

Piliavin, Rodin and Piliavin (1969): *Good Samaritanism: An Underground Phenomenon?*

Background to the Study

Understandably, the events outlined in the article to the right kickstarted a substantial amount soul-searching; is humanity really so hardened and selfish that nobody would intervene (or even call the police) in a sustained twenty minute attack on a 28-year-old woman - even when that attack woke nearly forty people in the surrounding neighbourhood?

The attack, and subsequent controversy, also kick-started a new wave of enquiry within social psychology; concerned with the processes which lead people to help others when they have nothing personally to gain from this act (or, to use the correct terminology, into **Altruistic Behaviour**). The focus of much of this research was by bystander behaviour, attempting to identify the factors (or **determinants**) which led onlookers (such as those in the Kitty Genovese case) to intervene and help others - or, perhaps more importantly, to abstain from intervening.

Much of the early research studies into this topic were conducted within psychology laboratories - and had a decidedly "Beadle's About" quality to them (I know you're too young to remember Beadle's About, but humour me; it's like Trigger-Happy TV, but infinitely better).

Perhaps the most notable of these studies were;

- ★ **Darley and Latane (1968)**, who conducted a lab experiment in which the participants were asked to converse with a fellow participant (really a confederate) across an intercom. Whilst having their conversation, the confederate would suddenly fake an epileptic fit - and the participants reaction was observed. The researchers found that when participants thought that others had also witnessed the fit, they acted to seek help for him far less readily.
- ★ **Latane and Rodin (1969)** conducted a follow-up study, which seemingly confirmed this finding. In this experiment, a participant was placed in a waiting room, sometimes alone and at other times with a group of confederates playing the part of fellow "participants". Whilst waiting, they would hear the noise of a woman fall and cry out in the adjoining room. The researchers found that participants were much slower in offering assistance when others were present than when they were alone.

A key finding of these studies was a tendency for the probability and speed of helping behaviour to drop when more people were present in the immediate environment. In response to this trend, Darley and Latane proposed two important explanatory processes;

- ★ **Diffusion of Responsibility** occurs because in a crowd setting, people believe that the responsibility for intervention is shared between everyone present - and thus is less weighted on the individual themselves.
- ★ **Pluralistic Ignorance** describes how people delude one another into remaining calm and inactive. To illustrate, people may perceive an emergence as a non-emergency because everyone around them is calm and inactive.

Taken together, these concepts reinforce one another; urgency is diminished as nobody feels the weight of sole-responsibility, and this lack of activity means that others are unlikely to intervene - as they do not perceive the situation to be "an emergency".

Getting You Thinking

37 WHO SAW MURDER DIDN'T CALL POLICE

Apathy at Stabbing of Queens Woman Shocks Inspector

For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks.

Twice the sound of their voices and the sudden glow of their bedroom lights interrupted him and frightened him off. Each time he returned and stabbed her again. Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead.

That was two weeks ago today. But Assistant Chief Inspector Lussen, in charge of the borough's detectives and a veteran of 25 years of homicide investigations, is still shocked. He can give a matter-of-fact recitation of many murders. But the slaying baffles him - not because it is a murder, but because the 'good people' failed to call the police.

'As we have reconstructed the crime,' he said, 'the assailant had three chances to kill this woman during a 35-minute period. He returned twice to complete the job. If we had been called when he first attacked, the woman might not be dead now.'

She got as far as a street light in front of a bookstore before the man grabbed her. She screamed. Lights went on in the 10-storey apartment house which faces the bookstore. Windows slid open and voices punctured the morning stillness.

Miss Genovese screamed: 'Oh, my God, he stabbed me! Please help me!' From one of the upper windows in the apartment house, a man called down: 'Let that girl alone!'

The assailant looked up at him, shrugged and walked down Austin Street toward a white sedan parked a short distance away. Miss Genovese struggled to her feet.

Lights went out. The killer returned to Miss Genovese, now trying to make her way around the side of the building by the parking lot to get to her apartment. The assailant grabbed her again.

'I'm dying!' she shrieked.

