

The bystander effect

Society



When the terms feelings, thoughts, and behavior are brought up, one does not automatically think these are quantifiable variables. To social psychologist, these words make up the basis of their studies. Trends have also been studied, tested, and analyzed as a way to understand the outcome of actions. They study what one is feeling, how those emotions are affecting that person's thoughts, and how, or if, those thoughts become incentives or something that produces an action. Together, those analyses' make up behavioral trends.

Sociologists have been studying behavioral trends for decades, especially how people react in groups to a situation or stimulus. Researchers do not only study the behavior of people in a certain group but also how they act, as a whole, in society or within a culture. Psychologists have come to find that the way a person acts influences others either positively or negatively. Behavior, above all other things, describes why the bystander effect happens. In 1968, Bibb Latane and John Darley were the first to demonstrate the bystander effect.

Darley and Latane arrived at the conclusion that the number of people within an area influences the likelihood of intervention during an emergency (Latane and Darley, 1968). Emergency, in this definition, refers to a number of situations such as a murder, someone that is homeless, or a person being ridiculed or discriminated against. It could be a person that was hit by an automobile or a child that was abandoned from a car and left to walk home. The bystander effect also influences the likelihood of someone reporting an emergency such as smoke coming from another room or a vent.

After this phenomenon was introduced, Latane and Steve Nida (1981) explained it was the most replicated effect in social psychology according to their review (p. 305). Many factors are taken into account as to why this social phenomenon exists. Diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance, to name a few, describe how groups are influenced by the bystander effect. Some case studies, that have been conducted, do not support the effect though. Altruism, personality, and morals are why people get involved occurs. Imagine there is a man lying on the stairs in front of an office building in the middle of a city.

He is an average looking man in jeans and a plain t-shirt. The man appears to be hurt because he is face down and moaning. Many people stop to assess the situation. Here is where the diffusion of responsibility takes place. Diffusion of responsibility is the concept that each person is only responsible for an equal proportion of effort based on the number of people in a group (Latane and Darley, 1968). Considering it is a busy city, many people do not have time to stop and check to see if he is all right. No one is assigned to take accountability for a person in distress.

All the people that see the man, and notice that something is wrong, automatically pin the responsibility on everyone else, figuring others will intervene. It is stated that as the number of bystanders [increases], the amount of responsibility any one bystander bears [decreases] (as cited in What Is Psychology 2002, p. 503). If there were one hundred passersby walking past that hurt man, the likelihood of anyone stopping is very low. When the liability of interference is singled out or placed upon one person, contribution to the circumstances is very high.

There are a number of reasons why the diffusion of responsibility takes place. People that are aware of an emergency tend to look at what others are doing because they are inclined to follow normal behavior. People imitate what others are doing in order to achieve a sense of normalcy. Some people do not want to assess a situation incorrectly. For example, the man mentioned above may be hurt but to some people he may appear drunk. Witnesses sometime believe everyone else knows something they do not know. One person might have been watching that man drinking out of a bottle from a brown, paper bag.

So assuming it was alcohol, the witness does not get involved which influences everyone else around that had not seen him drinking. If no one else is helping him, it gives other people the impression that the man in pain is not in need of assistance because of the unconscious control people have over one another. During an emergency, observers have the choice to analyze the situation and act or fail to act. People who fail to act usually fall victim to cognitive biases. When reasoning is distorted, immoral decisions are frequently made.

Floyd Allport reported that pluralistic ignorance explain events in which virtually all members of a group privately reject norms yet believe that virtually all other group members accept them (p. 348). It is a bias when people follow a fallacy by rejecting a norm, which might not be the correct way to deal with an emergency. One of Latane and Darley's first case studies was the influence of people in a smoke filled room. A number of confederates were in a controlled room with one person who was unaware of the test.

They were filling out surveys when all of a sudden fake smoke started to fill the room.

No one had noticed or said anything about the emergency. The woman that was being tested was fully aware of the situation but because of pluralistic ignorance, she did not report the smoke (Latane and Darley, 1968). When it is perceived or known that one person in the room comprehends what is happening and they are not doing anything, it influences the rest of the group because his or her opinion is casted onto the bystanders that what is happening is okay. Similar to this cognitive bias, false-consensus effect describes why diffusion of responsibility occurs.

It is the tendency for people to project their own opinions when predicting the attitude, opinions, and behaviors of others (Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). This cognitive bias states that individuals believe to share the same beliefs or opinions as others, which is related to the bystander effect in the sense that people seem to project their thoughts onto those around them. People that prefer to follow a crowd portray why humans act out the bystander effect. As a result, the herd behavior or the bandwagon effect arises.

If there is a man face down on the street and everyone is calmly walking around him, the chances are that everyone else will follow suit. Whatever decision the leader of the herd makes, the rest of the pack is sure to follow. Animals tend to walk in packs with one or more leaders and numerous followers, which keep them safe. Similarly, people want to conform to everyone else. The word society makes us human; without it, we are

animals. We do what we need to stay alive and to protect others and ourselves; that is, until threats to our lives are taken into consideration.

