The Bystander Effect
F. Chee, S. Connor, A. Givens, D. Hale, N. Mishchenko, & C. Solomon

Introduction

I. Attention Getter: After the Giants won the Super Bowl in 2012, they did what most football teams do to celebrate. After going to Disneyworld, they held a parade through the streets of New York. During the parade, a fight broke out between a Giants fan and, of course, a Jets fan, the cause of which might seem obvious. Immediately, spectators did what anyone might do when they see a fight break out. They…..pulled out their phones and videotaped it. And from the videos, and there were many, we can see no one, not a single person, jump in and try to break the fight up.

II. Background and Audience Relevance: Recently in the media there have been many stories of instances where someone has cried for help in public places, yet people are slow to react, if they react at all. As members of a growing community, we should be aware of emergency situations and how to react to them.

III. Speaker Credibility: As a member of society, I have been in a situation where I was the bystander and wanted to learn more about the topic.

IV. Thesis: The thesis of this presentation is that the Bystander Effect explains human reactions in public emergencies.

V. Preview Main Points: First, I will share with you some background information on the Bystander Effect, second, what causes us to choose whether to react, and finally what the outcome of the emergency can be.

Transition to first main point: So first, what is the Bystander Effect?

Body

I. Main Point 1: In order to get a better grasp of what the Bystander Effect is, we must first, explore the background of the effect, and second, outline the characteristics of an emergency.

   Sub Point A: In 1964, a woman named Kitty Genovese went back to her home at 3am and was attacked by a maniac. Thirty-eight of her neighbors saw what was happening, but not a single one even phoned the police even though the assault lasted for over half an hour, and Kitty died. Latane and Darley researched this phenomenon in their 1969 study published in American Scientist to try and explain why it was that none of Kitty’s neighbors, and people in similar situations, do not try and help. According to Fischer and fellow researchers in a 2011 article published in Psychological Bulletin, the bystander effect “refers to the phenomenon that an individual’s likelihood of helping decreases when passive bystanders are present in a critical situation” (p. 1). Basically, the more people there are, the less likely they are to respond in emergency situations.
Sub point B: So what is an emergency? According to the study previously mentioned by Latane and Darley, there are five distinctive characteristics to an emergency that makes it different from a situation: First, life, well-being or property is in danger, and no one is better off after the emergency than before. This first aspect is most important because it points out that since our well being is at risk, we are less likely to get involved. Second, the situation must be an uncommon occurrence; in other words when it occurs, people will have little experience on how to handle it. Third, the nature of the emergency is different from case to case, meaning that all emergencies are unique. Fourth, there is little to no preparation made due to its uniqueness. Police officers, firemen, and other first responders may have training, but can’t fully anticipate any emergency. Fifth and finally, emergencies require immediate action. The limited amount of time to respond combined with the other four factors creates an environment that is high stress, high risk, low reward, and low competency, which is a recipe for disaster.

Transition (signpost, review, preview): Now that we have discussed what the bystander effect is and how an emergency is characterized, let’s move on to our second point, what causes us to react or not?

II. Main Point 2: In order to fully understand why this phenomena happens we must discuss the two main causes Latane and Darley outline. First we will discuss social influence and then move onto diffusion of responsibility.

A. Sub point A: First let’s explore social influence. This was first examined through a study by Latane and Darley in 1968 published by the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, where participants were put into a room to take a test. During the test the researchers started to fill the room with smoke, as if a fire had started. When left alone 75% of the time the participants left and reported the smoke. This number drops to 38% when three people are in the room, and drops even lower to 10% when one person is put with two others who do not react to the smoke at all. This tells us that no one reacts because they are basing their actions on what others are doing around them.

B. Sub point B: Now that we understand the cause social influence let’s move onto the second cause, diffusion of responsibility. According to an article by Marsh and Keltner in 2006 published in the University of California, Berkeley’s Greater Good Magazine, stated diffusion of responsibility is, when we see there are other witnesses to an emergency, so we feel less personally responsibility to intervene. For instance, when you are driving and you witness an accident and there are a lot of other cars around; do you stop or call 911? Many of us wont, since there are so many other people around that probably already did it or can do it. Latane and Darley say that diffusion of responsibility was the leading factor in the incident of abuse on Kitty Genovese.
Transition (signpost, review, preview): So, after defining the bystander effect, discussing its causes, let us now explore the implications of this phenomenon and how it may affect us in an emergency.

III. Main Point 3: While it may seem almost depressing to think that in a time of need nature guides us to run away, or be inactive as individuals, all hope is not lost. The implications of the previous cited research force us to examine two distinct areas for further research, emergency training and volunteerism.

A. Sub point A: First, in light of these findings we as individuals must consider the amount of time and energy we spend on emergency training and its effectiveness. Findings from a 1982 study by Patin and Carver, and published in the Journal of Applied Sociology note that training is often the best solution to the bystander effect. However, within this research Patin and Carver explain that although training is needed for how to respond, training is also needed for calls of emergency. Or in other words, how we alert those to our needs greatly impacts how they respond.

B. Sub point B: Next, research into the bystander effect forces us to re-examine the ways that we encourage society to volunteer for charity. If individuals are psychologically restrained in circumstances where people are placed in great harm how can we expect individuals to react in less dangerous circumstances? Additionally, and more personally, as we move forward in this class we are to give a persuasive speech and yet these findings challenge us to find new ways to persuade our audiences that address the aforementioned findings.

Transition and signal closing: Now that we know what the bystander effect is, and how it affects us, let’s wrap things up.

Conclusion:

I. Restate Thesis: The thesis of this presentation is that the Bystander Effect explains human reactions in public emergencies.

II. Review main points: First of all, I described the meaning of Bystander Effect, secondly, explored the causes, and finally hypothesized some implications.

III. Tie Back to Introduction with Memorable Closer: We may find ourselves having to break up a fight at our teams Super Bowl parade, especially since Los Angeles doesn’t have a team. However, the next time you are in a public setting and there is an emergency, you will have a better idea of your role in that situation.
References


