

# Immunity in Community: Clergy Experience of Bystander Decision Making in Clergy Workplace Harassment

Bradley Morrison

To cite this article: Bradley Morrison (2017) Immunity in Community: Clergy Experience of Bystander Decision Making in Clergy Workplace Harassment, Practical Theology, 10:4, 367-382, DOI: [10.1080/1756073X.2017.1336394](https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1336394)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2017.1336394>



Published online: 07 Jun 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 369



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Immunity in Community: Clergy Experience of Bystander Decision Making in Clergy Workplace Harassment

BRADLEY MORRISON 

*Faculty of Theology, Huron University College, London, ON, Canada*

This study used directed content analysis to extend Darley and Latané's bystander decision making theory to the analysis of clergy workplace harassment. Bystander decision making theory, which was developed from analysis of bystander subjective experience in emergency incidents, was applied here to the target's subjective experience in non-emergency incidents. Interviews with United Church of Canada ministry personnel ( $N=10$ ) were coded using bystander decision steps as pre-determined categories. Findings were analysed to construct a model of clergy workplace harassment and a bystander task list. Additional findings were discussed with reference to normative abandonment and theological reflection on the ecclesial and missiological consequences of bystander immunity from communal responsibility.

**KEYWORDS** bystander decision making, clergy workplace harassment, normative abandonment, the United Church of Canada

## Introduction

The research study was developed in response to a common theme identified in clergy accounts of workplace harassment. The researcher's informal observation from personal correspondence and an online discussion group for ministry personnel is that clergy stories of workplace harassment often describe bystander involvement in the incident. Specifically, clergy described the action and inaction of bystander parishioners; moreover, clergy described personal pain and disappointment resulting from bystander inaction in addition to the consequences of perpetrator harassment.

This qualitative research study uses directed content analyses (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) to apply a model of bystander decision making (Darley and Latané, 1970) to the textual analysis of clergy interviews describing bystander behaviour in workplace harassment. Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) is a qualitative research method used to validate or extend existing theory. The bystander decision making model, which was developed from analysis of bystander subjective experience in emergency incidents, is used in this study as a constructive framework for interpreting the subjective experience of clergy-targets describing bystander behaviour in non-emergency incidents. The use of bystander effect theory in research on non-emergency situations is discussed below under research limitations.

The discussion of interview findings argues that Latané and Darley's (1970) research on bystander effect, which continues to guide research, resources, and meta-analysis (Bell, 2015; Fischer *et al.*, 2011; Uale, 2010), is a constructive interpretive framework for understanding the clergy experience of bystander behaviour and patterns of congregational responses to problem behaviour. Specifically, Latané and Darley's bystander decision making process helps to frame the clergy-target's experience of bystander responses to clergy workplace harassment using the categories of bystander decision making: noticing an incident, interpreting harassment, feeling a personal responsibility to act, considering forms of assistance, and deciding specific action in response to clergy workplace harassment.

In addition to observations about bystander behaviour, participants described an affective response to bystander action and inaction. The discussion section relates the concept of normative abandonment (Walker, 2006a, 2006b) to participants' expression of emotional pain in response to bystander inaction.

## Review of literature

The study of clergy workplace harassment can focus on three participants: perpetrator, target, or bystander. The literature on clergy workplace harassment tends towards the study of perpetrators and targets rather than bystanders (Boers, 1999; Conn, 2013; Crockett, 2012; Greenfield, 2009; Haugk, 1988; Maynard, 2010; Moreland and Grassi, 2012; Rediger, 1997; Shelley, 2013; Stevenson-Moessner and Dell, 2013). Where the literature does raise the issue of bystander behaviour in congregations, the discussion does not draw on Latané and Darley's or subsequent bystander effect research. Two studies relating the bystander idea to church issues (social injustice and violence, declining youth participation) are not related to clergy workplace harassment (Martin, 2008; Vasko, 2015).

A review of case studies and clergy self-reports in popular books and a recent documentary on clergy workplace harassment (Boers, 1999; Conn, 2013; Crockett, 2012; Greenfield, 2009; Haugk, 1988; Maynard, 2010; Moreland and Grassi, 2012; Rediger, 1997; Shelley, 2013; Stevenson-Moessner and Dell, 2013) suggests a similar pattern; that is, bystander behaviour is narrated and described as adding to clergy distress. However, these same books and documentary make no references to bystander effect theory. Specifically, the popular literature on clergy workplace

harassment does not reference research on bystander effect and decision making (Darley and Latané, 1968, 1970; Fischer *et al.*, 2011; Latané and Darley, 1968).

A broader search of the literature related to clergy workplace stress and forced termination (Barfoot *et al.*, 2005; Fearon and Mikoski, 2013; Foss, 2002; Gale, 2014; Grosch and Olsen, 2000; Hoge and Wenger, 2005; London and Wiseman, 2003; Powell, 2003, 2008; Randall, 2013) found no references to bystander theory.

The review of the literature concludes that studies of clergy and congregations lack reference to bystander theory when analysing clergy workplace harassment. This qualitative research study will draw on Latané and Darley's work, described here briefly.

