

The bystander effect and its factor of influence essay sample



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The bystander effect or Genovese syndrome denotes a scenario where a victim in an emergency situation is not offered any help by the surrounding individuals, even though they are aware that the victim needs help. The presence of other bystanders greatly reduces the likelihood of intervention. The more bystanders present, the less likely any one of them will assume responsibility for taking action to help the victim. The bystander effect happens quite often independently of culture, gender or age and it is very unfortunate as if it didn't happen, lives could be saved, and crimes could be avoided. The bystander effect could happen for three main reasons which are the pluralistic ignorance, the social inhibition, and the diffusion of responsibility.

The bystander effect also got the name Genovese syndrome because of a famous case that happened in New York City involving Catherine Susan “Kitty” Genovese. Ms. Genovese was an ordinary 28 year old, who was brutally murdered on March 13, 1964. She was on her way back home from work when a man attacked her. The attacker chased and stabbed her a few times while she screamed for help. Although there were 38 residents in her building that could hear her, nobody called the police or went downstairs to help her. Her neighbors did very little to save her. A man watching the scene, slid opens his window and yelled at the attacker “ Hey! Let that girl alone!!” The attacker heard it and immediately walked away. That was the only help she got and unfortunately that was not enough to save her life. The victim with several wounds struggled to stay conscious and within five minutes the attacker returned and stabbed her again.

Once again, Kitty Genovese cried for help saying “ I’m dying! Please somebody help me!” Some lights turned on and the tenants from the safety of their apartment only watched what was happening without offering any assistance to the victim. Kitty Genovese died in front of a number of witnesses that silently watched and did very little or basically nothing to prevent this tragedy. Only after hours that she was dead that her neighbors notified the police about the case. This became a famous and a much criticized case because although there were many bystanders that could have offered assistance, nobody took action to save her. Kitty Genovese died in front of a number of witnesses that took no action to save her, because of this case the bystander effect also got the name Genovese syndrome.

There are three main factors that lead to the bystander effect. One of the factors is pluralistic ignorance also known as modeling or conformity. In this case, the bystander tend to think that the others bystanders doesn’t look concerned so they act in conformity and assume that there is nothing to be concerned about. In reality, even though being clear that the victim needs assistance the bystander in pluralistic ignorance will act in conformity to others and will truly believe that if nobody took action or looked concerned about the victim this means that there is no necessity of their own concern or assistance. Therefore, the bystander takes no action.

A second factor for the bystander effect to occur is the social inhibition.

Social inhibition is related to the fear of negative evaluation, the fear of drawing attention to self or be doing the wrong thing. Social inhibition is a conscious or subconscious constraint by a person of behavior of a social nature. The constraint may be in relation to behavior, appearance, or a <https://assignbuster.com/the-bystander-effect-and-its-factor-of-influence-essay-sample/>

subject matter for discussion, besides other matters. There are a number of reasons for social inhibitions, such as that the person fears that the activity, appearance or discussion will bring social disapproval. In this case the bystander is afraid to take action due to the impression that the others bystanders could be judging or giving a negative evaluation. This bystander doesn't like the attention that their actions might bring and rather take no action at all in order to avoid the attention of others.

A third reason for the bystander effect to happen could be the diffusion of responsibility. This means that our obligation or sense of responsibility to help is diffused or divided among the other bystanders. The fact that we believe that there are other bystanders that potentially could be more capable of offering assistance could stop us from taking action and offering assistance to the victim. The phenomenon tends to occur in groups of people above a certain critical size and when responsibility is not explicitly assigned. The bigger the number of bystanders greater are the chances of no one helping as everybody believe that there is somebody else more capable of taking responsibility and helping the victim.

In conclusion, the bystander effect happens quite often and it could happen because of factors such as the pluralistic ignorance, social inhibition, diffusion of responsibility or all three factors combined. If one day you find yourself in a situation where you need help, to avoid the bystander effect, you should specifically point out or assign somebody to help you. When you specifically point somebody your chances of getting help will increase as the sense of responsibility of the pointed person will force her to take action and offer assistance. If you simply call for help is very likely that the bystander

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effect will occur and nobody will take action and offer you any help. In order for a person to help, they must first notice the situation, interpret it as an emergency, and take responsibility for helping.