

# Capitolo 10

## Case Study 1

### The broken windows theory

Our environments influence the extent to which we follow norms. For example, as mentioned in the text, a cluttered, littered environment conveys the norm that littering is acceptable and so more people will litter in that environment than in other, more pristine locations. In the presence of an unkempt, disordered environment, what other norms might we be tempted to break? Are people also more likely to steal in such environments?

In his 2000 book, *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell described the broken windows theory which proposes that more disordered and littered environments foster other types of disorder, including petty crime. This theory makes intuitive sense, but it had not received a lot of empirical attention or support. In 2008, three researchers from the Netherlands wanted to see if they could find support for the broken windows theory. Keizer, Lindenberg, and Steg [DOI: [10.1126/science.1161405](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1161405)] conducted six studies in which they examined the behavior of passersby in orderly vs. disorderly environments. In each study, the disorderly environments had been set up so that a norm had been violated (e.g., the presence of graffiti next to an anti-graffiti sign, a request not to chain bikes to a fence by bikes that had been chained to a fence, etc.). The researchers were particularly interested in whether, in the presence of violated norms, the pattern of norm-violation would spread and people would be more likely to violate other norms (e.g., norms against littering). The researchers found that passers-by were more likely to litter in the disorderly environments AND they were also more likely to steal. In the final two studies, the researchers rigged a letter so that it was sticking out of a mailbox and very clearly contained a £5 note. Participants in environments covered with litter and in which the mailbox was covered with graffiti were more likely to steal the money than participants in the orderly environment.

The results of these studies show that there is support for the broken windows theory. In addition, environmental norms *do* provide powerful cues about accepted ways to behave. And the perception that one norm has been violated may result in the spread of other norm violations and petty crime. Can you think of the implications for our neighborhoods and cities?

### References

- Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company.

- Keizer, K., Lindenberg, S., & Steg, L. (2008). [DOI: [10.1126/science.1161405](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1161405)]. The spreading of disorder. *Science*, 322, 1681–1685.

## Case Study 2

### Deindividuation and cheating in online games

Have you ever read the comments section under a news article and been amazed at how brazen and rude some people can be? Under the cloak of anonymity afforded by the internet it seems that anything goes. Recently, Chen and Wu (2013) [DOI: [10.1080/0144929X.2013.843721](https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2013.843721)] explored whether playing online games anonymously led people to cheat more. They also wondered whether, as suggested in the text, this state of deindividuation highlighted people's social identity as gamers and led players to conform more to group norms.

Everyone knows that it's not fair to cheat (an injunctive norm), but in the online gaming environment, what do people really do (i.e., what is the descriptive norm regarding cheating)? Previous research on online gaming has shown that many people will cheat online and that it seems to be a fairly normative behavior in this domain. In this study, Chen and Wu (2013) surveyed individuals from Singapore who played online games. These players were, on average, 18 years of age, and they were asked to indicate how often they played online games with strangers (i.e., anonymously), how often they posted on gaming websites (and other indications that playing online games was part of their social identity), and how often they cheated.

The results showed that, as predicted, anonymity/deindividuation led to greater rates of cheating. Specifically, those individuals who were more highly socially identified as game players were more likely to cheat under conditions of anonymity. Both males and females were surveyed in this study. Who do you think cheated more? It turns out that males, on average, were more likely to cheat than their female counterparts, although females who were more socially identified were also more likely to cheat than were less identified female gamers.

These results provide support for the idea that deindividuation, even in virtual environments, leads people to perpetuate the norms of valued social identities.

### Reference

- Chen, V. H. H., & Wu, Y. (2013). Group identification as a mediator of the effect of players' anonymity on cheating in online games. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, [DOI: [10.1080/0144929X.2013.843721](https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2013.843721)]

## Case Study 3

### The low-ball technique

In a series of studies by Cialdini, Cacioppo, Basset, and Miller (1978) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.36.5.463], it was demonstrated that greater compliance was obtained when participants who made an initial decision to perform a behavior were asked to perform a more costly behavior than when participants were informed about the full costs from the beginning. This demonstrates the low-ball technique. Additionally, it was shown that the technique was only effective when the preliminary decision was made with a high degree of choice. Cialdini et al. argued that the concept of commitment could best account for these results.

