CORE STUDY #2: PILIAVIN 1969 (SUBWAY SAMARITANS)

Aim:

Investigate bystander behaviors in a naturalistic setting. They also wanted to investigate the effect of 4 factors on bystander helping:
1) The type of victim (e.g. drunk/sick)
2) The race of the victim (black/white)
3) The behavior of a model
4) The size of the group of bystanders

Hypothesis:

Piliavin argued that when the group of bystanders was larger, bystander helping would decrease due to a social phenomenon known as diffusion of responsibility. This is when an individual does not feel personally responsible or obligated to help a victim when a large group of people is present because there are so many others who could intervene instead of them. So, the larger the group, the less likely it is for the victim to receive help because everyone is thinking that someone else will intervene instead of them.

- Diffusion of responsibility - a person is less likely to take action in an emergency where there are others there also able to help. In a large group, the perceived sense of individual responsibility towards those in need is 'diffused' or reduced to the extent that people feel little obligation to intervene. An explanation for the bystander effect.

Background:
The study was inspired by the horrific murder of a woman called Kitty Genovese. She was killed in 1946 in front of a residential apartment building in the early hours of the morning. What made the incident so disturbing (apart from the murder) was the fact that 38 of the residents in the apartment building were either ear or eye (or both) witnesses to the incident, and did nothing to intervene (none called the police, none ran outside to help).

Piliavin was interested in investigating the bystander effect and bystander helping in a real-life setting after this event, mainly because they wanted to see why people refrain from helping, and if some people are just more likely to help than others.

Method:

Participants
- 4450 people (roughly) of all races and genders
- Passengers on the train from Harlem to the Bronx between the times of 11 am and 3 pm from the New York Subway
- Unsolicited opportunity sample
- 55% of the participants were white
- The mean number of people in the carriage was 43, and in the critical area (the area where the incident took place) it was 8.5
- Design
- Covert naturalistic observation with 2 female researchers observing the incidents
- Field experiment as the IV is still manipulated by the researcher
- 4 IVs:
  - The race of the victim (black/white)
  - The type of victim (drunk/ill)
  - The behavior of a model (the model was close/distant and helped early/late, no model)
  - The size of the group of bystanders (the naturally occurring number of participants in the train car)
- The DV was operationalized as:
  - In quantitative terms: the time taken for the first passenger to help, as well as the total number of passengers who helped.
  - In qualitative terms: verbal remarks made by the passengers during each incident
→ The race, gender, and location in the carriage of each person who helped were also recorded.

Procedure

- Bystander - a person who is present, but may not be directly involved in a particular situation. 'Bystander apathy' or the 'bystander effect' refers to the actions of bystanders who don't help others in the event of an emergency.

- 4 teams of student researchers on behalf of Piliavin were used in the study (2 male and 2 female)
- The two males and two females entered with each other from opposite sides of the train car
- The female students sat in the area adjacent to the critical area (CA) where the incident was taking place. They observed the passengers and recorded data for each trial
- The male confederates took the roles of the victim and the model
- Each trial was conducted on the same route from Harlem to the Bronx because it provided a 7.5-minute window for the experiment to take place.
- 70 seconds into the journey the victim would collapse and stay still on the floor until either someone helped them, or he would remain there until the next stop where the model would then help him up.
- The victim was played by different males during the study, but they all looked similar:
  - They were aged 26-35 years

- 3 were white and 1 was black
- They were dressed in identical clothes: jacket, old trousers, no tie, casual
- 38/103 trials: victim smelled of alcohol, carried a brown paper bag holding a bottle of alcohol, and appeared drunk
- Remaining 65/103 trials: victim appeared sober and carried a black cane
- The models were all white males aged 24-29 who were also dressed casually. When helping the victim, the model propped them up to a sitting position and stayed with them until the next stop
- Trials were split into the following conditions:
  - Critical early: model stood in the critical area and helped 70 seconds after the victim collapsed
  - Critical late: model stood in the critical area and helped 150 seconds after the victim collapsed
  - Adjacent early: model stood in the adjacent area and helped 70 seconds after the victim collapsed
  - Adjacent late: model stood in the adjacent area and helped 150 seconds after the victim collapsed
  - No model: the model did not help the victim at all and waited until the train had reached the next stop to help

