

Too many witnesses, not enough action essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Too Many Witnesses, Not Enough Action In their essay, " Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," John Darley and Bibb Latane seek to explain the disturbing phenomenon of bystander inaction in the face of emergencies. Complex, stressful decisions are thrust upon witnesses to an emergency, and " people sometimes choose not to get involved - and then later regret this decision.

" Every individual is different, and reticence toward action in an emergency is an important, difficult decision, but many factors come into play as a witness decides whether to render assistance. According to the article, the number of witnesses plays a significant role in determining whether individuals will step up and aid an emergency victim. This " diffusion of responsibility" theory argues that the more witnesses, the less likely individuals within that group of bystanders will respond with aid. The theory also argues that even if bystanders decide not to help, their choice is neither easy nor stress-free. Whether their choice is easy or difficult, bystanders to an emergency or tragedy deserve blame and perhaps even punishment if they choose not to help the victim and avert the tragedy. The authors cite several emergency situations and argue that " the megalopolis in which we live makes closeness difficult and leads to the alienation of the individual from the group.

" Psychological withdrawal, apathy and indifference of the witnesses to an emergency are then cited as factors underlying inaction. But, whether strangers are alienated or withdrawn from one another, they should feel a moral obligation to aid a nearby victim in significant, obvious distress.

Psychoanalytical analysis that attempts to assuage lack of responsibility or
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guilt from inaction should be treated dubiously. Simply stated, those who are capable of aiding a victim in dire distress should feel compelled, both internally and externally, to do the right thing and help. United States' culture, even if it engenders isolation and insulation from the needs of fellow citizens, cannot be blamed for the callous, selfish inaction of bystanders to an emergency.

The emergencies and tragedies in the article are many and the circumstances presented to the bystanders vary, but witnesses' inaction seems irresponsible, unreasonable, reprehensible and even cowardly in most of the emergency scenarios. As Ms. Kitty Genovese is brutally attacked and killed during a half hour span of terror and wailing, thirty-eight of her neighbors watch from their windows and "no one so much as calls the police." This appalling example of bystander irresponsibility is stunning and difficult to fathom. These bystanders, who didn't even possess the courage or common decency to dial 911, should probably be prosecuted as accessories to murder. Tragically, this instance of bystander irresponsibility is not uncommon as the authors depict other examples of stabbing victims and severely injured pedestrians in shock as witnesses to the victims do nothing.

The causes of inaction, according to the authors, can at least be partially explained and attributed to societal factors and group influences as a crisis is observed. "Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public. We are taught to respect the privacy of others.

” And, “ in a crowd...each person is less likely to notice a potential emergency than when alone.” Good manners are important, but a crisis supersedes the need for polite, controlled behavior; witnesses to tragedy should reflexively and instinctively provide aid. The authors feebly argue that it is considered embarrassing to “ lose your cool in public,” and that an individual rendering aid “ fears that he may appear a fool.

” Peer pressure and worries about appearing foolish should be negligible if a responsible individual can reasonably and safely assist a stricken crisis victim. Experiments that studied the willingness of witnesses to aid crisis victims were disturbing as well because those who chose not to act offered flimsy, pitiful rationalizations and explanations for their unwillingness to help a fellow human being in dire need. Despite clear and convincing evidence that an emergency had just occurred, witnesses who chose not to help rationalized their reasons for inaction. A female actor seemingly fell, moaned, and sustained a severe foot injury while witnesses dubiously discounted her plight as “ not serious,” and probably just “ a mild sprain.” These despicable witnesses to a crisis “ didn’t want to embarrass her” with their aid. Adding insult to injury, they feebly assured the researchers that in a “ real emergency...they would be among the first to help.

” These pitiful cowards, masquerading as compassionate human beings, should be pilloried in public, with a passive and unresponsive crowd as witnesses. Despite these regrettable, almost unbelievable examples of human failure to act in the midst of a crisis, some redeeming points are offered by the authors. As an actor portrayed a seizure victim, “ eighty-five

percent of the people who believed themselves to be alone with the victim (decided) to help.” The authors also pointed out that “ people who failed to report the emergency showed few signs of the apathy and indifference thought to characterize ‘ unresponsive bystanders.’” Despite these few encouraging examples of responsible behavior in the face of crisis, this article starkly identifies a societal problem that must be acknowledged and remedied. Despite the theory of “ diffusion of responsibility” and other supposed causes of inaction, human beings must summon their innate and admirable instinct for compassion and aid when a crisis arises.