

**The role of visibility and
number of bystanders to
the experience of the
bystander effect**

*Psychological consequences
for victims*

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Abstract

A great deal of research has been done on the perspective of a bystander and disregards the experience of the victim. More research is required into the experience of the victim, in order for possible first responders to be able to offer better help. The current research focuses on the effect of the bystander effect on its victims and whether the visibility of the incident plays a role. Four hypotheses were postulated. The first three were about the negative influence of the number of bystanders on the psychological consequences for victims and whether the just world theory and locus of control had a positive or negative influence on this. The last one was concerned with the effect of the visibility of the situation on the experience of shame for the victim and whether this was negatively influenced by the number of bystanders present. To test these expectations an experiment with four vignettes, representing different conditions, was executed. Overall the most striking result appeared to be that when numerous bystanders were present, participants felt their existence was less meaningful. Additionally, participants felt less excluded when the situation was less-visible situation compared to when the situation was visible.

Samenvatting

Er is veel onderzoek gedaan naar het perspectief van een omstander, maar de ervaring van het slachtoffer wordt hier vaak achterwege gelaten. Meer onderzoek is nodig naar het perspectief van het slachtoffers, zodat 'first responders' betere hulp kunnen aanbieden. Dit onderzoek focust op het effect van het bystander effect op zijn slachtoffers en of de zichtbaarheid van het incident hier een rol bij speelt. Vier hypothesen zijn opgesteld. De eerste drie testten de negatieve invloed van het aantal omstanders op de psychologische gevolgen voor de slachtoffers en of de 'just world theory' en de locus of control hier een positieve of negatieve invloed op heeft. De laatste testte of de zichtbaarheid van de situatie de ervaring van schaamte van het slachtoffer beïnvloed en of het aantal omstanders hier een negatieve impact op heeft. Er is gebruik gemaakt van een experiment met vier vignetten, die verschillende condities representeerden. Over het algemeen bleek het meest opvallende resultaat te zijn dat wanneer er meerdere omstanders aanwezig waren, deelnemers hun bestaan als minder zinvol beschouwden. Daarnaast voelden deelnemers zich minder buitengesloten wanneer ze zich in een minder zichtbare situatie bevonden.

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The role of visibility and number of bystanders to the experience of the bystander effect: consequences for victims

There are several examples of incidents where bystanders were present, but no one intervened. Even though some famous examples are from a few decades back, also in the present such incidents take place. A recent example is the gang rape of a 15-year-old girl at a California High School in October 2009. The girl was raped outside the school during the home coming dance. 10 people were involved and 10 more witnessed the crime, however, nobody bothered to call 911 (CNN, 2009). A second example is the attack on a 19-year old man in a train full of people during the night of February 10th 2010 in the Netherlands. He asked for help, but no one responded. Once he was out of the train the perpetrator followed him and continued his abuse, and again no one responded to his cry for help. Eventually some minutes later a bicyclist finally stopped to call the police and the perpetrator fled (Volkskrant, 2010).

Both incidents must have had a big impact on the victim's mental well-being, however, only the crime itself and possible physical consequences for the victim were reported. This research focuses on the effect that the occurrence of the bystander effect has on its victims and whether it plays a role if the incident took place in a dark environment, such as the incidents above, or in full light.

1.1. The bystander effect and its victim

In 66% of violent incident cases, bystanders are present (Hamby, Weber, Grych & Banyard, 2016). The presence of bystanders can be important if a particular situation occurs. They are the first ones at the scene and thus potential first responders or allies in preventing the occurrence of any violence at all (Hamby et al., 2016). How bystanders (re)act can influence the provision of services and resources or the priority with which the situation will be treated by emergency services (Fox & Cook, 2011).

The bystander effect is a well known phenomenon, introduced by Darley and Latané in 1968. Fischer et al. (2011) defined the bystander effect by summarizing the findings of three decades of research as follows: "The bystander effect refers to the phenomenon that an individual's likelihood of helping decreases when passive bystanders are present in a critical situation" (p. 517). The definition of the bystander effect rests on the theoretical framework of Darley and Latané that consists of three psychological processes: audience inhibition, social

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influence and diffusion of responsibility (Latané & Nida, 1981). These processes can respectively lead to fear to be judged by others, misinterpretation of the seriousness of the situation and shifting of the responsibility to help among all bystanders, but the overall effects of these psychological processes on victims unknown.

A lot of research has been conducted in the field of the bystander effect, the different situations in which it occurs and the different variables that could increase or decrease this effect. A great deal of research however, is done from the perspective of the bystander. In order to give a complete view of the topic, therefore, research about victims themselves, their influence or what the consequences are when the bystander effect prevents them from getting help is necessary. Victims often assume that the chance of being helped increases as the number of possible helpers increases (Latané & Nida, 1981). However, as stated above, research has repeatedly found the opposite. The reality can subsequently lead to an unpleasant surprise. This report focuses on the effects that this discrepancy between the expectations and the reality of the victim have on the victim. Secondly, this research will present some of the factors that could affect the victim during and after the incident and review their corresponding effects on the victim. The understanding of the reaction processes of victims to bystanders that this research will bring can help to improve the support and help that victims need. This can affect how quickly bystanders react and will help the victim in such a situation, or affect the quality of which the victims are taken care of by first responders/emergency services.

1.2. Fundamental needs, just world theory and locus of control

Several theories and concepts can be linked to the bystander effect. One that has numerous similarities with the phenomenon is ostracism: “ignoring and excluding individuals or groups by individuals or groups” (Williams, 2007, p. 427). Same as with ostracism, people figuratively stick their head in the sand when they are witnesses of an incident, when the bystander effect occurs. They are afraid of being judged or excluded if they get their head out of the sand to help (van Bommel, van Prooijen, Elffers & van Lange, 2016). Ostracism tends to threaten the four fundamental needs that every person desires. These needs are: “belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence” (Zadro, Williams & Richardson, 2004, p. 560). According to several studies victims of ostracism experience a lower level of these fundamental needs when measured. Due to the similarities between ostracism and the bystander effect there is reason to assume that these four fundamental needs that play a role in

the effect that ostracism has on the victim of the ostracism, also influence the bystander effect (van Bommel et al., 2016; Williams, 2007; Zadro et al., 2004).

Another probable assumption is that people's beliefs play a part in how someone processes being a victim of an incident with bystanders. The just world theory, conceived by Lerner, examines such a belief; the belief that the world is just (Lerner, Miller & Holmes, 1976). This means that "our social and physical environment is stable, predictable, controllable, and organized" (Dolinski, 1996, p. 214). The just world theory basically states that everybody gets what they deserve (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Dolinski, 1996; Lerner et al., 1976; Lodewijckx, Wildschut, Nijstad, Savenije & Smit, 2001). Thus, when one is the victim of an accident, one must have done something to deserve it. The same goes for 'good' things; when one works hard and is honest, one will be rewarded. Translated to current society this means that one way of dealing with someone being victimized is to deny the injustice of their misfortune, so the bystander's belief in a just world remains intact (Lerner et al., 1976).