Bystander effect research explains why people fail to intervene to offer help in an emergency. Researchers Latané and Darley (1968) found an inverse relationship between the number of bystanders and the likelihood or the speed of intervention. The more bystanders, the less likely or the more slowly someone would offer help in an emergency. The individual bystander assumes that another bystander is better situated or more competent to intervene. Darley and Latané (1968) called this observation the diffusion of responsibility.

When an individual bystander sees that other bystanders are not intervening in an apparent emergency, they remain uncertain that an emergency requires intervention. Latané and Darley (1968) called this group inhibition. Whatever the reason for inaction, bystanders remain in a state of indecision and emotional conflict over whether or not to intervene (Darley and Latané, 1968: 382).

Darley and Latané found that bystander intervention depends on a series of decisions which the bystander must make before acting. The intervention process described by Darley and Latané has five steps (1970: 32): (1) *notice* an incident; (2) *interpret* the incident as an emergency; (3) feel a personal *responsibility to act*; (4) consider the *form of assistance* to offer; and (5) decide how to *implement* action. Failing one of these steps, bystanders fail to progress beyond indecision and inaction.

The bystander decision making process, modified to include non-emergency incidents of clergy workplace harassment, provides a structure for understanding a parishioner's need for coaching and support when responding to clergy workplace harassment. The modified decision making model also provides a structure for organizing more specific explanations and resources for bystander behaviour.

This study uses the term 'clergy workplace harassment' to describe what others call bullying and the so-called clergy killer phenomenon. Rospenda and Richman (2004) define workplace harassment as:

... any negative workplace interpersonal interaction that affects the terms, conditions, or employment decisions related to an individual's job, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment, but is *not* based on any legally protected characteristic. (221–222)

The term workplace harassment, which is widely accepted in the social scientific literature (Rospenda *et al.*, 2006), is not used in the church literature's discussion of clergy and congregations as workplaces.

## Methodology

Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) is a qualitative research method used to validate or extend existing theory. An existing theory, which for this study is bystander decision making process (Darley and Latané, 1970), operationalizes the structure of textual analysis (Hashemnezhad, 2015; Kyngas and Vanhanen, 1999). The key concepts of an existing theory — which for this study are: (1) notice an incident; (2) interpret the incident as an emergency; (3) feel a personal responsibility to act; (4) consider the form of assistance to offer; and (5) decide how to implement action — are applied to the textual data as pre-determined coding categories (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). For this study, the second decision step was modified to ‘interpret the incident as harassment’ according to the interviewee’s perception, which may include problematic behaviours that do not conform to any formal or legal definitions of workplace harassment and may include non-emergency incidents. Data not fitting the coding categories were analysed subsequently as findings that extend or challenge the existing theory.

## Subjects

This study’s research questions focused on clergy experience of workplace harassment with targeted questions about bystander behaviour. This small, qualitative study interviewed ten participants who responded to an invitation posted in an online discussion group for ministry personnel in The United Church of Canada. Participants were age twenty-nine to sixty-one with an average age of forty-seven. Seven (7) female and three (3) male participants ranged in paid accountable ministry experience from 4 to 36 years with an average of 14.4 years. Eight (8) participants were ordained (OM), one (1) diaconal (DM), and one (1) a student minister.

## Procedure

Interviews were one hour long and conducted by telephone. The researcher transcribed interviewee responses in real time using a word processing programme. After collecting demographic information, the following questions related to workplace harassment and bystander behaviour were asked:

- What is your experience of clergy workplace harassment?
- How did others (lay leaders, parishioners, colleagues) intervene or not?
- In your opinion, what motivated the harassment?
- In your opinion, what motivated the intervention (or lack thereof) by others?
- How did this impact you emotionally?
- What else did you notice or understand about the incident(s)?

Participants received the question list prior to the interview, and the accompanying letter of information emphasized the study’s focus on workplace harassment rather than bystander dynamics.

Coding for bystander decision making included differentiation of successful and failed negotiation of each decision step. The interviewee’s perception of successful and failed negotiation was accepted at face value. Data were coded for ‘notice an incident’ if the bystander observed the incident and if the bystander failed to

notice an incident in plain view. Data were coded for ‘interpret the incident as harassment’ if the bystander recognized or failed to recognize an incident to as problem behaviour. Data were coded for ‘feel a personal responsibility to act’ if the bystander expressed a feeling or sense of obligation to act in response to the incident, if the bystander failed to respond despite holding a governance or judicatory role with a responsibility to respond, and if the bystander expressed a greater felt responsibility to act on behalf of the congregation’s well-being (avoiding conflict, preserving revenue and membership) or out of loyalty to the perpetrator (spouse, family, friend, community member). Data were coded for ‘consider the form of assistance to offer’ if the bystander consulted or deliberated resources and options and if the bystander overlooked a resource or dismissed the necessity or efficacy to consider responses to the incident. Data were coded for ‘decide how to implement action’ when the bystander did and did not take specific action as described by the interviewee.