Windows were opened again, and lights went on in many apartments. The assailant got into his car and drove

away. Miss Genovese staggered to her feet. A city bus passed. It was 3.35 am.

The assailant returned. By then, Miss Genovese had crawled to the back of the building where the freshly painted brown doors to the apartment house held out hope of safety. The killer tried the first door; she wasn't there. At the second door, he saw her slumped on the floor at the foot of the stairs. He stabbed her a third time - fatally.

It was 3.50 by the time the police received their first call, from a man who was a neighbor of Miss Genovese. In two minutes they were at the scene. The neighbor, a 70-year-old woman and another woman were the only persons on the street. Nobody else came forward.

The man explained that he had called the police after much deliberation. He had phoned a friend for advice and then he had crossed the roof of the elderly woman to get her to make the call.

'I didn't want to get involved,' he sheepishly told the police.

Six days later, the police arrested Winston Moseley, a 29-year-old business-machine operator, and charged him with the homicide. Moseley had no previous record. On Wednesday, a court committed him to Kings County Hospital for psychiatric observation.

The police stressed how simple it would have been to get in touch with them. 'A phone call,' said one of the detectives, 'would have done it.'

Today witnesses from the neighborhood, find it difficult to explain why they didn't call the police. Lieut. Bernard Jacobs, who handled the investigation by the detectives, said:

'It is one of the better neighborhoods. There are few reports of crimes. You only get the usual complaints about boys playing or garbage cans being turned over.'

'We can understand the reticence of people to become involved in an area of violence,' Lieutenant Jacobs said, 'but where they are in their homes, near phones, why should they be afraid to call the police?'

source: New York Times (27/04/64)



Getting You Thinking...

1. Read the article above. Do you think that you would have responded in a different way if you were in a similar situation?
2. Try to identify at least **three** explanations for the onlookers lack of action in this article.
3. Working in pairs, identify at least **four** situational factors which might affect people's readiness to help others.

Aims of the Study

The core study conducted by Piliavin *et. al.* further develops the premise established by this earlier research. However, they take the study of bystander behaviour a step further in a number of important ways;

- * The study primarily set out to examine how the **nature of the victim** might effect helping behaviour; exploring how ethnicity (Black or White) and status (Drunk or Ill) might impact on the likelihood of intervention.
- * Secondly, whilst previous studies had focused on the dynamics involved when nobody steps in to help a victim, this study began to explore **what happened when another bystander did help**. Consequently, the study examined the impact of models (i.e. people who stepped in to help) on the altruistic behaviour of others.
- * Finally, the study aimed to make **methodological improvements**; earlier studies conducted into bystander behaviour were conducted in laboratories - lacking ecological validity, and thus having limited applicability to real-world contexts. Piliavin *et. al.* consequently opted to conduct a field experiment to test whether diffusion of responsibility occurred to the same extent in a real context.

Methodology

The first issue encountered by Rodin and the Piliavins was in finding a real-world context in which their study could be conducted multiple times under very similar conditions. They eventually opted for the New York subway system - and, in particular, a route which passed through number of stations, but only stopped at two. This gave the researchers a period of 7.5 minutes each journey, during which they had an essentially captive audience to the “emergency” they were about to create.

Procedure

Each individual “trial” (the term used by the authors to describe each journey) took part in a different train compartment (focussing on an area which the researchers call the **critical area**), and began with a team of four students from the researchers’ university boarding the train using different doors. Two of the students were to observe the experiment from the adjacent area, one would play the “victim”, and the final student would play the “model” who would eventually step in to help (more on these people later!).

As the train passed the first station (about 70 seconds after departure), the victim would stagger forward and collapse onto the floor; where he would remain, motionless and staring at the roof, until helped. Eventually, if nobody else stepped forward, the model would help the victim to his feet.

Conditions

Whilst the main bulk of the procedure was standardised from trial-to-trial, the researchers varied the some elements of the study in order to address the aims outlined at the beginning of this page.