A third theory about how a victim experiences an incident, where the bystanders are present, is about their internal or external locus of control. The locus of control is the belief that something is within their own control (internal locus of control), or due to outside factors (external locus of control) (Crick & Dodge, 1994; van Reemst, Fischer & Zwirs, 2016). If the victim has a high internal locus of control it is probable that they are going to believe the blaming by others and so they blame themselves for what happened, according to the belief described by the just world theory. However, this could also include the bystanders in such a way that the victim will believe that, besides the incident, he or she also deserves not to be helped. On the contrary, if a victim has a high external locus of control he or she is more likely to blame external attributes; this includes bystanders (Ahlin & Lobo Antunes, 2015).

The way of dealing with victimization described by the just world theory and adopted by victims with an internal locus of control is about victims being "blamed, derogated, avoided or isolated by others" (Maes, 1994, p. 70). This phenomenon called victim-blaming most frequently occurs side by side with the bystander effect, but unlike the bystander effect, which occurs during the crime, victim-blaming also occurs after the incident. By victim-blaming, people get a feeling of control, safety and justice (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Lodewijckx et al., 2001).

There are two sorts of blaming a victim may have to deal with; characterological blame, based on a stable factor like personality, and behavioral blame, based on a changeable factor, the behavior of the victim (Davies, Rogers & Whitelegg, 2009). Furthermore, there are

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different factors that can influence the severity of the victim-blaming. An example is the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim or the gender of the victim (van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). The experience of an individual affected by victim-blaming can be described as the experience of a second victimization.

Victim-blaming, in whichever form, can lead to a great amount of negative consequences for the victim. It can counteract their psychological recovery, cause shame, anxiety, embarrassment and even depression (Campbell, Ahrens, Sefl, Wasco & Barnes, 2001; Doerner & Lab, 2008; Ullman, 1996). Another important possible outcome is that a victim starts to believe the victim-blaming is just and starts to blame oneself. This blaming often leads back to the just world theory wherein the victim believes that they deserved it and that it was their own fault (Callan, Kay & Dawtry, 2014). Victim-blaming can increase this feeling. The extent to which this affects someone also correlates strongly with the self-esteem the victims had before the incident occurred. However, due to victim-blaming the self-worth of the victim will inevitably decrease slightly and thus a high probability exists that each victim experiences at least marginally a feeling of deserving their own misfortune. This in turn leads to a lower self-esteem and, in extreme cases, begins to show self-defeating behavior, like substance abuse (Callan et al., 2014; Kosenko & Laboy, 2014).

Besides the negative effects on the self-esteem of the victim, the combination of the bystander effect and its side by side occurring phenomenon victim-blaming can ultimately have a negative influence on the other fundamental needs that Zadro et al. (2004) describe as well. This can then cause negative cognitions and emotions for the victim, like feelings of guilt or shame. Eventually, the victim is likely to believe the things people are saying about him/her and the incident that occurred. It can be reasoned that the effect of victim-blaming will be magnified, when there are more people who can participate in victim-blaming. This expectation, combined with the literature, leads to the first hypothesis of this study

H1a: There will be more psychological consequences for victims when numerous bystanders are present in comparison to only one bystander.

Hereby, the possible interaction that the just world theory and the locus of control might have with the experience of the victim cannot be ignored. The additional hypotheses that will be tested, therefore, are

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H1b: Victims with a belief in the just world theory will experience less psychological consequences than victims that do not believe in the just world theory.

H1c: Victims with an external locus of control will experience less psychological consequences than victims with an internal locus of control, when numerous bystanders are present.

These first three hypotheses are partly about the presence of bystanders, but this presence can occur in various forms. Bystanders who participate in victim-blaming at the moment the incident takes place are called “real bystanders” (p. 98, Levy & Ben-David, 2015). However, people do not necessarily have to be at the scene of an incident to participate in victim-blaming. Examples are the news broadcast or people reading about it in the paper, but also social media (e.g. Facebook) and amusement sites (e.g., YouTube and 9gag.com) play a part. Via these channels people learn of the incident and form an opinion about the victim’s suffering, hereby it is likely to assume that the way these channels state the news influences the opinion of the bystander. This type of bystander, following the media, gossip or other stories, is called a “metaphorical bystander” (p. 98, Levy & Ben-David, 2015). These two concepts thus reveal that one does not have to be visible (“real bystanders”) to cause a bystander effect. The expectation or imagination that bystanders are present can be enough (“metaphorical bystanders”). This is confirmed by experimental research (Garcia, Weaver, Darley & Moskowitz, 2002; Manning, Levine & Collins, 2007; Voelpel, Eckhoff & Förster, 2008).

Thus, one can assume that when the incident takes place in the dark, the difference in shame that a victim feels between a situation with only one bystander versus a situation with numerous bystanders will be minimal. The victim might after all expect or imagine that more bystanders are present, even though only one bystander is. However, when the incident takes place in the light, a victim is able to see the number of bystanders watching and the bystanders are able to see the victim. This causes shame to play a particular role. Thus, in line with the first hypothesis, there will be a difference in the experience of shame when the incident takes place in the light. Therefore, the second hypothesis is

H2: The experience of shame for the victims in a less-visible situation will be independent from the number of bystanders present, but in a visible situation will be more as the number of bystanders grows.

1.3. The current research

In summary, there exist numerous different factors that play part in the way a victim experiences an incident and the presence of bystanders. However, a great deal of extra research needs to be done as to what these factors exactly are. The aim of this research therefore is to find out how the bystander effect influences the feelings of a victim.

Additionally, the research presented here will focus on the experience of victims that are ignored by bystanders. As mentioned before it is enough if one expects or imagines others are near for the bystander effect to occur, one does not have to be physically present (Garcia et al., 2002; Manning et al., 2007; Voelpel et al., 2008). Thus it seems visibility does not necessarily play a role in the appearance of the bystander effect or victim-blaming. However, visibility might influence a victim's experience of the bystander effect and victim-blaming. Therefore, this current research additionally focuses on the factor "visibility of the incident" and whether this affects the impact of the bystander-effect on the victim.

2. Methods

2.1. Design and participants

This is an explorative study that used a quantitative, descriptive research design in the form of a vignette questionnaire. The research had a 2 (bystander presence: 1 vs. numerous) x 2 (visibility: light vs. dark) between-subjects design. For each of the four conditions a matching vignette was written to which participants were randomly assigned. In the result section the four conditions were compared to each other.

Participants were recruited via e-mail, social media and Sona System. Participants who subscribed via Sona System received half a point when finished. A total number of 154 participants filled in the questionnaire completely (50 men, 104 women, age range: 18 – 77 years).