However, Burger and Petty (1981) [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.40.3.492] came to a different conclusion on the mediating process involved in the low-ball technique. In their first experiment, they demonstrated that the low-ball technique only resulted in greater compliance when the second request came from the same person as the first, but not when the second request came from a different person. In their second study, the low-ball technique was effective whether the second request was related or unrelated to the first request. These results suggest that an unfulfilled obligation to the requester, rather than commitment to the target behavior, is responsible for the effectiveness of the low-ball technique.

## References

- Burger, J. M., & Petty, R. E. (1981). [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.40.3.492]. The low-ball compliance technique: Task or person commitment? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40,492–500.
- Cialdini, R. B., Cacioppo, J. T., Basset, R., & Miller, J. A. (1978). [DOI:10.1037/0022-3514.36.5.463]. Low-ball procedure for producing compliance: Commitment then cost. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36,463–476.

## Case Study 4

### Abu Ghraib

The Abu Ghraib prison is a notorious prison in Iraq, located in Abu Ghraib, near Baghdad. It was the place where Saddam Hussein's government tortured and executed dissidents. In April 2004, the prison became notorious when the Coalition Provisional Authority took over control and a report came out on the United States military's torture of Iraqi dissidents.

According to Fiske, Harris, and Cuddy (2004) [DOI:10.1126/science.1103788], the situation of the military guarding Abu Ghraib prisoners fits all the conditions that are known to cause aggression: Their morale suffered, they were untrained for the job, their command climate was lax, their return home was a year overdue, their identity as disciplined soldiers was gone, and their own amenities were scant. Heat and discomfort also doubtless contributed.

(Fiske et al., 2004, p. 1482)

Additionally, the prisoners were seen as out-group members who are part of the enemy, so prejudice and discrimination are easily present (see Chapter 6).

Next to these conditions that elicit discrimination and aggression, norms of conformity and obedience to authority play an important role in the abuse. As Fiske et al. put it: “in combat, conformity to one’s unit means survival, and ostracism is death.” A guard may start with a small action, other guards may follow in conformity to the first, and to fulfill their role. And those actions become worse. As can be learned from the Milgram studies, ordinary people can do horrible things under the influence of complex social forces and authority.

### **Reference**

- Fiske, S. T., Harris, L. T., & Cuddy, A. J. C. (2004). [DOI:10.1126/science.1103788]. Why ordinary people torture enemy prisoners. *Science*, 26, 1482–1483.

### **Case Study 5**

#### **Tortured victims appear more guilty**

Torture is a method used to forcibly “encourage” someone to tell the truth. As noted in the text, those who inflict pain on others often experience dissonance, and one way to resolve that dissonance is to blame the victim and see them as somehow deserving of negative treatment.

In a study by Gray and Wegner (2010) [DOI:10.1016/j.jesp.2009.10.003], participants were asked to listen as a confederate underwent a painful experience (that was likened to “torture”) to elicit a confession. Specifically, the participants were told that the confederate may have lied and acted in a self-serving way. In addition, one way to determine whether the confederate just engaged in a dishonest act would be to have her endure a cold pressor task, in which she places her hand in ice-cold water for 80 seconds. The proximity of the participants was manipulated such that half of the participants either listened from the next room, whereas the other half listened to a previously recorded tape of the confederate enduring the cold pressor task. In addition, the amount of pain experienced by the confederate was manipulated such that half of the participants heard her whimper throughout the experiment whereas the others heard no reaction by the participant during the 80-second task. After the task was completed, the participants rated how guilty the confederate seemed. They were also debriefed before leaving the experiment.

The results of this study showed that the participants who were close by and heard the confederate whimper in pain, later perceived her to be more guilty than the participants who heard a recording of the confederate in the same condition. These results support what Milgram (1974) noticed in his

obedience research—that participants who went all the way to the end of the shock generator were more likely to derogate and blame the learners for their predicament.

These findings suggest that being close to victims of torture (even if we are not the direct cause of their suffering) still creates an uncomfortable feeling inside of us that we are motivated to dampen, and one way to do this is to blame the victim.

### **ReferenceS**

- Gray, K., & Wegner, D. M. (2010). [DOI:10.1016/j.jesp.2009.10.003]. Torture and judgments of guilt. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46, 233–235.
- Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority*. New York: Harper & Row.