Results:

Trial	White victim		Black victim	
	Cane	Drunk	Cane	Drunk
No model	100%	100%	100%	73%
Model	100%	77%	—*	67%

*No model trials for the black cane victim were conducted

- The majority of the helpers were male
- Over 80% of the victims received spontaneous help (i.e. before the model could help or when there was no model)
- In 60% of cases, more than one person helped

- Both black and white CANE victims were likely to receive the same amount of help, but there was evidence of same-race helping in the drunk condition
- Black drunk victims were found to receive less help overall
- Early model intervention (70 seconds) was found to trigger more helping behavior than late intervention (150 seconds)
- In 20% of the trials, passengers moved away from the critical area
- More comments were made when there was no help or when the victim was drunk

- The study found no evidence of the role of diffusion of responsibility.
- Large group: 7 people, small group: 3 people. The diffusion of responsibility theory would predict that the helping response in a group of 7 people would be slower than in a group of 3 people due to diffusion of responsibility. However, Piliavin found that in 7-person groups the time taken to help was much faster than in the 3-person group.

Piliavin proposed an alternative explanation for these findings: the cost-benefit model.

- Cost-benefit model - involves a decision-making process in which a person weighs up both the advantages and disadvantages of helping. If it seems beneficial to help, then the person is likely to do so; if the risks are too great, they may refrain.

Conclusion:
- In a natural setting, many people would offer spontaneous help to a stranger, even in a group situation
- The type of victim matters - someone using a cane will be helped more than a drunk person. This is because of the perception of responsibility, where the victim appears responsible for their situation. A drunk person would be less likely to be helped because bystanders feel that the victim brought the situation upon themselves.
- The gender of the helper - men are more likely to help than women
- People may be more likely to help members of their race, especially in the drunk condition - this is because the helper finds it easier to relate to the victim
- The longer an emergency continues, the less likely it is that anyone will help, and the more likely it is they will find another way of coping with arousal.

Evaluation:

A strength of this study is that it has high ecological validity. This is because it was done in a naturalistic setting on a New York train subway train from Harlem to the Bronx, which is a natural setting for incidents like the trials to occur in. Because of this, the participants would be more likely to display natural reactions, producing accurate data. This increases the validity of the study.

Another strength of this study is that it is highly reliable. This is because it was done as a covert, naturalistic observation in a natural setting on a train from Harlem to the Bronx, and so the participants were not aware of the experiment taking place and so could not change their behavior to seem more socially desirable. The study also made use of standardized procedures, having the victims all dress identically and having the model help after a fixed time in each trial. This increases the reliability and validity of this study.

A weakness of this study however is that it breaches the ethical guidelines of informed consent, withdrawal, and debriefing. This is because it was conducted in a naturalistic setting as a covert observation on a train where there was only a 7.5-minute window to complete the study. Because of this, the researchers could not ask for the informed consent of the participants, and since the participants were not aware they were taking part in an experiment, they were unable to withdraw from the study. Since the participants entered and exited the train car so quickly, it was also impossible to debrief them. This reduces the credibility and validity of the study.

Another weakness of this study is that it lacks generalisability. This is because it was conducted in a New York subway on a train from Harlem to the Bron between 11 am and 3 pm. This means that though the sample size was large, it only encompassed residents of New York City and people who used public transportation during working hours. The results can therefore not be generalized to the wider population of people who, for example, cannot afford or do not use public transportation, or people who are from different areas of the world. This reduces the validity of the study.

<u>Issues and debates:</u>

- **Application to daily life:** the findings of this study can be used to educate people about bystander intervention. To try and combat stereotypes, children can be educated on this matter and be taught to help those regardless of their appearance/diffusion of responsibility.

- **Individual and situational explanations:** The study supports the situational explanation of bystander helping because of the natural setting it was done and the social situation that was created to investigate helping. However, it could be argued that the individual explanation also plays a role in helping behavior as since the sample size was large and varied, it may have been a shared personality type across participants that made them help/not help.