2.2. Procedure

This research used a Dutch questionnaire composed via the website Qualtrics. Within the questionnaire a vignette was used, allowing the participant to empathize with the victim. The vignette was about someone getting robbed, while walking over a well-known square in the city at night. In accordance with the 2 x 2 design there were four different conditions: 1 bystander (it is quiet on the square, only one person witnesses) vs. numerous bystanders (it is crowded on the square, several people witness) and dark (the lanterns are broken) vs. light (the robbery occurs under a working lantern).

Prior to the vignette, the locus of control and the belief in the just world theory were measured. Following the vignette, questions were asked about the perpetrator and the bystanders (using the IOS Scale), victim-blaming, self-blaming and fundamental needs. The questionnaire ended with a short demographic questionnaire.

All participants were presented a small introduction before starting the questionnaire. This introduction gave a short explanation about the goal of the research, the duration of the questionnaire and stated that the data would be handled anonymously and confidentially. Furthermore, an e-mail address was presented which could be used to pose eventual questions or interests in the results that should arise amongst participants.

2.3. Materials

The questionnaire was based on different theories and existing constructs and items, which are further elucidated below. Because of the nature of this research (explorative) some constructs that were used in the questionnaire appeared not to be relevant for the results. These constructs can be found in Appendix 6.2.

All questions were scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*), with the exception of the I-E Scale (that measures the locus of control) and the IOS Scale.

2.3.1. Locus of control

To determine whether participants had an internal or external locus of control the internal-external scale (I-E Scale) of Rotter (1966) was used. The I-E scale consisted of numerous items. Each item was composed of two statements, such as “many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck” and “people's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make”. One statement belonged to the external locus of control and the other to the internal locus of control. The score was measured by comparing which statements the participant chose the most: the statements belonging to internal or external locus of control.

The I-E Scale originally had 29 items, of which six were ‘fillers’. However, because the determination of locus of control was just a small part of this study, only a small selection of 8 items was used ($\alpha = .400$ ¹).

2.3.2. Just World Theory

To understand where the victims were coming from it is important to know if they believed in the just world theory prior to the incident. In the Just World Theory questionnaire 16 items

¹ If the second item were to be deleted α would be .476. The second item consists of the statements “In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world” and “Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries”.

measured this belief (Lucas, Zhdanova & Alexander, 2011). However, only 8 items were used in the questionnaire used in this research (e.g., “People generally earn the rewards and punishments that they get in this world”, $\alpha = .822$).

2.3.3. Fundamental needs

To measure the four fundamental needs the questionnaire that Zadro et al. (2004) developed, of which a part measures the influence of ostracism on the four needs of Williams (2007), was used. 8 out of 12 items were altered and translated to match the vignettes instead of the Internet ball-toss game from the original questionnaire and were added to our questionnaire.

The items were divided among four constructs, equivalent to the needs: belonging (e.g. “I felt like an outsider during the situation”, $r[154] = .189, p = .019$), control (e.g. “I felt somewhat frustrated during the situation”, $r[154] = .226, p = .005$), self-esteem (e.g. “I felt that the bystanders failed to perceive me as a worthy and likeable person”, $r[154] = .146, p = .071$), and meaningful existence (e.g. “I felt non-existing during the situation”, $r[154] = .501, p < .001$).

The four fundamental needs (belonging, control, self-esteem, meaningful existence) were used to measure part of the psychological consequences of the victim, the dependent variables, which refers to the negative cognitions and emotions.

2.3.4. Additional constructs

Self: This construct consisted of two items about self-blame (“I could have prevented the situation”, “This situation was my own fault”, $r[154] = .506, p < .001$), four items about shame (e.g. “I am embarrassed by the situation”, $\alpha = .666$), and two items about influence (“I had an influence on the situation”, “I am convinced this was a one-off situation”, $r[154] = .053, p = .517$).

The subscales ‘self-blame’ and ‘shame’ were used to measure part of the psychological consequences of the victim, the dependent variables, which refers to the negative cognitions and emotions.

Empathy: With five items was measured how well the participant could identify or emphasize with the victim in the vignette (e.g., “I could empathize with the situation”, $\alpha = .778$)².

Manipulation check: Three items were used as a manipulation check to control whether the participants read the vignettes correctly (“How many bystanders were present during the situation?”, “During the incident it was dark/light”) and whether they had interpreted the

² This construct originally consisted of six items, however the last item was deleted (“I have experienced a similar situation”) to create a higher α . If the sixth item was included α would be .660.

visibility of the situation as they were supposed to (“Was the incident clearly visible to bystanders?”).

3. Results

3.1. Empathy and manipulation check

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to measure whether participants could empathize and if there was a difference in empathy among the four vignettes.

Participants could empathize with the victims from the vignettes relatively well and no differences between the four conditions were found, $F(3, 150) = 0.270, p = .847$ (Table 1).

Several manipulation checks verified whether participants experienced the content of the vignettes as they were supposed to and whether they read the text well. It appeared that this was not the case. Though almost all participants had the question about the number of bystanders present right, only half of the participants interpreted the visibility of their situation as they were supposed to (Table 2). Also, only half was able to remember correctly whether their situation took place in the dark or light, however, this can be explained as the question could be ambiguous. In hindsight the question “During the incident it was dark/light” could be interpreted as whether it was dark or light at that time of the day or whether the place where the incident took place was dark or light.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of ‘Empathy’ for the four vignettes.

| | N | M | SD |
|-----------------------------|----|------|------|
| Light – numerous bystanders | 37 | 5.69 | 0.85 |
| Light – one bystander | 39 | 5.52 | 0.87 |
| Dark – numerous bystanders | 40 | 5.57 | 0.80 |
| Dark – one bystander | 38 | 5.56 | 0.83 |

Note. The median was 4.00.

Table 2. Frequencies of manipulation check for the number of bystanders and the visibility of the incident.

| | | Correct | Incorrect |
|----------------------|----------------|---------|-----------|
| Number of bystanders | | 146 | 8 |
| Visibility | Interpretation | 82 | 72 |
| | Read correctly | 80 | 74 |

Note. Frequencies are expressed in number of participants.

3.2. Number of bystanders

The first hypothesis concerned the blame and negative emotions one could feel when a certain number of bystanders were present. To answer this hypothesis four two-way ANOVAs were conducted. The results of these ANOVAs will be described at once.