Differentiating success and failure for ‘decide how to implement action’ was challenged by multiple understandings of what action constituted intervention. Analysis found a continuum of bystander interventions from confronting the perpetrator and naming inappropriate behaviour, to providing emotional and strategic support to the target without confronting the perpetrator, to informing or complaining to the target or a governance body of problem behaviour (in effect referring the incident for someone else to intervene), to enabling the perpetrator by remaining passive and taking no action in response to an incident, to becoming a confederate to the perpetrator.

### ***Research limitations***

A series of objections arise when applying bystander effect theory to the clergy workplace harassment problem. First, can bystander effect theory be extended to workplace harassment? Lövgren (2007) used Latané and Darley’s bystander model to analyse workplace harassment in general.

Second, can a theory developed to explain bystander decision making in emergency situations be extended to non-emergency situations? Clergy workplace harassment is not usually an emergency situation. Uale (2010) applied bystander decision making to teacher responses to school bullying, distinguishing emergency from imminent danger, for example, in gossiping, peer harassment, homophobic and racial slurs, mean gestures, social exclusion, taunting, and teasing. Bystander decision making process offers explanatory power in non-emergency situations (no imminent danger) where the situation’s ambiguity, nonetheless, leaves bystanders in a state of indecision.

Third, can bystander theory apply to situations where no one witnessed the harassment? Diffusion of responsibility and group inhibition explanations do not seem to apply here. Hoefnagels and Zwikker (2001) applied Latané and Darley’s decision model to child abuse where bystanders noticed and/or interpreted the situation after the fact or heard vague or clear disclosures by the child. Parishioners who are not direct witnesses to clergy workplace harassment must still negotiate a decision making process when they hear reports of problem behaviour. With harassment,

parishioners become bystanders after the fact when approached by the minister with a report of the incident. Or parishioners hear about the harassment through the grape vine or even from the mouths of boasting perpetrators. One can be a bystander after the fact, triggering a decision process for intervention.

Fourth, the bystander decision making model was derived from bystander subjective experience; however, this study uses interviews with clergy-targets. Can a study of clergy experience of workplace harassment use target experience as evidence of a bystander's subjective experience? No, and this study does not attempt this. Rather, this study takes the bystander decision making model as established theory and applies it to clergy self-reports to analyse the target's description of bystander responses to harassment. Nonetheless, this study's findings are limited by the targets' perceptions impacted by distress and extended times of interaction and negotiation.

## Findings

In the first cycle of data analysis, the pre-determined codes from bystander decision making (Darley and Latané, 1970) were applied to the interview transcripts. In addition to the pre-determined bystander decision codes, the first cycle of coding identified expected categories: *perpetrator*, *incident of harassment*, *target*, *bystander*, *confederate*, and *target reaction* (action, affective). Analysis of the incident category found sub-categories of *emergency* (imminent danger) and *non-emergency* incidents, and all but one incident fit the sub-category of non-emergency. Analysis of the incident category also found sub-categories of *private* and *public* incidents, representing a visual-spatial dimension running through other categories. Analysis of the incident category found sub-categories of *pre-incident*, *during incident*, and *post-incident*, representing a temporal dimension running through other categories.

Analysis of the target reaction category found a sub-category of *target reaction to bystander inaction*, which further analysis related to the concept of normative abandonment (Walker, 2006b). In response to the question, 'How did this impact you emotionally?', seven of ten participants described their incident-related distress with reference to bystanders (individually or organizationally) who failed to intervene or offer support. These participants described physical illness, loss of sleep, disillusionment, isolation, depression, fury, sadness, depression, worthlessness, and vocational confusion. In all cases, the behaviour of bystanders was integral to the story of harassment and essential for understanding the full extent of harm experienced by the minister. Bystander behaviour was meaningful to participants insofar as the intervention or lack of intervention reduced or increased their suffering.

In the second cycle, the analysis of the connections between categories led to the construction of a model representing these relationships (Figure 1). Perpetrators create incidents of harassment, which together create a target. Incidents create bystanders, and perpetrators may create confederates who work with the perpetrator to amplify or conceal the harassment. Bystanders may negotiate successfully the decision steps leading to an intervention and becoming an ally; otherwise, bystander response may fall along a continuum from supporting the target (emotional ventilation, consultation), to informing the target or others about perpetrator behaviour,

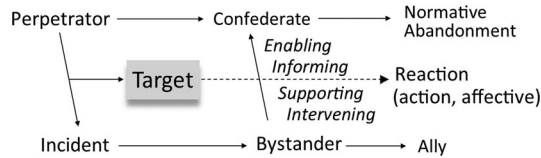


FIGURE 1 Bystander to clergy workplace harassment.

to enabling the harassment through passivity (individually and governance inaction), to becoming a post-incident confederate to the perpetrator or the governance system amplifying the harassment by contributing to normative abandonment.