Most straightforwardly, the ethnicity of the victim was changed (one of the victims used was **Black**, whilst three were **White**) - although in every other respect their appearance was identical; they were all males aged between 26 and 35 and wore the identical clothing. Furthermore, in 38 of the trials conducted, the “victim” carried a bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag, and smelled of alcohol (called the **drunk condition**). In the remaining 65 trials, the participants carried a black cane and appeared sober (the **cane condition**). As was the case previously, no other aspects of the behaviour or appearance was modified in the two conditions.

Finally, the **model’s behaviour** was varied across the the trials; either intervening after just 70 seconds (the **early conditions**), or waiting for 150 seconds (the **late conditions**). Furthermore some times they intervened from within the **critical area**, and at othertimes they helped from the adjacent area. All models were male, and all wore informal clothing; however this was not strictly standardised.

Participants

In total, four research teams conducted 103 separate trials; and thus the participants in the study (the bystanders) were an estimated 4,450 passengers travelling on the train between 11am and 3pm on weekdays of a two month period. In the study, the researchers note that the typical composition of these passengers was 45% Black and 55% White; and the average number of people in the critical area was 8.5 (with 45 people in the immediate area of the victim).

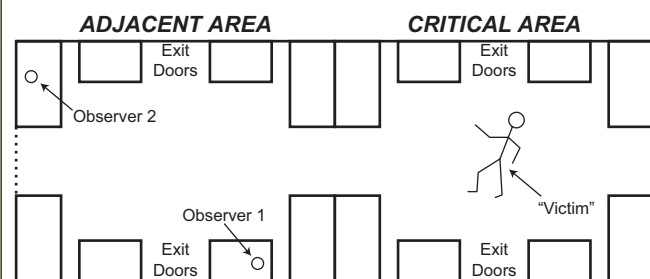
Measures

Each trial was watched by two female observers; focusing on slightly different aspects of the scenario and bystanders’ behaviour;

- * The first noted the number of people who stepped forward to help the victim, together with their gender, ethnicity and location in the carriage.
- * The second observer recorded the gender, ethnicity and location of all passengers in the immediate area. When helping behaviour occurred, she also noted the its urgency, whether or not a model had acted first and the amount of time between model activity and bystander intervention

In addition, both of the observers recorded the comments made by passengers, and attempted to elicit comments from the passengers sitting next to them.

Layout of the Study



Evaluation Questions

4. Identify the DV and IVs (more than 1!) in this study.
5. The authors describe their sample as consisting of “unsolicited participants”. What do you think they mean by this?
6. What ethical issues are raised by this and the study generally?
7. Identify at least **two** ways in which the sample of this study might distort its findings.
8. Give one strength and one weakness of conducting field experiments. Illustrate your points, with reference to this study.
9. With reference to this study, identify problems that might occur when conducting observations.
10. The study uses two observers, focusing on different aspects of bystander behaviour. Why might this be a good approach?
11. Why might it be better to ask observers watch the same aspects of the situation?

Results of the Study

Item A: Spontaneous Help by Condition

	CANE	DRUNK	TOTAL
WHITE	95%	46%	80%
BLACK	100%	57%	73%
TOTAL	95%	50%	79%

Item B: Helpers by Ethnicity

	CANE VICTIM	DRUNK VICTIM	TOTAL
MALE HELPERS	Unknown	Unknown	90%
FEMALE HELPERS	Unknown	Unknown	10%

Item C: Helpers by Ethnicity

	WHITE			BLACK			ALL		
	CANE	DRUNK	TOTAL	CANE	DRUNK	TOTAL	CANE	DRUNK	TOTAL
SAME ETHNICITY	63%	91%	68%	25%	75%	50%	58%	84%	64%
DIFFERENT ETHNICITY	37%	9%	32%	75%	25%	50%	42%	16%	36%



You now need to analyse the data produced in Piliavin, Rodin and Piliavin's study. To help you "getting lost" in the data, use the questions below to guide your analysis. You will probably find it easier to work in pairs for this task.

