

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was born in Copenhagen, Denmark but I have been living in New York City for the last four years. I have been interested for a long time in the idea that so many people can live side by side and somehow stay strangers. With that idea in mind, I found the New York Times article '37 Who Saw Murder, Didn't Call the Police' (March 27th 1964). Kitty Genovese was stabbed 17 times and sexually assaulted right outside her apartment building for 37 of her neighbors to witness. It is so easy to judge, but how far would I really go out of my comfort zone to help a stranger if I knew that other people had seen or heard it too? I see myself as a very conscientious person; I treat the people in my life with respect and care. But that is it: in my life, who am I to judge the 37 neighbors, if I cannot know for sure that I would have done any differently?

The article had a great impact on social psychology. The Bystander Effect, also known as *The Genovese Syndrome*, is when a person sees that others have witnessed the same thing, or think that others have witnessed it, and therefore don't feel obligated to get involved. None of the neighbors who witnessed the murder of Kitty Genovese could explain why they had not interfered. A pattern of people's behavior has been discovered through research in social psychology, but why people would rather shut their eyes than take action is still a mystery. The easy way out would be to say that people are evil: it is in our nature; therefore we can't help it. But could it also be that we fear the unknown? The embarrassment of helping someone who doesn't want or need help, the fear of taking responsibility? Maybe we only want to help one from our own group, which would mean that every single one of us is xenophobic.

New York City serves as the backdrop for this story about the fear of losing someone, the unknown, and the duplicity of protecting yourself or helping a person in need.