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A PROPOSED CYBERBYSTANDER INTERVENTION MODEL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Introduction

On the Internet, no one may know you're a dog, but this also means no one knows you could play fetch or run for help. While we are more connected to known and unknown others more than ever, we can still feel quite alone and separated, especially when in need. An increasing reliance on computer-mediated communication to work and socialize has led to a rise in hostile and negative communication. The deindividuating nature of the Internet makes intervening in perceived cyberemergencies such as cyberharassment, cyberbullying, and cyberthreats difficult, but not impossible. Individuals uninvolved in incidents are considered cyberbystanders, and a new model is necessary to test the boundary conditions of cyberbystander intervention. The rapid changes in technology, the near constant increase in access, and the moving target of determining who is accessing what through what means and to what degree they are aware of its effects make determining action difficult and daunting. Specific communication models and theories offer commentary on how offline models of bystander intervention may operate online. A more comprehensive model of cyberbystander intervention is proposed.

The Bystander Intervention Model online

There are five key steps that must occur in order for a bystander to intervene: (1) notice something is happening, (2) interpret the event as an emergency, (3) take personal responsibility for providing assistance, (4) determine actions to take to assist, and (5) actually provide help. This model has been replicated in field and laboratory studies, using seemingly benign and clearly violent situations and remained stable no matter the environment, gender of participants or victims, rewards, priming. In the proposed model, peripheral cues build a case for the cyberbystander to determine the social impact of the harassing communication and the estimated social cost or risk of cyberintervention.

Obviously, one must first notice an event is happening before any consideration of intervention. But online, avoidance may be more natural than offline. A user's initial or

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intentional purpose for using the mediated communication can draw attention to space other than the emergency. The disinhibition experienced online can interrupt interpretation of events as emergencies to tend to. As bystanders tend to rely on the reactions of others witnessing to determine action (Latané & Darley, 1970), could difficulty in interpreting others' reactions affect cyberbystanders' own interpretation of events. If a cyberbystander considers taking action (step 3), the threat of diffusion of responsibility is powerful, leading to likely bystander effect (Fischer et al, 2011). Due to the asynchronicity of computer-mediated communication, it could be difficult for interlocutors to determine if cyberbystanders are choosing to not intervene or are just stuck in a decision loop. Steps four (decide how to help) and five (provide help) include direct and indirect interventions. Direct interventions include obvious and literal attempts to stop the emergency or assist in recovery whereas indirect interventions are behind the scenes or after the fact. In the mediated environment, these choices could contain less social risk than direct intervention in very straightforward, simple ways. The various affordances of the Internet may influence users to defer to indirect intervention strategies, but the affordances may also offer more opportunities for indirect intervention as well.

Social Impact Theory

Social Impact Theory (Latané, 1981) takes into account the various factors and forces involved determining the social impact of event(s). Each principle of the theory involves some function of the strength (S), immediacy (I), and number (N). The first principle, or the social forces equation of $I=f(SIN)$, assumes specific forces, strength, immediacy, and quantity, function together to vary impact on the target. Social proximity and social presence may also affect determinants of immediacy online. It encompasses the very essence of interpersonal communication: the feeling other individuals are jointly responsible for and involved in the communicative event or interaction (Walther, 1992). Latané's second principle, the psychosocial law, assumes the proximity of this first person is most important in influencing the resulting social impact. It is suspected the first person, or few people, to agree, like, favorite, or generally support a perpetrator's treatment of a victim online would be the most powerful damper on a cyberbystander's assumption of personal responsibility to intervene. Alternatively, the first cyberbystander to intervene (directly or indirectly) would be the most powerful social source for other cyberbystanders. The third principle, multiplication or division of impact, assumes the diffusion of responsibility whereas the social impact, measured by the strength, immediacy and number, will be divided or multiplied depending on the perspective. Each of these principles will affect the cyberbystander's progress through the five steps differently, dependent on various affordances of computer-mediated communication.

Affordances of Computer-Mediated Communication

Anonymity, disinhibition, viral nature, and asynchronicity are affordances of the Internet that may affect cyberbystander intervention (Suler, 2004). Anonymity breeds an environment friendly to disinhibition and deindividuation. The frequent disinhibition of individuals online facilitates "one's ability to keep his or her identity unknown is a unique method of asserting dominance online" (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004, p. 1313). It affords the same security to the cyberbystander as it does the aggressor and victim. The viral

nature, or the rapid social transmission of information via CMC, can impact the likelihood of cyberbystander intervention. By intervening, the cyberbystander becomes part of the narrative that can also go viral. Cues such as time stamps, network size, number of likes, or shares may impact a cyberbystander's inclination to intervene and intensify the presumed strength and number of sources online. The asynchronicity of CMC is especially problematic for cyberbystanders as it manipulates immediacy. Cyberbystanders walk a fine line of being an actual bystander to someone needing help and happening upon a more historical event.