Contrary to what we expected, no significant main or interaction effects were found for the dependent variables control, self-esteem, self-blame or shame (Table 3). However, the 2 (bystander presence: 1 vs. numerous) x 2 (visibility: light vs. dark) ANOVA revealed that people in a less-visible situation scored significantly higher on the fundamental need ‘belonging’ ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.05$), than people in a visible situation ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.16$), $F(1, 150) = 4.140$, $p = .044$, $\eta^2_p = .027$. Also, a significant crossover interaction was found between the effects of bystanders and visibility on the fundamental need ‘meaningful existence’, $F(1, 150) = 6.390$, $p = .013$, $\eta^2_p = .041$. Simple effect analysis showed that within the group with only one bystander the score on ‘meaningful existence’ was significantly higher in the less visible situation ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.20$) compared with the visible situation ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.19$) ($p = .034$). These significant differences in the scores of ‘belonging’ and ‘meaningful existence’ concerning the visibility of the situation were not hypothesized.

Furthermore, participants within the group with the less visible situation scored significantly higher if there was only one bystander ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.20$) compared to when there were numerous bystanders ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.19$) ($p = .008$) (Figure 1). This was in line with our expectation. No significant differences were found within the group with numerous bystanders (less visible: $M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.19$, vs. visible: $M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.20$, $p = .153$) or within the visible situation (one bystander: $M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.19$, vs. numerous bystanders: $M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.20$, $p = .371$).

Table 3. Results of the ANOVA in control, self-esteem, self-blame and shame.

| | Bystander | | | Visibility | | | Bystander*visibility | | |
|--------------------|-----------|----------|----------|------------|----------|----------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Control | 1, 150 | 1.204 | .274 | 1, 150 | 0.083 | .774 | 1, 150 | 0.004 | .952 |
| Self-esteem | 1, 150 | 0.139 | .710 | 1, 150 | 0.235 | .629 | 1, 150 | 1.965 | .163 |
| Self-blame | 1, 150 | 0.285 | .594 | 1, 150 | 0.737 | .392 | 1, 150 | 0.508 | .477 |
| Shame | 1, 150 | 0.490 | .485 | 1, 150 | 2.776 | .098 | 1, 150 | 0.333 | .565 |

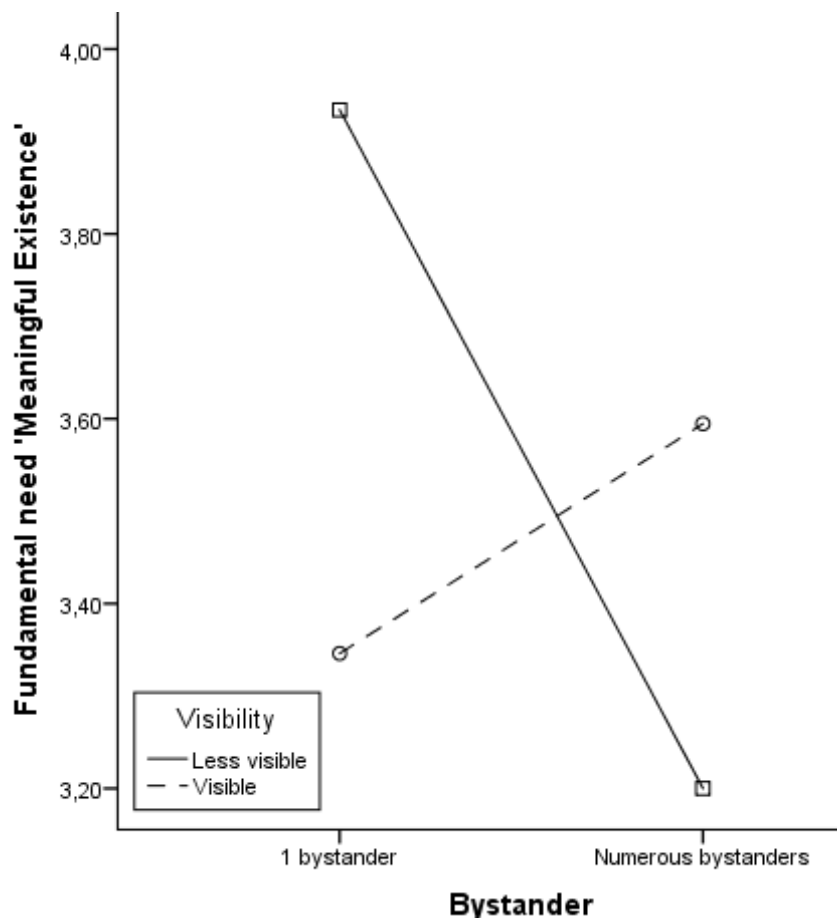


Figure 1. Diagram of interaction effect for fundamental need 'meaningful existence'.

3.3. Just world theory and locus of control

The first hypothesis has been extended with the just world theory and locus of control, to see whether these two theories had any influence the situation. Because both hypotheses concerning these two theories involved a three-way interaction, the results were measured via a regression analysis, including the three variables and all possible two- and three-way interactions. This data was then used to do slope difference tests (Dawson, 2015).

The slope difference tests revealed several effects, but the most evincive slope differences were found for the fundamental need 'meaningful existence' for both the just world theory and the locus of control. The significant slope differences were found between the lines showed in Figures 2 ($t = 3.068, p = 0.003$) and 5 (1 vs. 4: $t = 2.344, p = .020$; 2 vs. 4: $t = 2.881, p = .005$).

These findings mean that participants in a visible situation people with a low belief in the just world theory feel their existence is more meaningful if numerous bystanders are present compared to when only one bystander was present. However, participants in a less

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visible situation that do believe in the just world theory score lower on 'meaningful existence' when numerous bystanders are present and find their existence thus less meaningful.

Participants with an external locus of control scored somewhat the same on 'meaningful existence', regardless of the visibility, while participants with a lesser external locus of control felt their existence was less meaningful, when the situation was less-visible, as the number of bystanders grew.

Finally, some significant slope differences were also found for the dependent variables fundamental needs 'control' ($t = -1.981, p = .049$), 'self-esteem' ($t = 2.201, p = .029$) concerning the locus of control. These interactions are shown in Figure 3, 4.

3.4. Visibility

The last hypothesis concerned the amount of shame victims feel when a situation is visible or less-visible and whether this is affected by the bystanders present. As opposed to what we expected, no significant main effects were found for the number of bystanders present, $F(1, 150) = 0.490, p = .485$ (one bystander: $M = 4.76, SD = 1.16$, vs. numerous bystanders: $M = 4.63, SD = 1.03$), nor for the visibility of the situation, $F(1, 150) = 2.776, p = .098$ (less visible: $M = 4.55, SD = 1.10$, vs. visible: $M = 4.85, SD = 1.08$). No significant interaction effect was found, $F(1, 150) = 0.333, p = .565$.