Participants described a range of behavioural and affective reactions to the perpetrator and harassment. However, this study's focus on bystander behaviour analysed the target's assignment of cause or blame to the bystander for psychological and emotional distress experienced by the target. The study found seven of ten participants ascribed some level of blame to passive or ineffective bystanders. This finding supports the claims of normative abandonment theory (Walker, 2006b), which is discussed below. Targets receiving bystander intervention or support expressed gratitude and other positive expressions of appreciation; however, there was difficulty representing these positive reactions in the model without implying satisfaction with the negative impact of the perpetrator and harassment. The category of *ally* represents the target's positive perception of bystanders who offer support and intervention. The normative abandonment category represents the target's negative perception of bystanders and confederates who offer no support.

The model with its categories and relationships was placed in matrices with the pre-determined bystander decision making codes and sub-categories, which generated a table of all possible codes when applying this model to textual data related to bystander decision making in clergy workplace harassment. The resulting matrices, while offering a potential heuristic tool for tracking elements of a target report of clergy workplace harassment, contained 1500 permutations and would be impractical for congregational use.

In the third cycle of analysis, a simplified matrix was created for practical use with bystanders. First, the textual data were analysed to identify tasks to be negotiated by a bystander for successful intervention with an incident of clergy workplace harassment. Then a table was developed (Table 1) by constructing ally behaviour from correctives to perceived negative bystander behaviour (see discussion below of bystander noticing, bystander interpreting, bystander responsibility, bystander consideration, and bystander action). The table organizes bystander decision tasks using the temporal categories of pre-incident, during incident, and post-incident.

## Discussion

### *Bystander noticing*

The first bystander decision step is noticing an incident. Many of the clergy interviewees reported that a parishioner noticed the problem behaviour. In other cases,



TABLE 1

BYSTANDER DECISION STEP TASKS FOR ALLIES OF CLERGY-TARGETS OF CLERGY WORKPLACE  
HARASSMENT

---

<p>Bystander decision steps for allies of clergy targets of workplace harassment</p> <hr/> <p>(1) Notice the incident. Pre-incident: Beware of parishioners or congregations with history of problem behaviour; design reporting structures and processes for proactive, regular check-in with clergy. During incident: Observe clergy reactions to parishioners, noting discomfort, distress, fight, flight, or freezing. Post-incident: Help others to notice by reporting incident to relevant governing or judicatory officials.</p> <p>(2) Interpret the incident as harassment. Pre-incident: Create and review policies related to clergy workplace harassment; define workplace harassment and list unacceptable behaviours typical to congregational context. During incident: Ask target to describe interpretation of incident and listen for content meeting criteria for harassment. Post-incident: Understand the target's perception of why the incident is harassment.</p> <p>(3) Feel a personal responsibility to act. Pre-incident: Become aware of governance duties and identify spousal, familial, friendship relationships that create dual relationship or split loyalty; identify congregational anxieties (financial, membership health) that may influence response to clergy-parishioner conflict. During incident: Become aware of your emotional response and sense of responsibility to act. Post-incident: Access your personal empathy and compassion; consult with judicatory officers regarding your governance role and responsibility to act.</p> <p>(4) Consider the form of assistance to offer. Pre-incident: Educate congregation about resources for intervention with problem behaviour. During incident: Create space to consult privately with target; obtain permission to intervene in non-emergency situations. Post-incident: Consult with judicatory resource people regarding resources and best practices; support the target's needs for emotional ventilation and response planning; connect target with resources.</p> <p>(5) Decide how to implement action. Pre-incident: Practise various interventions individually and as a governing body; create policies related to clergy workplace harassment. During incident: Respond in ways that de-escalate situation, create safety, and interrupt the target's exposure to the harassing behaviour. Post-incident: Coordinate with others to name to the perpetrator(s) what is problem behaviour and describe expected standards of conduct.</p> <hr/>
---

parishioners were aware of the problem behaviour only because the minister reported it. Apart from weekly worship and monthly committee meetings, clergy work is often alone with individuals and out of public view. This congregational reality facilitates clergy workplace harassment going unnoticed. In response to incidents of harassment, clergy usually need to notify others, meaning the harassment is noticed after the fact and second hand through clergy disclosure.

### ***Bystander interpreting***

The second bystander decision step is interpreting the incident as harassment. The interpretive task can apply to emergency and non-emergency situations (that is, no imminent danger of physical harm or threat to life). A meta-analysis of bystander research by Fischer, *et al.* (2011: 533) found that bystanders more clearly perceive dangerous emergencies as emergencies. Non-emergency situations can be difficult to interpret. Interpretive ambiguity (Latané and Darley, 1968: 33) can complicate this decision step. Bystanders to clergy workplace harassment have a unique

interpretive ambiguity: bystanders consider clergy to be equipped adequately and sufficiently to tolerate or to defend against parishioner hostility.

Clergy interviews suggested that parishioners often interpret harassment as problematic insofar as it threatens the well-being of the congregation. The congregation's health and functioning, rather than the minister's well-being, often provided the bystander's interpretive frame for measuring the need to respond to inappropriate behaviour.

