

Sexual Assault in a 'Just World'

A Novel Exploration of Bystanders in Virtual Reality



Introduction

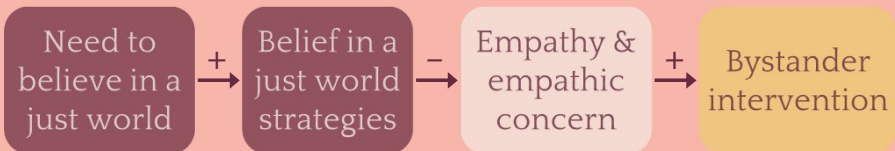
Limited research has explored how the **need to believe in a just world** (BJW), **empathic variables** and the **bystander decision-making process** are related when witnessing a sexual assault.

This is the first comprehensive investigation of this.

Research Questions

- Do strategies used to restore the BJW, namely victim derogation, victim blaming and psychologically distancing oneself from a victim, affect bystander intervention, and via Latané and Darley's (1970) bystander stages?
- Does empathy or empathic concern mediate this effect?

Hypothetical model used in analysis:



Method

Threat to the need to BJW was indirectly manipulated via changing the severity of the sexual assault participants witnessed (two conditions).

Study 1

- 294 participants
- Online experiment
- Text vignette



Study 2

- 117 participants
- In-person replication
- Filmed virtual reality



Initial Results

Analysis

Data for this research was analysed using Welch's t-test, correlation, hierarchical regression, mediation and serial mediation.

Patterns across both studies

- Manipulating the severity of the sexual assault** participants witnessed had a significant effect on both general¹ and behaviour-specific² intervention intentions.
- Accepting responsibility to intervene** (stage 3 of Latané and Darley's (1970) model) predicted both general³ and behaviour-specific⁴ measures of intervention intentions.
- Victim blaming⁵ and psychological distancing⁶** predicted lower empathic concern towards the victim.

Conclusion

Some evidence to support our research questions, but further analysis and research needed to account for differences between studies and to determine precise benefits of using filmed virtual reality in this context.

Differences between the studies

- In Study 1, lower psychological distancing⁷ and greater empathic concern⁸ were key predictors of Latané and Darley's (1970) bystander stages and intervention intentions, but were not in Study 2^{9,10}
- Greater victim blaming¹¹ only predicted reduced general intentions to intervene in Study 2.

All analysis used the p-value of $\leq .05$.
Cohen's *d* values: ¹.25 & .55, ².37 & .40
³.46 & .38, ⁴.31 & .32, ⁵-.22 & -.46, ⁶-.31 & -.31, ⁷-.19, -.25, -.17, -.23⁸.23, .29, .37, .23, .17, .29⁹.21, -.16, -.02, -.05¹⁰.16, .32, .03, .00, .13, .16¹¹-.42

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Latané, B., & Darley, J. M. (1970). *The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help?* Appleton Century Crofts.

CREATE



Watch the filmed virtual reality scene here:

