Activity 2 - The Bystander Effect and Pluralistic Ignorance

Imagine walking into a room and sitting down to take a test in it. While filling out your test sheet, the room starts filling up with smoke. What would you do?

Imagine walking into the same room to take a test, but sharing this room with other test takers. When the room starts filling up with smoke, you look around and see no one else seems bothered. What would go through your mind, and what would you do?

In the smoke filled room paradigm, social psychologists Darely and Latane tested how people would react if the room they were sitting in were slowly filled with smoke.

Task 1

Check out this video to see how people react to the smoke filled room, and try to think how this behaviour could explain the bystanders’ behaviour in the case of Kitty Genovese: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KE5YwN4NW5o

1. Why do you think this situation coined the term “pluralistic ignorance”?
2. Have you experienced this behaviour before, in your class perhaps?
3. Do you think this is uncommon behaviour?
4. What about when instead of a smoke filled room, you find someone else in danger, like with Kitty Genovese? Watch this video and find out: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4S1LLrSzVE

In the different situations presented in the video, the researchers varied the needy person’s appearance. How did this affect the passers-by, and why?

Perhaps conformity to the group’s norms is not as powerful when the needy person is in serious, life threatening danger. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
Task 2

This video will make you think: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOYLCy5PVgM

1. Name three possible reasons for pluralistic ignorance and the bystander effect to occur.
2. What could individuals do to stop these situations from occurring?
3. What should social psychologists study next, in the domain of conformity, pluralistic ignorance, and the bystander effect?