### ***Bystander responsibility***

The third bystander decision step is feeling a personal responsibility to act. Even when a perpetrator's actions are publicly noticed and clearly interpreted as inappropriate, there is no guarantee the harassment will provoke a sense of responsibility in a bystander parishioner. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) differentiates in-group and out-group belonging. A bystander shares sub-group identities with a perpetrator (both are parishioners) but not with the clergy-target, who shares superordinate group identities (within the congregation or denomination) with the bystander. The interests of sub-group identities may conflict with superordinate group obligations (Barentsen, 2011). The bystander may act out of sub-group loyalty instead of the less salient superordinate identity shared with the clergy-target. For example, a bystander may share both a congregational and workplace group identity with an influential business leader who harasses their shared clergy. Shared bystander-target social identities can inhibit the sense of responsibility to intervene in clergy workplace harassment.

Attribution theory (which makes a distinction between personal and situational causes of behaviour) may explain why bystanders are more likely to intervene and help people they judge to be innocent victims and less likely to help people they judge to have invited the problem behaviour. From this perspective, a bystander parishioner may not feel a personal responsibility to intervene in clergy workplace harassment because he or she attributes cause or blame to the clergy for the harassment.

Many of the clergy interviewed reported conversations with sympathetic parishioners. While not acting to intervene, the bystander expression of sympathy affirmed the target's sense that someone should be responsible to act, for example, lay leaders in positions of authority or the clergy themselves. When parishioners project their felt responsibility to act onto the church's governance structure, the resulting intervention tends to address the well-being of the congregation first. The officials and elders who are tasked with responsibility to respond tend to process that responsibility in terms of their fiduciary responsibility to the organization.

### ***Bystander consideration***

The fourth bystander decision step is considering the form of assistance to offer. Parishioners often overestimate a minister's capacity for self-defence and underestimate their own capacity for constructive intervention. Even when bystanders are motivated to help, they may not believe they possess the skills to intervene. If a parishioner cannot imagine the form of assistance needed, then a parishioner is not likely to attempt an intervention. Will a sympathetic parishioner know how to intervene in an appropriate way? What is the likelihood of a constructive outcome that does

not end in a congregational battle, split, or end of the pastoral relationship? Congregational resources for clergy workplace harassment need to focus especially on building capacity for this step of bystander making.

Participant interviews found that the form of assistance usually involved reporting and/or referring the matter to the congregation's governance structure. Again, this processing of workplace harassment through governance bodies influenced the form of assistance to serve the well-being of the organization rather than the target of harassment.

### ***Bystander action***

The fifth bystander decision step is deciding how to implement action. Even when the harassing behaviour is noticed and clearly understood by a bystander parishioner to be inappropriate, and even when these parishioners feel a responsibility to offer help and have the skills to intervene, nothing will happen apart from the bystander's decision to act. Bystanders need to decide that it is in their interest to act, despite any potential costs.

From the clergy's perspective, it is frustrating and demoralizing when parishioners do not notice harassment, interpret it as a problem, or feel no responsibility to intervene. And when parishioners do notice and feel responsible to help but do not know how or decide not to intervene, ministers are left feeling isolated and uncertain about the viability and even legitimacy of their vocation.

Most of the clergy interviewed had to request action from others in the congregation. Even then, most clergy paused before requesting this intervention, and some clergy made no requests for help. These requests for help did not always result in positive outcomes. Only one situation involved a parishioner initiating an intervention. Incidentally, this parishioner was described as a professional who worked as an advocate.

Many of the clergy interviewed described bystander action coming eventually from congregational opinion leaders — respected elders. These are the people who usually speak last at decision making meetings and everyone awaits their opinion before finalizing a decision. These congregational and community leaders tend to often frame their intervention in terms of the congregation's or community's well-being. Sometimes this influential leader is aligned with the perpetrator of harassment, which can impact the minister negatively.

### ***Confederates***

**Figure 1** models pathways to becoming a confederate to perpetrators. Clergy workplace harassment reports often describe the recruitment of others by the perpetrator into their cause. In addition to recruiting other parishioners as confederates to engage in harassing behaviour, another subtler form of recruitment occurs. Perpetrators will recruit fellow parishioners into the role of passive bystander. That is, perpetrators narrate their clergy conflict in a way that invites the listener to assume a passive role. Perpetrators recruit and coach model bystanders; that is, perpetrators influence bystanders to model non-intervention to other onlookers.

These model bystanders influence not only individuals but also the congregation at large. The congregation, understood as a complex but singular organism, can assume the role of bystander — the silent majority. A passive bystander congregation leads to the isolation of the minister. When the organization or community signals passive bystander behaviours, the minister readily interprets this as abandonment and betrayal, compounding the experience of pain.

### ***Normative abandonment***

Figure 1 models target's perception of normative abandonment. Gale's (2014) study of ecclesial hostility introduces a helpful discussion of normative abandonment and moral repair into the analysis of bystander behaviour. Drawing on Margaret Walker's study of restorative justice, Gale identifies the moral injury suffered by targets of abuse when bystanders leave abuse unacknowledged. Normative abandonment is behaviour that contravenes normative expectations, including the expectation that bystanders will intervene when others break societal expectations. Normative confirmation and enforcement is a core social expectation we have of each other, including the bystander (Walker, 2006b). Walker argues that normative abandonment is the antithesis of restoration, negating the significance of the wrong and the victim.

