which the incident is named by <b>Cherry</b> changes over the years, as does the cultural framework which (re-)interprets the event.</p> <p>Not surprising - the world in 1964 did not recognise the widespread abuse of women; feminism of the 1970s enlarged the definition to take in violence against</p>
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children, spouses, rape, pornography etc. This change allows a different framework to be used in the 1980s to reinterpret the murder of KG.

It also coincides with a shift in SP from experimental and predictive science to one of interpretation. But even so, learning about 'bystander behaviour' is more 'scientifically pure' than what you can learn about trying to make sense about the murder of a woman (example of the power of the scientific method in late C20/C21.)

**Gergen** - social experiments are not about competing hypothesis for 'the truth' - but reflect the cultural knowledge of the experimenter within the social context that their knowledge can be displayed in.

**Cherry** cites two studies as being conceptual anomalies in the bystander literature:

1. **Borofsky et al** (1971) - role playing experiment; male and female dyads; attack simulated. None of the 6 male observers intervened to stop a man attacking a woman, but in other dyads, male helping did happen. Explained as perhaps men get gratification out of seeing a woman attacked by a man.

Women were unlikely to intervene at all - no explanation offered.

Study received little attention - perhaps because it was 'too early' for it to become a classic.

2. **Shotland and Straw** (1976) - at a time when feminist activism was focussed on collective intervention - e.g. rape crisis centres and refuges.

Experiments conducted found that:

(a) Intervention occurred more frequently when observers viewed protagonists as strangers (65%) than married (19%)

(b) Observers more likely to infer an intimate

relationship between a man and a woman in the absence of other knowledge.

Therefore, there is a shift from 1960s where bystander behaviour had within it a sub-case of male violence against women to the 1980s - where gender role expectations are the general phenomena with bystander behaviour a sub-case.

Despite limitations in their research and the lack of understanding in the 1970s about rape being a 'stranger' crime (it usually isn't) and wife-battering being under-reported if at all, these two studies provide an experimental interpretation of the KG murder which is different to the more famous **Darley and Latané** experiments.

i.e. they are not about bystander intervention, but about the nature and perception of male-female relatedness.

Therefore, if theories are historically situated, it is dangerous to canonise events and the research that follows as having universal application for all time.

**Cherry** reflects further on the KG murder as being more than about violence on women - it was also about a growing expression of a community which felt powerless to do anything to prevent violence.

e.g. brings in race and social class. KG was white, middle class; her attacker was black (not widely reported at the time, as Mosley said he had gone looking for 'any girl' - NY Times did not therefore suggest the murder could have been racially motivated).

**Cherry** argues that we only know about KG as she was white and middle class and no-one intervened. "Had she been a Negro killed in Harlem she would have received a paragraph or two" - **Rosenthal**, 1964.

Mosley's background was of Detroit and Pittsburgh in the 30s/40s. While clear that this does not absolve him

of the crime, **Cherry** uses this to argue that the daily experience of violence in a person's life becomes decontextualised by SP theories which operate at the individual, behavioural level.

**Dowd** - 20 years after the event suggested that the event crystallised what people were beginning to think about urban life in the USA - anonymity, lack of human contact, feeling unable to control the environment.

**Davis** - writing in 1984 about the murder of another woman suggested that the wonder was not that many people failed to call the police, but that anyone bothered at all.

**Rosenthal** - suggests that NYC homeless community is the most powerless of all. Whose 'community' are we protecting and preserving - and why?

**Cherry** says what she once understood as being a general instance of individuals failing to intervene she now thinks about the murder of KG as a way of seeing how whole communities can be seen to be vulnerable to unchecked violence.

#### Summary:

Gender and power-relations are key to understanding the murder of KG according to **Cherry**.

Meaning of the emergency and bystander's response is suffused with societal assumptions and values

She does not argue that one form of analysis (feminist) should be preferred over another (experimental).

Instead, a feminist reading of the event would not have been available as a discourse in the 1960s. (even she would not have approached it that way as a student in the early 1970s).

Her account therefore challenges the view that objectivity in research is possible.

Hers is an argument for seeing knowledge as socially contingent and fluid, not discoverable and fixed - a 'social constructionist' epistemology (**Burr**).

'Bystander intervention' has now been largely abandoned as a research topic in favour of a focus on 'helping behaviours' and 'altruism'. New theories have been spawned.

However, the dominant methodological framework has not changed; Cherry's critique is unlikely to be found in research reports. However, critical and feminist psychology has had some impact as the raised profile of:

- Situated knowledges
- Qualitative methods

have encouraged research of a wider range of experience, including that of marginalised groups.