Carrie Keating, a psychologist at Colgate University, proves a point when saying; “ We use [a] sort of intuition to get a sense of how dangerous people are” (Keating, 2008). If people see that an emergency is too dangerous, one will more than likely not take action. The least one can do is call the police and notify them of any violence. Neglecting the possibility is also another cognitive bias that people fall under during the bystander effect. It is that a person completely rejects any possibility when trying to decide something under uncertainty, or ambiguity.

The more ambiguous the situation is, the less likely people are to intervene (Bickman, 1971). This goes back to people wanting to do what is normal. If there is a child being hauled away by a man, one can easily mistake the situation for a misbehaved son or daughter, when in fact, the man is a kidnapper. It is embarrassing to intrude on a situation that is misinterpreted. Neglecting the possibility that a child is being abducted, or that someone else will take care of the dilemma, makes it easier to stay out of the way.

When there are fewer people around to distribute responsibility to, people tend to have all the weight on their shoulders. The responsibility is distributed among the other people and you are not singled out. People that are not in groups but are singled out tend to have excuses of their own that fall into other cognitive motives. Some excuses are that they were in a hurry and did not notice anything. Some people do not want to get into any legal processes. People like to mind their own business so if there was a woman

getting verbally abused in a park, people tend to think it is none of their business.

People are not expected to intervene if the situation looks like it is a dispute between couples or between spouses. Keating explained, on ' What Would You Do' that some people do not help men or woman that look low class or high class. They seem to help people that appear to be in the same rank as them (Keating, 2009). People think that just because they are not certified doctors that they have no sense in even stopping to help someone that is injured. Colin Tukuitonga and Andrew Bindman say that some men and women do not stand up for people of other cultures, religions, ethnicities (2002), or opinions.

An episode of ' What Would You Do? ' revealed that people praised a clerk for not serving a Muslim customer even though she was from America. Another episode exposed a young girl to verbal abuse by three other girls but because it was not physical, no one saw a reason to intervene. Sometimes the situation looks to dangerous and witnesses think of themselves rather than the danger of someone involved. Don Hockenbury stated that when the personal cost for helping outweighs the benefits, the likelihood of helping decreases (p. 527), the costs being embarrassment, danger, and an endeavor.

In rare cases, the number of people in an area does not influence the likelihood of a bystander helping or reporting an emergency. Prosocial behavior describes the social interaction when people help others knowing there will be no reward. It contradicts everything that psychologists study about decreased intervention. Altruism is a selfless way of decision-making
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where a person puts their general welfare in danger to help another in need without expecting a reward. People like to think of it as a moral obligation towards a person. Irving Piliavin, and others (1969), conducted an experiment on New York's underground subway.

Even though it is a busy subway, ninety percent of the witnesses helped an apparent disabled person when they fell down. When a drunken confederate fell over, twenty percent of the people on the subway helped the person. Piliavin concluded that bystanders see others as responsible for their own situation. Society is less prone to help those responsible for their predicaments. He also concluded that participation strengthens when a person seems similar to them. In addition, when they perceive the situation is not the victim's fault, such as if the person is unable to help him or herself (ex. Elderly or disabled), intervention strengthens. People who are more attractive seem to get help faster than those who are unattractive. (Piliavin, 1969) According to Jane Pivialin and Hong-wen Charng (1990), factors that increase the likelihood of bystanders helping include the "feel good, do good" effect, guilt, seeing others helping, deserved help, knowing how to help, and relationships (p. 526 - 537). When a person is in a good mood, they are quick to help someone in need. Your conscious is a major influence on yourself. It tells you whether a decision is a good one or not.

When one person has all the responsibility to intervene, that person feels obligated to make a move. If the person fails to fail, guilt sets in and intervention occurs. Morals also come into effect while deciding to intervene. If someone was brought up to do the right thing, that person will help or report a person or situation. Empathy also determines how people will act.

People, that have experienced the same situation that someone is going through, will more than likely act upon what their conscious is telling them to do because they know it is the right thing.

For someone that used to be homeless, one will help someone asking for food or spare change. Whenever one person helps, a group seems to form, which strengthens the alliance. If one person has to carry ten rocks from point A to point B, those stones are going to be very heavy. If you have nine other people working with you to complete the task, the weight of the rock that one person has to carry, decreases provided each person carries one stone. The responsibility is distributed among the other people and the task is accomplished more efficiently.

When someone intervenes, people also follow and then unconsciously form a group to ward off the violent person. When individuals act and get involved, it empowers bystanders to take responsibility for their society and it allows an opening to appear so others can also help. People that are stronger, more aggressive, or sympathetic seem to be of the dominant group of interveners while ambiguity slows down intervention "...The more crystal clear the situation, the faster intervention occurs" (Keating, 2008). When a woman is screaming as a man drags her through a park, ambiguity occurs.