An extended quote from Walker (2006b) offers valuable insight into what is at stake when bystanders consider their decision to intervene in clergy workplace harassment.

... to fail to confirm the victim's sense of wrong is itself another wrong. It violates the morally essential trust that there are recognised, shared rules by which we live and which we can count on to protect and guide us. Normative abandonment is especially painful, enraging, and humiliating, and can feel disastrous for victims. This explains a common phenomenon in the testimonies of victims: they often experience as much or more rage, resentment, indignation, or humiliation in response to the failure of other people and institutions to come to their aid, acknowledge their injury, reaffirm standards, place blame appropriately on wrongdoers, and offer some forms of solace, safety, and relief, as they experience toward the original wrongdoer. (20)

Future research into the ethical dimensions of bystander behaviour needs to consider Walker's approach to restorative justice and the theological anthropology it supports.

### ***Engaging bystanders***

Table 1 seeks to overcome the sources of bystander inaction. Because clergy workplace harassment is often private and unnoticed by others, targets will report the incident to others and seek support. Because of the often blurred lines between workplace and home for clergy, especially those living in manses, rectories and parsonages, workplace harassment may follow clergy from the church building to the home, where there are no parishioner bystanders.

Sometimes harassment occurs behind the target's back, so bystanders will report the incident to the clergyperson. This exchange allows targets to assess if a bystander noticed the incident directly and interpreted it as possible harassment. Participants

would report the harassment to potentially sympathetic parishioners or colleagues when they perceived that no one noticed the incident or failed to interpret it as harassment. Participants would themselves consult with parishioners or colleagues to confirm their perception that their experience constituted harassment.

Conversations with potentially sympathetic parishioners and colleagues usually stalled on the question of what form of assistance was possible. Even if parishioners and colleagues expressed a felt sense of responsibility to intervene, they usually concluded that there was nothing constructive they could do. If a sympathetic bystander could identify a constructive intervention, for example, calling out the behaviour in a church meeting, they were most likely to implement that plan. The identification of an intervention plan seems tied to the likelihood of implementing the intervention. The bystanders who did intervene constructively were described as having training or experience outside the church in mediation, advocacy, or similar skills. Many plans, however, amounted to advice for the minister to take action.

### ***Bystander response***

Table 1 seeks to coach successful bystander action and ally responses. When asked about possible bystander motivations, participants generally reported that the bystander did not know how to respond, feeling powerless despite wanting to help. Some participants knew exactly how they wanted bystanders to respond. However, many participants, the clergy themselves, did not know if or how bystanders could intervene constructively, apart from a general sense that someone needed to stand up and at least say something. Clergy seemed to empathize somewhat with the bystander dilemma. In most cases, both participant and bystander lacked specific resources for making constructive decisions to intervene with perpetrators.

If bystanders did intervene, it was often delayed or inadequate to the need. Participant interviews describe the impact of delayed, inconsistent, or inadequate bystander action. Moreover, clergy-targets could have benefited from an expression of concern and early intervention that might have prompted the minister to involve church authorities and/or police earlier. The lack of intervention or delayed intervention contributed to the escalation of the situation, which had a negative impact on the minister.

### ***Gender***

Many of the female clergy interviewees discussed gender. Research on gender and emotional display in the workplace finds that women who express anger in the workplace are accorded lower professional status, lower wages, and seen as less competent than angry men and unemotional women unless they offer an external attribution or reason for their anger (Brescoll and Uhlmann, 2008). These gendered social consequences reflect the experience of clergywomen in the congregational context. Do these potential consequences also impact the bystander decision making of women who witness clergy workplace harassment?

## Theological reflection

Congregations are communities of faith, and harassment's targets, perpetrators, confederates, and bystanders function within this shared community. In addition to the harm that is caused to individual clergy as persons, harassment harms community. Harassment harms a faith community's mission and ministry.

Community and immunity both describe a relationship to shared gifts and obligations. The word community derives from the Latin *com-* together and *munis* bound, under service, which derives from *munus* gift, service, duty (*The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 1991). Community, then, can be described as the gathering together of gifts and services towards a common purpose or good (Morrison, 2010). Within the same framework, immunity means to be exempt from the duties and service due communal membership. Immunity is an exemption from sharing one's gifts towards the common purpose or good, and an exemption from stewarding the gifts of others in community.

When perpetrators of clergy workplace harassment are permitted to abuse clergy unchallenged, they are granted immunity in a faith community. Moreover, when parishioner bystanders exempt themselves from intervening in clergy workplace harassment, they, too, are claiming immunity in a faith community.