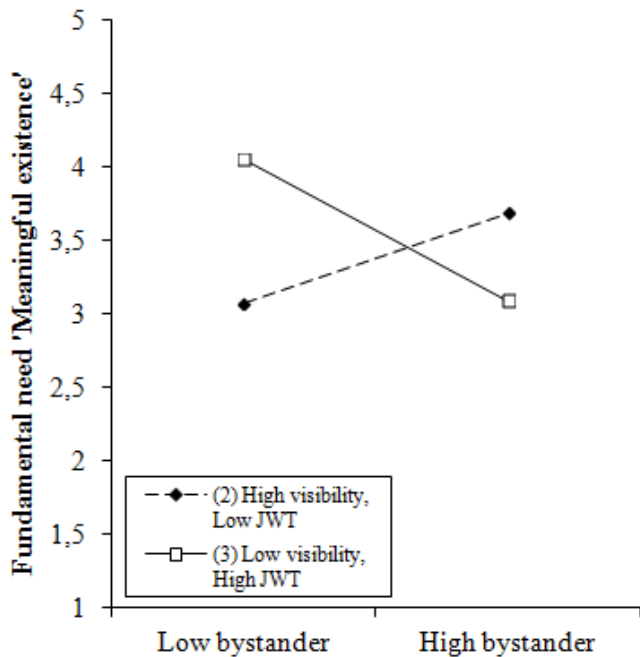


Figure 2. Slope differences for 'meaningful existence' with the just world theory score.

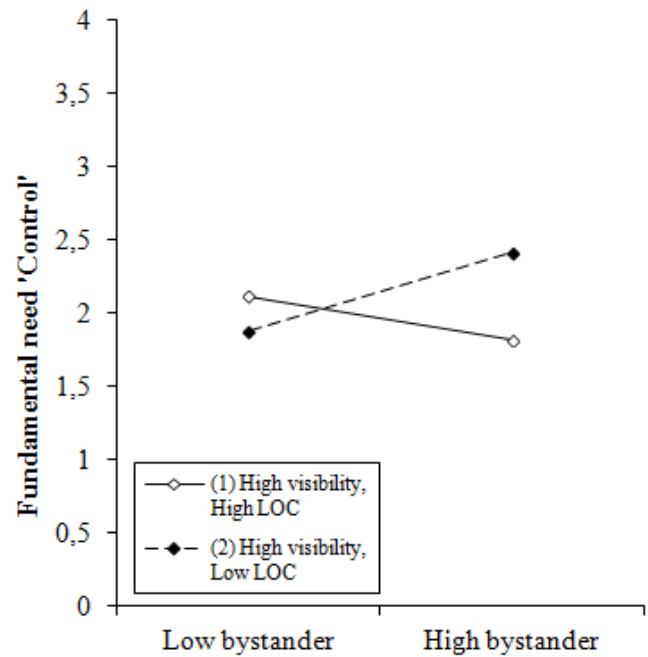


Figure 3. Slope differences for 'control' with the locus of control score.

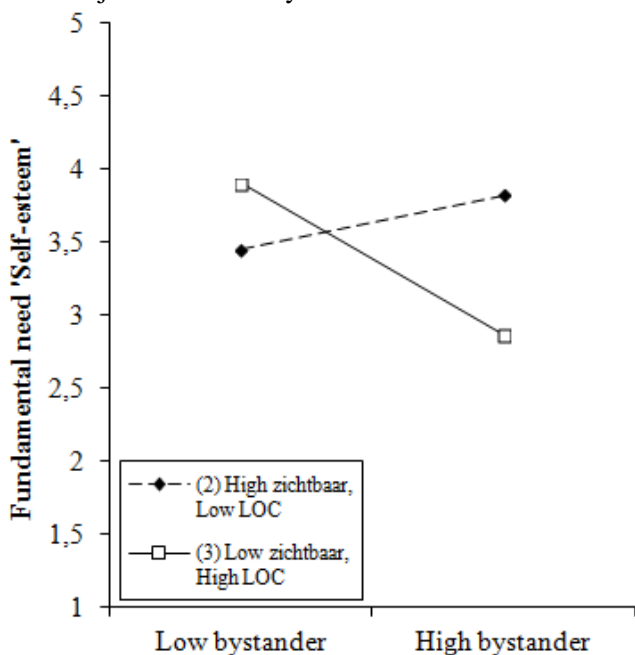


Figure 4. Slope differences for 'self-esteem' with the locus of control score.

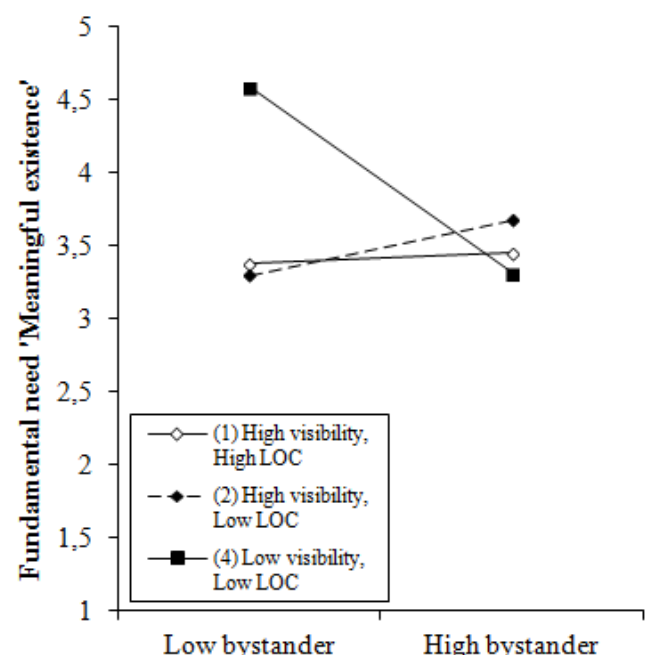


Figure 5. Slope differences for 'meaningful existence' with the locus of control score.

4. General discussion

The aim of this research was to find out how the bystander effect influences the feelings of a victim. Hereby, there was an additional focus on the factor “visibility of the incident” and whether this affects the impact of the bystander-effect on the victim. Reason for this was several researchers stating that visibility does not necessarily play a role in the appearance of the bystander effect (Garcia et al., 2002; Manning et al., 2007; Voelpel et al., 2008) and thus in the experience from victims of the bystander effect. The study tested four hypotheses using a questionnaire with four corresponding vignettes.

4.1. Number of bystanders

The results of this study showed that the impact of the situation appeared to be less severe for ‘meaningful existence’ when only one bystander was present, compared to when there were numerous bystanders. This corresponds with the assumptions of this research that the bystander effect would cause similar results as ostracism and therefore threatened the need for meaningful existence (Williams, 2007). The bystander effect amplifies as the number of bystanders increases (Fischer et al., 2011), which can explain the fact that participants scored lower on ‘meaningful existence’ when numerous bystanders were present compared to the presence of one bystander.

