

Case Studies in Helping Behavior

Part A.

Read the story below, and answer the questions that follow. Be prepared for class discussion.

Kitty Genovese

In 1964, Kitty Genovese was attacked on the street outside a number of apartment buildings in a respectable area of New York City. She yelled for help, escaped her attacker, and ran. The man caught her and stabbed her. From the windows of their apartments, thirty-eight people watched her struggle. The attack on the street lasted for over thirty minutes. No one called the police. Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death.

1. What would you have done if you were watching from one of those apartments?
2. Why do you think no one came to her assistance?
3. Why do you think no one called the police until fifteen minutes after the attack was over?

Part B.

Read the following list of factors developed by social psychologists to describe when bystanders help.

Bystanders help when

1. They notice the situation.
2. They perceive the situation as an emergency.
3. They believe no one else is available to help.
4. They are in an environment with which they are familiar.
5. They believe their action will not put them in danger.

Conversely, social psychologists have found that bystanders do not help when

1. They think they will be regarded foolishly by others.
2. They perceive that others are not helping for a good reason. (This is called pluralistic ignorance.)
3. They believe others will help instead of themselves. (This is called diffusion of responsibility.)
4. They are unfamiliar with the environment.
5. They perceive that recognition of the event by even a small action might require greater action on their part.

Part C.

Reread the story about Genovese and answer the following questions.

1. Using the factors identified by social psychologists, list three specific reasons why none of the people who watched the attack helped or called the police.
2. Are there any reasons why they should have helped, according to this theory? If so, list them.

Part D.

Read the story below and answer the questions that follow. Be prepared for class discussion.

Lenny Skutnik

On January 13, 1982, an airplane bound for Tampa left National Airport in Washington, D.C. A few minutes after takeoff, the plane hit a truck and six cars on a bridge over the Potomac River and then crashed into the ice-covered river. Emergency squads immediately started rescue operations and pulled five people from the icy water. Lenny Skutnik was standing on the riverbank. He took off his boots and his coat and dove into the river. He dragged two passengers from the thirty degree water.

1. What would you have done if you had been standing on the riverbank?
2. Why do you think Skutnik dove into the river to help the passengers?
3. Using the factors suggested by social psychologists, state three specific reasons why he helped.
4. According to the social psychologists, are there any reasons why he should not have helped? If so, list them.