- Would previous studies into bystander behaviour predict high or low helping behaviour in a subway train context? Explain your answer carefully.
- Examine Item A. Does the general level of helping behaviour support or refute your answer to question 12?
- Formulate two explanations for your answer to question 13.
- In general, did the ethnicity of the victim significantly affect their chances of being helped (note that significantly is underlined)?
- Did the condition of the victim (drunk/cane) have any effect on their chances of being helped? (Item A)
- Try to formulate an explanation for the findings of question 16.
- Were males or females more or less likely to intervene and help the victim?
- Try to formulate an explanation for this finding.
- No findings are available for the balance of genders helping the drunk vs cane victims. With reference to your previous answer, estimate this data.
- Look at the "all victims" data of Item C. Were there any tendencies for bystanders to help those of their own ethnicity?
- Did the condition of the victim (drunk/cane) have any effect on the likelihood of same-ethnicity help?

Results

In general, the findings of Piliavin *et. al.*'s study portray a far more positive image of human nature than previous research into bystander behaviour. In some 79% of trials, the victim was helped spontaneously (that is, without the model acting first) by at least one bystander - and in 47% of cases, they were spontaneously helped by two or more passengers.

This evidence seems to provide clear counter-evidence to the predictions posited by the diffusal of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance hypotheses - as helping behaviour was very high, despite large numbers of other people being present. Furthermore, in many cases helping responses actually occurred much more quickly when *more* passengers were present in the carriage. This suggests that previous research had overstated the degree to which helping behaviour drops as numbers of bystanders increase.

Types of Victim and Models

The ethnicity of the victim did not significantly affect their likelihood of being helped. Differences were, however, found between the drunk and cane conditions; in 95% of the trials, the cane victim received spontaneous help, compared to only 50% of victims in the drunk condition. Passengers were also more likely to leave the critical area in the drunk condition - although we should note that only 34 people in the entire study (1%) actually did so, and nobody left the carriage. Comments were also more likely to be made by bystanders experiencing the drunk condition - these tended, however, to reflect concern for - rather than condemnation of - the victim (for example, "you feel so bad that you don't know what to do").

As spontaneous help was so prevalent in the study, the impact of models did not yield enough data for substantial analysis. Consequently, this priority was dropped from the agenda of the study at this stage of the research.

Characteristics of Helpers

Piliavin, Rodin and Piliavin also undertook further analysis into the characteristics of those people who initiated spontaneous helping behaviour - with a specific focus on gender and ethnicity. They found that, overall, some 90% of these helpers were male - despite the proportion of males within the critical area standing at only 60%.

Overall, the ethnicity of the helper did not seem to be significant - with a proportions of helpers roughly matching the balance of ethnicities in the sample. The researchers do, however, note a non-significant trend towards "own-race" helping; for instance, 68% of people helping the white victim were themselves white - whilst only 50% of the helpers of the black victim were white. This finding was more marked in the drunk condition; where "own-race" helping was very much the norm.



- Return to the aims of the study outlined on page 2. For each, outline at least one conclusion which could be drawn from the data explored on this page.

Conclusions

On the basis of this study, Piliavin *et. al.* draw further conclusions about bystander behaviour.

The level of helping behaviour in this study was dramatically higher than in previous research, and intervention was more common when the train was busy - contrary to the diffusion of responsibility hypothesis. The authors attribute this difference to the methodological shift from laboratory to field experiment - implicating a number of possible dimensions;

- * On one level, the study might have given a more valid insight into bystander behaviour "in the real world". Field experiments are much higher in **ecological validity** - as they are conducted in genuine social contexts - and thus, their findings tend to reflect behaviour more authentically. In a laboratory setting, for instance, there may be an assumption that people with authority and expertise will be monitoring events - and will intervene if people are in genuine danger.
- * Alternatively, the findings might be a product of the very particular context in which the study was conducted. The participants were in an extremely constrained situation, which was almost impossible to escape (physically and psychologically). Consequently, they may have experienced more pressure to act than in other contexts.
- * Finally, there may have been biases in the sample studied which might have distorted the overall findings. It could be, for instance, that more "helpful" types of people travel on the particular route chosen at the time of the study.