However, the effect that the bystander effect had on the score of ‘meaningful existence’ was only shown in the less visible situation. Researchers stated that when people are in the dark, they can perceive objects as off-sized. As a consequence the judgments of the person in the dark reflect “inferential rather than perceptual processes” (p. 239, Gogel, 1969). Which means a victim may try to self-explain the size of the objects, or in our case (group of) persons, he or she perceives. It is possible that this leads to the victims feeling as if there was a bigger difference between the presence of one bystander and numerous bystanders in the dark, because the victim could not see the real number of bystanders present, in contrast to the visible situation where one could tell the number of bystanders.

4.2. Just world theory and locus of control

An influence of the just world theory on ‘meaningful existence’ was found for people that do not believe as well as for people that do believe, though the effect appeared to be limited to the feeling of meaningful existence. The direction of this influence depended on the visibility of the situation and the number of bystanders present. The locus of control also appeared to have an effect on ‘meaningful existence’. People with an internal locus of control scored

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significantly lower on ‘meaningful existence’ when numerous bystanders were present compared to only one bystander when the situation was less-visible. It is probable that victims feel their existence is more meaningful if only one bystander is present, because in this case there is only one person who can start victim-blaming, which has less impact than a group (Fischer et al., 2011).

In addition, a negative effect was found between ‘control’ and ‘self-esteem’ and an external locus of control if numerous bystanders were present, while a positive effect was expected. For ‘control’ this negative effect was only found in the visible situation, but for ‘self-esteem’ it depended on the visibility of the situation. According to Ahlin and Lobo Antunes (2015) these outcomes make sense, because individuals “with an external locus of control attribute outcomes [to things] beyond their control” (p. 1803, Ahlin & Lobo Antunes, 2015) and they are partly because of this less likely to feel well overall (Larson, 1989), which may result in a low self-esteem.

The role of visibility in the findings concerning the just world theory and the locus of control can be explained by the same reasoning used in section 4.1.

4.3. Visibility

No support was found for the expectation that the visibility of the situation and the number of bystanders present would have influence on the experience of shame.

However, the analysis revealed some interesting results that were not hypothesized. It appeared that participants felt less excluded in a less-visible situation compared to the participants in a visible situation. This is in line with research of Hirsh, Galinsky and Zhong (2011). Several researchers state that being rejected by one’s social group can lead to serious adaptive or social consequences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hirsh, Galinsky & Zhong, 2011). Concealment in the dark or any other form of anonymity can reduce the strength of these social concerns, which can decrease the perceived social consequences (Hirsh et al., 2011). Thus, as supported by the current and previous research (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hirsh et al., 2011), being in a less-visible situation leads to a decrease in the feeling of being rejected or excluded by the group.

In addition, when only one bystander was present the participants in the less visible situation felt more recognized as existing in a meaningful way than in the visible situation or when numerous bystanders were present. This could be explained by the same line of reasoning as Baumeister and Leary (1995) combined with Hirsh et al. (2011) and by the elucidation on the first hypothesis in section 4.1.

These results are the most important of this research, because it appears that though visibility does not necessarily play a role in the appearance of the bystander effect (Garcia et al., 2002; Manning et al., 2007; Voelpel et al., 2008), it does play a role in the way a victim experiences the consequences of the bystander effect.

4.4. Limitations, strengths and further research

Though these results could be promising, this research had some limitations as well. First, the manipulation check showed a poor interpretation of the visibility of the situation among participants. Thus, further research is needed to (dis-)confirm the results above and clarify the exact influence of visibility. Secondly, the reliability of the I-E Scale was relatively low, which means the results concerning the locus of control should be handled carefully when used in further research.

However, despite the fact that this study could not research how people would truly behave in an actual situation, the overall empathy was high enough to assume that these results would correspond with a real situation. Furthermore, the age range of the participants is quite large, which means that this research does not only represent the behavior of students, but also that of elderly. Linqvist and Duke (1982) state that older adults are a vulnerable group that is afraid to get victimized. It is possible that because of this concern older adults react different to being victimized than younger adults. The difference between these two groups (younger and older adults) has not been tested, but might be an interesting subject for future research.

Other possible future issues could be the difference between men and women in such a situation, or the influence that the response time of aid workers has on the mental recovery of a victim. The importance of further research should be emphasized as the results can be used to warn and raise awareness of the consequences of the bystander effect, not only among potential bystanders, but also among first responders and emergency services, so they can also offer the appropriate mental help when someone gets victimized.

4.5. Concluding remarks

The current research showed a striking pattern that the bystander effect does have an impact on the psychological consequences of a victim, focusing on their feeling of meaningful existence. Hereby, the visibility of the incident does seem to play a role.

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6. Appendix

6.1. Vignettes

6.1.1. Vignette – Illuminated/numerous bystanders

Het is donderdagavond. Het is koopavond en je had zin om te gaan winkelen, helaas was er niemand die zin had om mee te gaan. Je loopt net het Van Heekplein op en trekt je muts nog wat verder over je hoofd. De decemberwind is erg koud en waait hard langs je gezicht. Het is al erg donker en aan de vochtigheid op je gezicht merk je dat het ook langzaam mistig begint te worden, *dus probeer je zoveel mogelijk in het licht van de lantaarnpalen te lopen. Terwijl je over het plein loopt merk je op dat het druk is in en rond de winkels.* Je kijkt op je telefoon hoe laat het is en of je nog berichtjes hebt gehad. *Wanneer je net langs een lantaarnpaal loopt botst er een man tegen je op.* Je zegt ‘sorry’ en wil doorlopen, maar het wordt duidelijk dat de man het niet per ongeluk deed. Hij grijpt je telefoon vast en geeft je een duw. De duw komt hard aan. Je struikelt over je eigen voeten en valt achterover op de grond. Uit reflex laat je je telefoon los, zodat je je op kan vangen met je handen. Desondanks beland je hard op je stuitje. Er schiet een pijnscheut door je heen. De man sist lelijk ‘Als je durft om hulp te roepen... Ik weet je te vinden...’. Hij geeft je nog een harde schop in je zij en rent weg met je telefoon in zijn hand. Je kijkt om je heen, maar *ondanks dat er veel toeschouwers waren lijkt niemand in actie te komen om je te helpen.*

6.1.2. Vignette – Illuminated/one bystander

Het is donderdagavond. Het is koopavond en je had zin om te gaan winkelen, helaas was er niemand die zin had om mee te gaan. Je loopt net het Van Heekplein op en trekt je muts nog wat verder over je hoofd. De decemberwind is erg koud en waait hard langs je gezicht. Het is al erg donker en aan de vochtigheid op je gezicht merk je dat het ook langzaam mistig begint te worden, *dus probeer je zoveel mogelijk in het licht van de lantaarnpalen te lopen. Terwijl je over het plein loopt merk je op dat het nog rustig is in en rond de winkels.* Je kijkt op je telefoon hoe laat het is en of je nog berichtjes hebt gehad. *Wanneer je net langs een lantaarnpaal loopt botst er een man tegen je op.* Je zegt ‘sorry’ en wil doorlopen, maar het wordt duidelijk dat de man het niet per ongeluk deed. Hij grijpt je telefoon vast en geeft je een duw. De duw komt hard aan. Je struikelt over je eigen voeten en valt achterover op de grond. Uit reflex laat je je telefoon los, zodat je je op kan vangen met je handen. Desondanks beland je hard op je stuitje. Er schiet een pijnscheut door je heen. De man sist lelijk ‘Als je durft om hulp te roepen... Ik weet je te vinden...’. Hij geeft je nog een harde schop in je zij en rent weg

met je telefoon in zijn hand. Je kijkt om je heen, maar *er is maar één persoon die het incident heeft zien gebeuren en die lijkt niet in actie te komen om je te helpen.*

