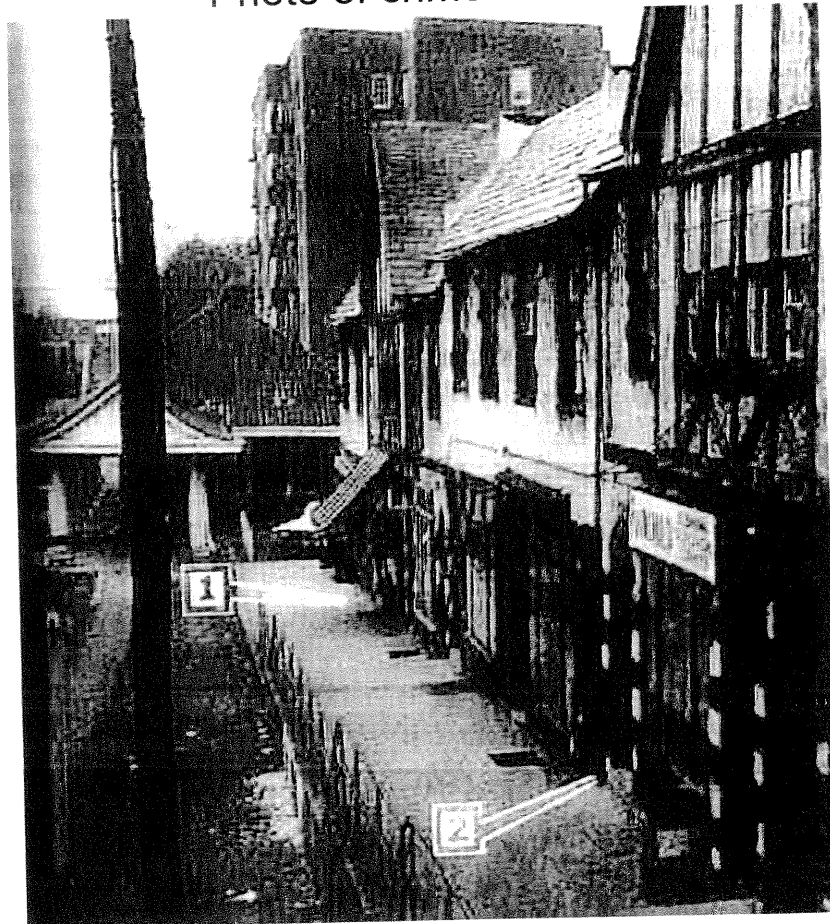


Remembering Kitty Genovese



On March 13th, 1964, one of one of the most infamous crimes in American history occurred in the Kew Gardens neighborhood of Queens, New York. At around 3 AM, 28-year-old Catherine "Kitty" Genovese was attacked, sexually assaulted, and murdered as she walked from her parked car. The assault lasted thirty-five minutes and occurred outside of an apartment building where a reported 38 witnesses either heard or saw the attack and did nothing to stop it. A front-page article in the *New York Times* sparked an avalanche of press and weeks of national soul searching. The case has lived on in plays, musicals, TV dramas -- it even spawned a whole new branch of psychology.

Photo of crime scene



Factors That Increase the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

Kitty Genovese's death triggered hundreds of investigations into the conditions under which people will help others (Dovidio, 1984; 2006). Those studies began in the 1960s with the pioneering efforts of Latané and Darley, who conducted a series of ingenious experiments in which people appeared to need help. Often, these studies were conducted using locations in and around New York City as a kind of open-air laboratory.

Other researchers joined the effort to understand what factors influence a person's decision to help another (see Dovidio & others, 2006; Eisenberg, 1991; Levy & others, 2002). Some of the most significant factors that have been found to increase the likelihood of helping behavior are noted below.

- **The "feel good, do good" effect.** People who feel good, successful, happy, or fortunate are more likely to help others (see Salovey & others, 1991; Forgas & others, 2008). Those good feelings can be due to virtually any positive event, such as receiving a gift, succeeding at a task, listening to pleasant music, finding a small amount of money, or even just enjoying a warm, sunny day.
- **Feeling guilty.** We tend to be more helpful when we're feeling guilty. For example, after telling a lie or inadvertently causing an accident, people were more likely to help others (Basil & others, 2006; Baumeister & others, 1994; Forgas & others, 2008). Even guilt induced by surviving the 9/11 terrorist attacks spurred helping behavior in many people during the aftermath (Wayment, 2004).
- **Seeing others who are willing to help.** Whether it's donating blood, helping a stranded motorist change a flat tire, or dropping money in the Salvation Army kettle during the holiday season, we're more likely to help if we observe others do the same (Bryan & Test, 1967; Sarason & others, 1991).
- **Perceiving the other person as deserving help.** We're more likely to help people who are in need of help through no fault of their own. For example, people are twice as likely to give some change to a stranger if they believe the stranger's wallet has been stolen than if they believe the stranger has simply spent all his money (Latané & Darley, 1970).
- **Knowing how to help.** Research has confirmed that simply knowing what to do contributes greatly to the decision to help someone else (e.g., Clark & Word, 1974; Huston & others, 1981).
- **A personalized relationship.** When people have any sort of personal relationship with another person, they're more likely to help that person. Even minimal social interaction with each other, such as making eye contact or engaging in small talk, increases the likelihood that one person will help the other (Howard & Crano, 1974; Solomon & others, 1981).

altruism

Helping another person with no expectation of personal reward or benefit.

prosocial behavior

Any behavior that helps another, whether the underlying motive is self-serving or selfless.

bystander effect

A phenomenon in which the greater the number of people present, the less likely each individual is to help someone in distress.

diffusion of responsibility

A phenomenon in which the presence of other people makes it less likely that any individual will help someone in distress because the obligation to intervene is shared among all the onlookers.