The "Arousal: Cost - Reward" Model

In order to explain the differing likelihoods of bystanders helping different "victims", Piliavin *et. al.* proposed a model through which individuals evaluate particular situations and decide how to respond. They argue that any emergency will produce physiological arousal, which is heightened by empathy, proximity and length of time. However, the individual might label that arousal differently depending on their interpretation of the events occurring (for instance, they may react to a given situation with sympathy, fear, anxiety or disgust). Crucially, their response to this situation will depend on how they label the situation - and Piliavin *et. al.* contend that central to this is their evaluation of possible rewards and costs of intervening; if rewards outweigh potential costs, intervention will occur.



24. As a whole group, draw a table indicating the potential costs and rewards of helping others or abstaining.
25. Using cost-reward model, explain why people were more likely to help victims in the "cane" than the "drunk condition".
26. How do you think that Piliavin *et. al.* explain the tendency of males to help more than females?
27. Re-examine the definition of altruistic behaviour on page 1. Does truly altruistic behaviour exist according to this model?

Cost-Reward Model of Helping: A Counter Example?

YOUTH GANG STABS HEAD TEACHER TO DEATH

A head teacher has died after being stabbed outside his west London school while protecting a pupil who was being assaulted.

Paramedics performed emergency surgery on Philip Lawrence, 48, after he staggered into a classroom following the attack outside St George's Roman Catholic School, Maida Vale, at about 1500 GMT today.

He was rushed to St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, where surgeons lost their battle to save the father-of-four.

The attack took place when Mr Lawrence went to help a 13-year-old pupil who was being assaulted by a gang outside the 440-pupil mixed comprehensive.

A Scotland Yard spokeswoman said: "It appears that as one of the schoolboys left the school premises he was approached by a small group of male youths. The teacher, who was in the

vicinity, intervened.

"The man sustained a stab wound but managed to stagger back into the school and raise the alarm. The suspects are believed to have made off on foot into roads nearby."

The boy was also taken to hospital with head injuries.

More than 20 police officers have converted the main school hall into an interview room to investigate the attack on the head teacher, who had led the school for three years.

Witnesses described seeing Mr Lawrence "staggering and clutching his chest" after the attack.

A spokesman for the board of governors said: "We are shocked and appalled at the sudden and tragic loss of such an outstanding friend and



colleague.

"At the moment our thoughts are with his family and we will be offering them all the support we possibly can."

In a television interview last year, Mr Lawrence said he had increased security at St George's to protect pupils, closing some school entrances and installing a video camera at another.

source: www.bbc.co.uk

Evaluation

- ✓ Methodologically, the study makes significant improvements on prior research. Most notably, it is very high in **ecological validity** - as the researchers conducted their experiment in a genuine context. Consequently, it could be argued that the study provides a more authentic insight into behaviour in the real world.
- ✓ Finally, the **sample** used within Piliavin's research consisted of an estimated 4,500 participants - a huge number when compared to many studies within psychology. Consequently, they are better justified in making generalisations from their data.
- ✗ Perhaps the most scathing criticism of the study is the unethical way in which the researchers treated their participants. No consent was gained from participants, and it was near-impossible to debrief them following the trials. There is also the potential that the study may have led to long term trauma in its participants.
- ✗ Furthermore, as the study was a field experiment, it lacked control. The problems with this are twofold. Firstly, **confounding variables** may be problematic (for instance, the researchers cannot be sure that some participants didn't experience more than one trial). Secondly, it makes the study **difficult to replicate** under exactly the same conditions.
- ✗ Whilst conducting the study in a genuine context was a strength of the study, the researcher's choice of situation can be criticised. A train carriage is a confined space, from which it is difficult to "escape". Consequently, the levels of helping behaviour may be higher than would be found in other contexts.
- ✗ Similarly, the sample used by the study may have been large - but it was also flawed. Most notably, it was ethnocentric and only examined passengers on the specific train at a particular time.
- ✗ Finally, the "arousal: cost-benefit" model of helping behaviour seems to deny genuine altruism. It suggests that people only help others if they themselves will benefit from this intervention.