Immunity in a pastoral community is an act of poor stewardship of gifts and responsibilities towards God's mission and vision for creation and humanity. The bystander exemption of perpetrators from accountability and the bystander's self-exemption from intervention have missiological and ecclesiological implications. The gifts brought by the pastor to the congregation and its mission are stewarded poorly when subjected to workplace harassment. The congregation and its gifts are stewarded poorly when time and energy go primarily to organizational self-maintenance to deal with the aftermath of clergy workplace harassment.

The application of bystander effect theory to clergy workplace harassment is an attempt to bring into awareness the ecclesial and missiological implications of clergy workplace harassment. More importantly, this study is an attempt to challenge any claims to immunity within the corporate body of Christ.

The most obvious claim is that perpetrators of clergy workplace harassment should not be immune to the responsibilities of healthy communal life. Perpetrators should not be immune from the consequences of their harmful behaviour. The less obvious claim, but the one that is emphasized for this study, is that bystanders, too, should not be immune to or exempt from communal responsibilities and consequences. Just as the perpetrator has a responsibility to the community and the potential target, so also the bystander needs to understand these responsibilities to the congregation, clergy leadership, and shared mission — fundamentally to God.

The author recommends future analysis of the so-called clergy killer literature; specifically, a constructive critique of its focus on the character and evil status of the perpetrator rather than helping bystanders to notice, interpret, and respond to specific harassment behaviours.

## Conclusion

Bystander decision process is an evidence-based model of bystander subjective experience, and as such it is available as an interpretive frame for studying the clergy-target's experience of bystanders to workplace harassment. The application of bystander effect theory to clergy workplace harassment allows access to resources developed by researchers, institutions, business, and government. The question arises: What can the church learn from bystander intervention programmes and resources that promote prosocial behaviour? Can we adapt these resources to the parish context? A simple review of online resources suggests they are relevant (Bell, 2015; Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2010; Province of Ontario, 2015; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2015). Workplace harassment research has produced definitions to describe harassment in behavioural terms (Rospenda and Richman, 2004), which can reduce interpretive ambiguity. This interpretive frame can be a protective factor for clergy — a source for psychological resiliency, guarding against clergy-target self-doubt and self-shame as secondary stress on top of the primary stress of the abuse by the abuser.

The application of bystander research to clergy workplace harassment can be instructive for clergy who struggle to understand bystander behaviour. Understanding bystander behaviour helps clergy-targets to understand that harassment is not justified and, moreover, that bystanders will process observed harassment a certain way. Coupled with a theological critique of communal immunity, the bystander interpretive frame can serve as a protective factor for resiliency in faith communities responding to clergy workplace harassment.

## Conflict of interest statement

The researcher shares a common employer at the denominational level with research participants. Research participants were self-selected volunteers who are employed in a congregation of The United Church of Canada, which is the employer of the researcher. The potential conflict of interest was managed through a research approval process at the researcher's academic institution.

## ORCID

Bradley Morrison  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1900-9681>

## References

- Barentsen, J. 2011. *Emerging Leadership in the Pauling Mission: A Social Identity Perspective on Local Leadership Development in Corinth and Ephesus*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick.
- Barfoot, D. S., B. E. Winston and C. Wickman. 2005. *Forced Pastoral Exits: An Exploratory Study*. Virginia Beach, VA: Regents University. Accessed July 11, 2015. <http://www.pastorinresidence.org/newsletter/SurveyPIR.pdf>.
- Bell, B. 2015. Step up. University of Arizona C.A.T.S. Life Skills Program. Accessed July 17, 2015. <http://stepupprogram.org>.