6.1.3. Vignette – Dark/numerous bystanders

Het is donderdagavond. Het is koopavond en je had zin om te gaan winkelen, helaas was er niemand die zin had om mee te gaan. Je loopt net het Van Heekplein op en trekt je muts nog wat verder over je hoofd. De decemberwind is erg koud en waait hard langs je gezicht. Het is al erg donker en aan de vochtigheid op je gezicht merk je dat het ook langzaam mistig begint te worden, *helaas werken de lantaarnpalen op het plein niet. Terwijl je over het plein loopt merk je op dat het druk is in en rond de winkels.* Je kijkt op je telefoon hoe laat het is en of je nog berichtjes hebt gehad. *Wanneer je net langs een donker stuk loopt botst er een man tegen je op.* Je zegt ‘sorry’ en wil doorlopen, maar het wordt duidelijk dat de man het niet per ongeluk deed. Hij grijpt je telefoon vast en geeft je een duw. De duw komt hard aan. Je struikelt over je eigen voeten en valt achterover op de grond. Uit reflex laat je je telefoon los, zodat je je op kan vangen met je handen. Desondanks beland je hard op je stuitje. Er schiet een pijnscheut door je heen. De man sist lelijk ‘Als je durft om hulp te roepen... Ik weet je te vinden...’. Hij geeft je nog een harde schop in je zij en rent weg met je telefoon in zijn hand. Je kijkt om je heen, maar *ondanks dat er veel toeschouwers waren lijkt niemand in actie te komen om je te helpen.*

6.1.4. Vignette – Dark/one bystander

Het is donderdagavond. Het is koopavond en je had zin om te gaan winkelen, helaas was er niemand die zin had om mee te gaan. Je loopt net het Van Heekplein op en trekt je muts nog wat verder over je hoofd. De decemberwind is erg koud en waait hard langs je gezicht. Het is al erg donker en aan de vochtigheid op je gezicht merk je dat het ook langzaam mistig begint te worden, *helaas werken de lantaarnpalen op het plein niet. Terwijl je over het plein loopt merk je op dat het nog rustig is in en rond de winkels.* Je kijkt op je telefoon hoe laat het is en of je nog berichtjes hebt gehad. *Wanneer je net langs een donker stuk loopt botst er een man tegen je op.* Je zegt ‘sorry’ en wil doorlopen, maar het wordt duidelijk dat de man het niet per ongeluk deed. Hij grijpt je telefoon vast en geeft je een duw. De duw komt hard aan. Je struikelt over je eigen voeten en valt achterover op de grond. Uit reflex laat je je telefoon los, zodat je je op kan vangen met je handen. Desondanks beland je hard op je stuitje. Er schiet een pijnscheut door je heen. De man sist lelijk ‘Als je durft om hulp te roepen... Ik weet je te vinden...’. Hij geeft je nog een harde schop in je zij en rent weg met je telefoon in zijn hand.

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Je kijkt om je heen, maar *er is maar één persoon die het incident heeft zien gebeuren en die lijkt niet* in actie te komen om je te helpen.

6.2. Non-relevant constructs³

6.2.1. IOS Scale

The Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale consisted of one figure with seven different Venn-like diagrams (Figure 6A and B). Each Venn-like diagram represented the degree of overlap one feels with another person (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992).

In this study, the IOS Scale was used to measure whether the victim feels as close to the perpetrator as to a bystander who does not intervene. Therefore, the figure was altered a little by changing the circle “other” to a circle “perpetrator” and “bystander(s)”. The circle the participant selected represented the amount of overlap one experienced with the perpetrator and the bystander(s). Because the IOS Scale only consists of one item, the reliability could not be measured.

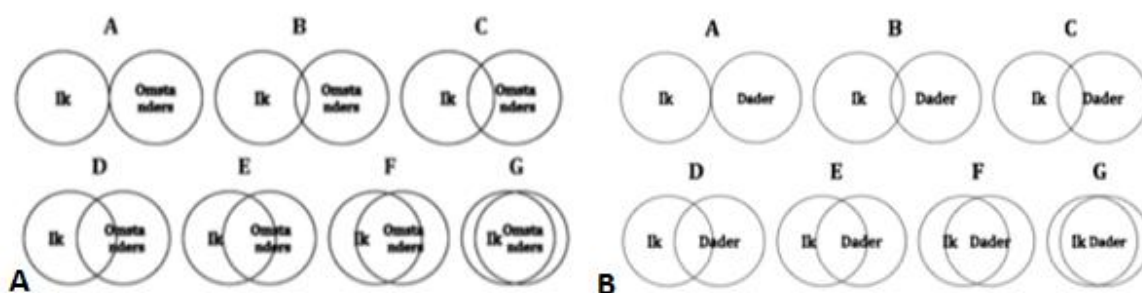


Figure 6. The Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale (Aron, 1992, p. 597); adjusted to “bystanders” (figure A) and “perpetrator” (figure B).

6.2.2. Additional constructs

Pluralistic ignorance: This construct consisted of two items about pluralistic ignorance (“No one responded to the event, thus the situation was not serious enough”, “It was clear to the bystanders that I needed help”, $r[154] = .302, p < .001$).

Diffusion of responsibility: This construct consisted of three items about the diffusion of responsibility (e.g. “It was the responsibility of the bystanders to help me”, $\alpha = .462^4$).

Efficacy: This construct consisted of three items about efficacy (e.g. “If someone had intervened, the consequences would have been less severe”, $\alpha = .528$).

Person perpetrator: This construct consisted of two items about the personality of the perpetrator (“The behavior of the perpetrator is normal”, “The behavior of the perpetrator is undesirable”, $r[154] = .148, p = .068$), two items about the behavior of the perpetrator (“The perpetrator is a friendly person”, “The perpetrator is a horrible person”, $r[154] = .277, p =$

³ These constructs were not relevant for the analysis.

⁴ However, if the first item were to be deleted (“The bystanders felt responsible for me”) cronbach’s alpha would be .724, which indicates a good reliability.

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.001) and two items about the guilt of the perpetrator (“The perpetrator could have prevent the situation”, “The perpetrator is to blame for the situation”, $r[154] = .579, p < .001$).

