The Smoky Room Experiment: Lesson Plan

### Topic
The Smoky Room Experiment was an investigation into a phenomenon known as “diffusion of responsibility.” In the words of the study’s authors, “if an individual is alone when [they] notice an emergency, [they are] solely responsible for coping with it. If [they] believe others are also present, [they] may feel that [their] own responsibility for taking action is lessened, making [them] less likely to help.”

### Possible subjects/classes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible subjects/classes</th>
<th>Time needed</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Psychology</td>
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<td>• Sociology</td>
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<td>• Ethics/Philosophy</td>
<td>30-45 mins</td>
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### Video link:
https://academy4sc.org/topic/the-smoky-room-experiment-trust-your-instincts/

### Objective: What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?

Students will be able to...
- Briefly summarize the Smoky Room Experiment and its main conclusions.
- Explain the differences between the three experimental conditions in the experiment and how they affect the results.

### Key Concepts & Vocabulary
Diffusion of responsibility, bystander effect

### Materials Needed
Worksheet, Student Internet Access

### Before you watch

**Turn & Talk:** The Smoky Room Experiment was an investigation into a psychological phenomenon known as “diffusion of responsibility.” Without doing any prior research, what do you think “diffusion of responsibility” is?
### While you watch

1. Who conducted the Smoky Room Experiment?
2. What were the three experimental conditions in the Smoky Room Experiment?
3. In which experimental condition were subjects most likely to report the smoke to an authority? In which condition were they least likely to report the smoke?

### After you watch/discussion questions

1. How would you react in the smoky room from the experiment? Would your reaction change whether you were alone or with other people?
2. Have you ever witnessed a group of people wait to react to an emergency situation until someone else does?
3. Do you think the bystander effect/diffusion of responsibility observed in the Smoky Room Experiment has changed at all since the study was first conducted in 1968?

### Activity Ideas

- Though it has since been proven otherwise, the Kitty Genovese murder case was the preeminent example of diffusion of responsibility in a real-life emergency. Independently research the case and then write a response describing how the results of the Smoky Room Experiment explain the events of the Kitty Genovese case. The response should be 1-2 pages long.
- In pairs or small groups, design a new experiment that could replicate the results of the Smoky Room Experiment. What are your independent and dependent variables? How would you operationalize the “diffusion of responsibility” concept? Consider any potential ethical concerns from the original experiment and how you could avoid or address them.
- Independently complete the Worksheet. Then share and explain your answers in small groups.

### Sources/places to learn more