Until that woman specifies to onlookers what is happening, people most likely do not mediate between the two, whether they are related or complete strangers. Relation to the person in need increases likelihood too. William Howard and William Crano (1974) studied the effects of gender in relations to the bystander effect (p. 491- 507). Among many other psychologists, Howard and Crano hypothesized that men are more motivated to act in the

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case of an emergency then woman. Conversely, they concluded that men and women do effect the whether intervention takes place; they are equally present in the bystander effect.

Marie and John Tisak, psychologists of Bowling Green State University, reported that whether it is directfamily, friends, or simply acquaintances, those factors increase likelihood. Small talk and eye contact towards the victim automatically trigger a connection and when that connection is made, one feels associated with the other and is quicker to speak out for that person. Likewise, if the witness knows the aggressor, the witness is also more likely to step in. The type of relationship determines the likelihood.

Relatives or very close friends to the bystander increase intruding whereas friends or acquaintances decrease likelihood (Tisak & Tisak, 1996). Many factors are correlated as to why intervention happens. Many famous events took place across history that people may not think as being the bystander effect. One of the first cases ever recorded was from the bible. Samaritan is the word that describes a charitable or helpful person but it also holds a more powerful meaning. A Jewish man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho had been stopped by thieves who robbed him, beat him, and left him to die on the side of the road.

A priest walked by and pretended not to notice the suffering man. A Levite, who was also a church official, looked at him and proceeded to walk on the other side of the street. The third man, a Samaritan, came across the man. It was evident that the Samaritan would not stop because Jews and Samaritans were enemies. He caught sight of the dying man and came to his aid. He brought him to a nearby inn to restorehealthand paid for his recovery (Luke <https://assignbuster.com/the-bystander-effect-research-paper-samples/>

10: 25-37). It is hard to believe that the priest and Levite did not stop because of the bystander effect, but only because there was no compassion.

The Holocaust is another time in history where the bystander effect was realized. Everyone fell victim to being a bystander. If society tries to state otherwise, they are saying that the Holocaust was not as horrifying as everyone made it to be. The entire world knew about the death of the Jews but no one said anything, not because no one else was taking a stand, but the fear of being executed filled their minds. Psychologists namely study feelings, thoughts, and behaviors and how each relates. By comprehending that concept, psychologists then go into detail and study groups and how they influence individuals, vice versa.

John Darley and Bibb Latane hypothesized that the numbers of people in an area influence individual's reactions to a response. After numerous controlled case studies, Darley and Latane concluded that the number of people does influence human behavior during an emergency. After this conclusion, the bystander effect became one of the most renowned and replicated studies in psychology. Psychologists, such as Steve Nida and Floyd Allport, have been significant contributors in the development of this behavioral effect.

Pluralistic ignorance and diffusion of responsibility are two major reasons that decrease the likelihood of intervention, among many other reasons. Altruism and morals, to name a few, enhance the likelihood that someone will interfere. There are many historical events that take place before the bystander effect happened. Albert Einstein once said "No amount of experimentation can ever prove me right; a single experiment can prove me

wrong” (as cited by Calaprice, 2005). Which is a true statement because unless the case studies conducted are flawless and show a constant correlation between each data entry, nothing can be proven right.

There are always biases and errors when researchers document data. There is no definite, reliable source to base information off because no one's research can be one hundred percent accurate. When research is confirmed by a community it is usually accepted to be precise and true. When a theory appears in psychology and people begin to test it, replication of the same case studies can show bias. Surveys that are taken on a computer or filled out on paper are not a true representation of what the general population would do in an emergency.

The person has to experience the conditions to predict what they would do. Anyone can say that he or she would be the hero but when it comes time to stand up to an aggressive man, the meek, twenty year old would most likely shy away. The bystander effect has many different levels of complexity. Psychologists, when performing case studies on bystander effect, fail to record the mood someone is in which, from above, shows that it has an effect on whether someone responds to a stimulus. Attributions, altruism, morals, personality along with others explain why people intervene.

Age defies the laws of the bystander effect. The size of a group does not matter to a child; they will not intervene. Alcohol consumption, mental health, maturity, ambiguity, experience, and reaction time are reasons that have to be taken into account when testing subjects and using the data to represent a statistic. It is all there in the numbers but they can also be misleading sometimes. We just have to believe that what researchers are

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telling us is true. Therefore, I agree with my hypothesis, to an extent, that the number of people in an area influences the likelihood of intervention.

I do believe that certain people look to others when determining what to do in an emergency. I also confirm that the reason some people do not intervene is that they are following social norms and by doing so they do not get involved because they do not want to assess a situation inaccurately. The bystander effect is a very complex behavioral trend that involves a lot of testing and analysis. I do not believe that it can be proven completely true in less than forty years or in one semester by a first year student. More research is to be done.