Factors That Decrease the Likelihood of Bystanders Helping

It's equally important to consider influences that decrease the likelihood of helping behavior. As we look at some of the key findings, we'll also note how each factor might have played a role in the death of Kitty Genovese.

- **The presence of other people.** People are much more likely to help when they are alone (Latané & Nida, 1981). If other people are present or imagined, helping behavior declines—a phenomenon called the **bystander effect**.

How can we account for this surprising finding? There seem to be two major reasons for the bystander effect. First, the presence of other people creates a **diffusion of responsibility**. The responsibility to intervene is *shared* (or *diffused*) among all the onlookers. Because no one person feels all the pressure to respond, each bystander becomes less likely to help.

Ironically, the sheer number of bystanders seemed to be the most significant factor working against Kitty Genovese. Remember that when she first screamed, a man yelled down, "Let that girl alone!" With that, each observer instantly knew that he or she was not the only one watching the events on the street below. Hence, no single individual felt the full responsibility to help. Instead, there was a diffusion of responsibility among all the bystanders so that each individual's share of responsibility was small indeed.

Second, the bystander effect seems to occur because each of us is motivated to some extent by the desire to behave in a socially acceptable way (*normative social influence*) and to appear correct (*informational social influence*). Thus, we often rely on the reactions of others to help us define a situation and guide our response to it. In the case of Kitty Genovese, the lack of intervention by any of the witnesses may have signaled the others that intervention was not appropriate, wanted, or needed.

- **Being in a big city or a very small town.** Kitty Genovese was attacked late at night in one of the biggest cities in the world, New York. Are people less likely to help strangers in big cities? Researcher Nancy Steblay (1987) has confirmed that this common belief is true—but with a twist. People are less likely to help a stranger in very big cities (300,000 people or more) *or* in very small towns (5,000 people or less). Either extreme—very big or very small—seems to work against helping a stranger.

- **Vague or ambiguous situations.** When situations are ambiguous and people are not certain that help is needed, they're less likely to offer help (Solomon & others, 1978). The ambiguity of the situation may also have worked against Kitty Genovese. The people in the apartment building saw a man and a woman struggling on the street below but had no way of knowing whether the two were acquainted. "We thought it was a lovers' quarrel," some of the witnesses later said (Gansberg, 1964). Researchers have found that people are especially reluctant to intervene when the situation appears to be a domestic dispute or a "lovers' quarrel," because they are not certain that assistance is wanted (Shotland & Straw, 1976).
- **When the personal costs for helping outweigh the benefits.** As a general rule, we tend to weigh the costs as well as the benefits of helping in deciding whether to act. If the potential costs outweigh the benefits, it's less likely that people will help (Dovidio & others, 1991; Hedge & Yousif, 1992). The witnesses in the Genovese case may have felt that the benefits of helping Genovese were outweighed by the potential hassles and danger of becoming involved in the situation.

Discussion Questions

Answer the following discussion questions in your group BEFORE you create your presentation for the class. Use these questions to ensure that everyone in your group has a thorough understanding of all of the information.

1. How does the presence of others impact our prosocial behavior?
2. Why would you be LESS likely to receive help when in an area where you are surrounded by MORE people?
3. Why are some people altruistic even when part of a large group?
4. What types of studies could you use to replicate these findings?
How would you set up this study?
5. How does this impact our lives today? Where have you seen examples of this?

Two Sides of the Coin Activity

(Collaborative Learning Only)

Examine the assigned handout. Then, create a three-part dramatic presentation that includes:

- Act 1: the information presented in the handout
- Act 2: ways the information can be used to decrease helping behaviors
- Act 3: ways the information can be used to increase helping behaviors

Assessment Criteria

Your completed assignment must meet all of the following criteria:

- Dramatic presentation must include the three acts listed above.
- Dramatic presentation includes at least one short-term (immediate) and at least one long-term effect in each act.
- Dramatic presentation shows who (and/or what) is affected and how.
- Dramatic presentation tells the story of the handout, including who, what, when, where, and why.
- Dramatic presentation makes use of three or more of the following: props, costumes, narration, sound effects, emotion, and/or backdrops.
- Dramatic presentation accurately includes ALL of the following terms in a form other students can understand: Altruism, Prosocial Behavior, Bystander Effect, Diffusion of Responsibility, Normative Social Influence, Informational Social Influence, Kitty Genovese, Latane & Darley

Oral Presentation Rubric : Complex Instruction

Teacher Name: Ms. Greenwald

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Props	Group uses visual aids that meet all of the assessment criteria and make the presentation better.	Group uses visual aids which meet most of the assessment criteria and make the presentation better.	Group uses visual aids that do not meet most of the assessment criteria and do not improve the presentation.	Group does not use visual aids OR the visual aids distract from the presentation.
Content	All members show a full understanding of the topic.	All members show a good understanding of the topic.	Some members show a good understanding of parts of the topic.	Group members do not seem to understand the topic very well.
Speaks Clearly	Group speaks loudly, clearly and distinctly through the entire presentation.	Group speaks loudly, clearly and distinctly most of the time	Group speaks loudly, clearly, and distinctly only some of the time.	Group members often mumble or cannot be understood.
Posture and Eye Contact	Stands up straight, looks relaxed and confident. Establishes eye contact with everyone in the room during the presentation.	Stands up straight and establishes eye contact with everyone in the room during the presentation.	Sometimes stands up straight and establishes eye contact.	Slouches and/or does not look at people during the presentation.
Collaboration with Peers	All group members almost always listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.	Group members usually listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.	Group members sometimes do not listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.	Group members rarely listen to, share with, and support the efforts of others in the group.