- Boers, A. P. 1999. *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute.
- Brescoll, V. L. and E. L. Uhlmann. 2008. "Can an Angry Woman Get Ahead?: Status Conferral, Gender, and Expression of Emotion in the Workplace." *Psychological Science* 19:268–75.
- Common. 1991. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. Second edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Conn, M. 2013. *When Sheep Attack: A Pastor's Survival Guide*. Lexington, KY: Ministry Center.
- Crockett, K. 2012. *Pastor Abusers: When Sheep Attack Their Shepherd*. Prattville, AL: Whole Armor.
- Darley, J. M. and B. Latané. 1968. "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8:337–83.
- . 1970. *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* New York, NY: Appleton Century Crofts.
- Fearon, H. D. and G. S. Mikoski. 2013. *Straining at the Oars: Case Studies in Pastoral Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans.
- Fischer, P., J. I. Krueger, T. Greitemeyer, C. Vogrincic, A. Kastenmüller and D. Frey. 2011. "The Bystander-Effect: A Meta-Analytic Review on Bystander Intervention in Dangerous and Non-Dangerous Emergencies." *Psychological Bulletin* 137:517–37.
- Foss, R. W. 2002. Burnout Among Clergy and Helping Professionals: Situational and Personality Correlates. Retrieved from Dissertations and Theses database (AAT 3046366).
- Gale, J. K. N. 2014. Violence in the Courts of the Church: How Do Male Clergy in The United Church of Canada Experience Ecclesial Hostility? (Graduate project). Atlantic School of Theology.
- Greenfield, G. 2009. *The Wounded Minister: Healing from and Preventing Personal Attacks*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Grosch, W. N. and D. C. Olsen. 2000. "Clergy Burnout: An Integrative Approach." *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 56:619–32.
- Hashemnezhad, H. 2015. "Qualitative Content Analysis Research: A Review Article." *Journal of ELT and Applied Linguistics* 3:54–62.
- Haugk, K. C. 1988. *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.
- Hoefnagels, C. and M. Zwikker. 2001. "The Bystander Dilemma and Child Abuse: Extending the Latané, and Darley Model to Domestic Violence." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 31:1158–83.
- Hoge, D. R. and J. E. Wenger. 2005. *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Hsieh, H.-F. and S. E. Shannon. 2005. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis." *Qualitative Health Research* 15:1277–88. doi:10.1177/1049732305276687.
- Kyngas H. and L. Vanhanen. 1999. "Content Analysis." *Hoitotiede* 1:3–12.
- Latané, B. and J. M. Darley. 1968. "Group Inhibition of Bystander Intervention in Emergencies." *Personality and Social Psychology* 10:215–21.
- London, H. B. and N. B. Wiseman. 2003. *Pastors at Greater Risk*. Ventura: Regal.
- Lövgren, S. 2007. Workplace Bullying Targets' Perception of Bystanders, (Order No. U237774). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (301705584).
- Martin, A. A. 2008. "Burst the Bystander Effect: Making a Discipling Difference with Young Adults." *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 3:46–53.
- Maynard, D. R. 2010. *When Sheep Attack*. Rancho Mirage, CA: Dionysus.
- Moreland, J. T. (Director) and V. Grassi (Director). 2012. *Betrayed: The Clergy Killer's DNA*. [Documentary]. Cheyenne, WY: US Films.
- Morrison, B. T. 2010. "The Pastorate as Helping Relationship." In *The Helping Relationship*, edited by A. Meier and M. Rovers, 220–34. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- Ontario Ministry of Labour, Occupational Health and Safety Branch. 2010. "1.3 Domestic Violence." In *Workplace Violence and Harassment: Understanding the Law*, 2–3. Toronto: Government of Ontario.
- Potter, W. J. and D. Levine-Donnerstein. 1999. "Rethinking Validity and Reliability in Content Analysis." *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 27:258–84.
- Powell, E. D. U. 2003. *The Heart of Conflict: A Spirituality of Transformation*. Kelowna, BC: Northstone.



- Powell, T. A. 2008. *Forced Terminations Among Clergy: Causes and Recovery*. Retrieved from Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary Dissertations. <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1171&context=doctoral>.
- Province of Ontario. 2015. Transcript. Accessed July 17, 2015. <http://media.ontarionewsroom.com/desctxt/whowillyouhelp.html>.
- Randall, K. J. 2013. "Examining Thoughts about Leaving the Ministry among Anglican Clergy in England and Wales." *Practical Theology* 6:178–89. doi:10.1179/1756073X13Z.0000000005.
- Rediger, G. L. 1997. *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.
- Rospenda, K. M. and J. A. Richman. 2004. "The Factor Structure of Generalized Workplace Harassment." *Violence and Victims* 19:221–38.
- Rospenda, K. M., J. A. Richman and C. A. Shannon. 2006. "Patterns of Workplace Harassment, Gender, and Use of Services: An Update." *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 11:379–93.
- Shelley, M. 2013. *Ministering to Problem People in Your Church: What to Do with Well-Intentioned Dragons*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
- Stevenson-Moessner, J. and M. L. Dell. 2013. *The Elephant in the Room: What You Don't See Can Kill You*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Tajfel, H. 1974. "Social Identity and Intergroup Behaviour." *Social Science Information* 3:65–93.
- Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Bibliography on Workplace Harassment. Accessed July 17, 2015. <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ve/hrsdr-eng.asp>. (Data migrating to Canada.ca website).
- Uale, B. P. 2010. Teachers as Bystanders: The Effect of Teachers' Perceptions on Reporting Bullying Behavior. (Order No. 3418189). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global; ProQuest Education Journals. (750488681).
- Vasko, E. T. 2015. *Beyond Apathy: A Theology for Bystanders*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Walker, M. U. 2006a. "The Cycle of Violence." *Journal of Human Rights* 5:81–105. doi:10.1080/14754830500485890.
- . 2006b. *Moral Repair: Reconstructing Moral Relations After Wrongdoing*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

## Notes on contributor

Brad Morrison assistant professor of practical theology at Huron University College, London, Canada. He is an ordained minister in The United Church of Canada. He is a Registered Psychotherapist (College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario) specializing in marriage and family therapy (AAMFT clinical fellow) and pastoral care and counselling. His doctoral studies included family systems theory, congregational dynamics, and spiritual care. He completed the AAMFT-accredited post-degree clinical programme in marriage and family therapy. Brad's publications include *Already Missional: Congregations as Community Partners*.

Correspondence to: Bradley Morrison, Faculty of Theology, Huron University College, 1349 Western Rd, London, ON, Canada N6G 1H3. Email: [bmorri49@uwo.ca](mailto:bmorri49@uwo.ca)