Person bystander: This construct consisted of two items about the personality of the bystanders (“The behavior of the bystanders is normal”, “The behavior of the bystanders is undesirable”, $r[154] = .074, p = .363$), two items about the behavior of the bystanders (“The bystanders are friendly persons”, “The bystanders are horrible persons”, $r[154] = .275, p = .001$) and two items about the guilt of the bystanders (“The bystanders could have prevent the situation”, “The bystanders are to blame for the situation”, $r[154] = .452, p < .001$).

Victim-blaming: This construct consisted of six items about the impression and effects of victim-blaming (e.g. “The bystanders thought it was my fault”, $\alpha = .507$).

6.3. Questionnaire

Beste deelnemer,

Bedankt voor het meedoen aan dit onderzoek. Deze vragenlijst is gemaakt voor een afstudeeronderzoek over het bystander effect. Halverwege de vragenlijst krijg je een klein verhaaltje te lezen. Ik wil je vragen dit verhaal zo goed mogelijk door te lezen en je zoveel mogelijk in te leven. De vragen hierna zullen ingaan op de situatie die wordt geschetst in het verhaaltje. De gegevens en resultaten van het onderzoek zijn anoniem en zullen uitsluitend gebruikt worden voor wetenschappelijke doeleinden. Je kunt op elk moment stoppen met uw deelname aan dit onderzoek, wanneer je niet meer verder wilt gaan. Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal ongeveer 20 minuten duren. Wanneer je begint met het invullen, geef je aan bovenstaande voorwaarden gelezen te hebben en in te stemmen.

Alvast bedankt voor uw tijd,

Nina Kuijsten

Q17 Toestemmingsverklaring

Ik verklaar op een voor mij duidelijke wijze te zijn ingelicht over de aard, methode en doel van dit onderzoek. Ik weet dat de gegevens en resultaten van het onderzoek alleen anoniem en vertrouwelijk aan derden bekend gemaakt zullen worden. Mijn vragen zijn naar tevredenheid beantwoord.

Ik stem geheel vrijwillig in met deelname aan dit onderzoek. Ik behoud me daarbij het recht voor om op elk moment - zonder opgave van redenen - mijn deelname aan dit onderzoek te beëindigen.

Klik op >> om door te gaan met het onderzoek.

Locus of control

Kies bij de volgende vragen de stelling waar u het meest mee eens bent

- Veel van de ongelukkige dingen in het leven van mensen zijn deels te wijten aan pech. (1)
- Tegenslagen zijn het resultaat van fouten die mensen zelf maken. (2)

LOC

- Op de lange termijn krijgen mensen het respect dat ze verdienen in deze wereld. (1)
- Jammer genoeg wordt iemand zijn waarde vaak niet herkend, ongeacht hoe hard diegene het ook probeert. (2)

LOC

- Ik heb vaak geconstateerd dat wat er gaat gebeuren, ook zal gaan gebeuren. (1)
- Vertrouwen op het lot heeft voor mij nooit zo goed uitgewerkt, als het maken van een eigen beslissing voor een bepaalde manier van handelen. (2)

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LOC

- Veel mensen realiseren zich niet in hoeverre hun leven wordt gecontroleerd door toevallige gebeurtenissen. (1)
- Er bestaat niet iets zoals "geluk". (2)

LOC

- Men moet altijd bereid zijn om fouten toe te geven. (1)
- Het is meestal het beste om iemand zijn fouten te verbergen. (2)

LOC

- Op de lange termijn worden de slechte dingen die ons overkomen gecompenseerd door de goede dingen. (1)
- De meeste ongelukken zijn het gevolg van gebrek aan vermogen, onwetendheid, luiheid of alle drie tegelijk. (2)

LOC

- Vaak heb ik het gevoel dat ik weinig invloed heb over de dingen die mij overkomen (1)
- Het is onmogelijk voor mij om te geloven dat kansen en geluk een belangrijke rol in mijn leven spelen (2)

LOC

- Wat er met mij gebeurt, komt door mijn eigen toedoen (1)
- Soms heb ik het gevoel dat ik niet genoeg controle heb over de richting die mijn leven op gaat (2)

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| | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| evalueren van anderen. (6) Mensen worden onderworpen aan eerlijke methodes, ongeacht de gevolgen die ze ervaren. (7) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mensen worden over het algemeen onderworpen aan processen die eerlijk zijn. (8) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q18 Dit was het eerste deel van de vragenlijst. Nu volgt het vignet (klein verhaaltje). Lees het verhaal goed door. Probeer je zo goed mogelijk in te leven en de situatie voor te stellen. Houd deze situatie in gedachten bij het invullen van het tweede deel van deze vragenlijst.

Q33 – Q36: one of the four vignettes, see Appendix 6.1 Vignettes.

Visibility, the bystander effect and its victims

Q32 De volgende vragen gaan over de situatie in het verhaal. Geef voor de volgende stellingen aan in hoeverre je het er mee eens bent

| | Helemaal mee oneens (1) | Mee oneens (2) | Een beetje mee oneens (3) | Niet mee eens / Niet mee oneens (4) | Een beetje mee eens (5) | Mee eens (6) | Helemaal mee eens (7) |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ik kon me goed inleven in de situatie (1) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik kon me de situatie goed voorstellen (2) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Het was voor mij onmogelijk om me in de situatie te verplaatsen (3) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik ben overtuigd dat mijn antwoorden met mijn daadwerkelijke gedrag in een dergelijke situatie overeen zouden komen (4) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mijn antwoorden reflecteerden goed wat ik in het echt zou doen en/of voelen (5) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Ik heb zelf eens een dergelijke situatie meegemaakt (6) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Q33 Was het voorval goed zichtbaar voor de omstanders

- ja (1)
- nee (2)

Visibility, the bystander effect and its victims

Q34 Tijdens het ongeval was het...

- Licht (2)
- Donker (3)

Q39 Waar vond het ongeval plaats?

- De Oude Markt (1)
- Het Van Heekplein (2)
- De Kalandersstraat (3)

Q40 Hoeveel omstanders waren er tijdens de situatie?

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)
- Meer dan 5 (6)

Q35 Wat is je leeftijd?

Q36 Wat is je geslacht?

- Man (1)
- Vrouw (2)

Q37 Wat is je nationaliteit?

- Nederlands (1)
- Duits (2)
- Anders, namelijk: (3) _____

Q38

Dit is het einde van de vragenlijst. Bedankt voor je deelname.

Dit onderzoek gaat over de impact van het bystander effect op slachtoffers, met een specifieke focus op de zichtbaarheid van de situatie.

Wanneer je nog vragen of opmerking hebt met betrekking tot de vragenlijst, of wanneer je interesse hebt in de resultaten van dit onderzoek, kan je mailen naar: n.c.m.kuijsten@student.utwente.nl