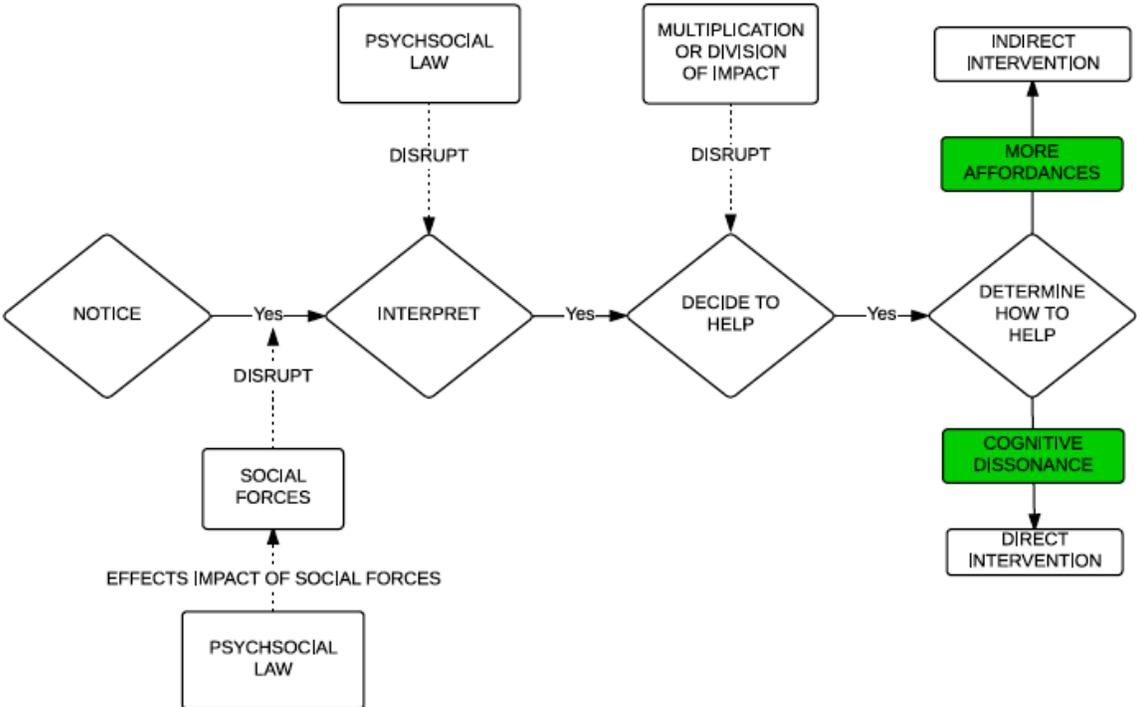
Proposed Cyberbystander Intervention Model

A new Cyberbystander Intervention Model is proposed, updating Latané and Darley's (1970) original Bystander Intervention Model with components from Latané's (1981) Social Impact Theory and Walther's Hyperpersonal Model (1992). As depicted in Figure 1, cyberbystanders' attention to cyber-emergencies will be attenuated by Latané's third principle, division of impact (indicated by $I=f(1/SIN)$). This same principle should disrupt a cyberbystander's interpretation of any emergency they do notice. Should a cyberbystander notice a cyber-event and recognize it as an emergency, Latané's first and second principle should moderate any movement of the cyberbystander towards personal responsibility to help. Once a cyberbystander takes personal responsibility to intervene, the perceived affordances of detour options in the medium will determine actual intervention. If there are no perceived detour options to intervene, the cyberbystander has only direct intervention choices. Various steps of this new model have been tested (Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Dillon, 2015). More energy and time would be necessary for direct intervention and characteristics of the cyberbystander (e.g., affiliation with victim), situation (e.g., nature of the original cyberemergency), and cybervictim (e.g., communication indicating specific assistance requested or needed) will determine direct intervention outcomes.

Conclusions

The Bystander Intervention Model appears at first glance to be a legitimate model to use to explain cyberbystanders' reactions to cyberbullying. There are important differences, however, between on- and offline environments, namely anonymity, disinhibition (and resulting deindividuation), viral nature, limitless boundaries, and asynchronicity. Incorporating the three main principles of Latané's Social Impact Theory at key points of the bystander intervention model can account for or at least test the effects of these differences on *cyberbystander* intervention. There are multiple platforms and media in which this specific point could be tested. Other experiments examining perceptions of these affordances, perception of the number of other cyberbystanders, and more investigation into moral disengagement strategies of non-intervention would continue to gauge the proposed model's stability.

Figure 1 Proposed Cyberbystander Intervention Model



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