Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility

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Psychology 1000-03
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Abstract

People, both men and women equally tend not to respond to emergencies when other bystanders are present. This effect has been explained by factors such as apathy, alienation, or a lack of moral responsibility in regard to the victim. However, the reason why people do not respond to victims may be more dependent on the other bystanders rather than any particular response to the victim.

An abstract is a very short summary of the whole article. It will typically give you the background and the general findings of the study in a very succinct manner.

Why this summary of the abstract is good:

1) It is short. I summarized the abstract in three sentences. I picked out what was most important and I reported it.

2) It gets straight to the point. In the first sentence I give the basic results of the whole study. In the second sentence, I give the misperceptions that were discussed in the literature review. Finally, I report the general conclusion of those results given in the first sentence.

3) The paragraph is grammatically correct. It reads well if I read it aloud. Reading your sentences aloud helps you detect if you sentences sound awkward or read oddly. Each sentence is conceptually connected to the next. For example, in the first sentence I report the results. In the second, I outline the misperceptions that are in direct opposition to the results. In the third sentence, I interpret those findings in the context of the first and second sentence. So, in other words, the paragraph is cohesive and logical. Each sentence connects to the next.
4) I did not report terminology that I am not likely to use myself. I put it in my own words. For example, I did not use the work “anomie.” Instead, I used words that explained the meaning of that word. That means in your work you need to look up words you don’t understand and then use your own words in place of those words in your writing.

5) I did not copy what was written in the abstract. This is plagiarizing. I read it, tried to break it down into the key points and wrote out a three sentence summary that gave you the basics of what you needed to know.

6) I avoided making unnecessary statements that did not contribute anything to understanding the basic gist of the study/abstract.

7) Grammar/spelling: I spelled checked my work. I avoided using passive voice in my sentences. I did not start any of my sentences with a conjunction (ex: and or but). All of my sentences have a subject and a verb.

The Literature Review

This article is in response to a real life event of Kitty Genovese. She was attacked and killed in a residential section of New York with approximately 38 onlookers. Onlookers were in their apartments but could see the crime and the other onlookers through their windows. Despite the number of people who could have intervened, no one did. The media suggested that the reason no one responded was due to a general degradation in moral values. However, our researchers, Darley & Latane propose a different set of reasons why the onlookers might not have responded. First, each onlooker knew that other onlookers were also aware of the situation. This, in turn, may have decreased the pressure to respond given that the responsibility to act is
shared. If everyone responds this way, however, the result is that no one acts. Second, even if no one acts each individual could assume that blame will be shared by the group and no single onlooker will be blamed. Thus, not only the responsibility but also the blame is diffused. Third, observers may assume that someone else is taking action and that further involvement would be redundant and/or unnecessary. The article’s experiment simulated a real life emergency where each individual was prohibited from communicating with others similar to the case of Kitty Genovese. The response/failure to respond and the speed of response to the emergency was recorded.

The literature review is the introductory section. It is called a literature review because it reviews previous research (also referred to as literature) so that what we know what research has been done and how it relates to the current study. It is usually written in a manner as to lead up to the current study and why the current study is relevant and needed.

Why this summary of the literature review is good:

1) First of all, I do not report every detail of the literature review. I report the basics so that you get the gist of what was discussed in the literature review which includes the story of Kitty and their theoretical explanation of the phenomenon. I also tie it directly to what they intend to do in the experiment.

2) As in the section above, I made sure the summary was grammatically correct, cohesive (ideas relate from sentence to sentence), the summary was in my own words, and I left out comments/opinions that did not contribute to summarizing to the overall literature review.
Procedure/Method

Fifty nine female and thirteen male students in an introductory psychology course at New York University participated. Each participant was situated in an individual room with a means of communicating with others through an intercom system. The students were informed that they would be discussing problems of college life that may be embarrassing. Thus, each individual would be in a separate and private room so that participants could speak freely without concern of being identified. The student participants were also informed that the researcher would not be present during the discussion. It was suggested that this would help participants speak more freely. During the course of the discussion, the participants were misled to believe that one of the students in the study was having a seizure. The student who was having the seizure specifically asked for help and indicated that he thought he was dying.

There were several variations on this base study. First of all, in different instances, there were different group sizes. There were two-person groups, three-people groups, and six-person groups. There was only one actual participant per group. All other individuals were part of the experiment. This was the independent variable. It was meant to test if the number of people would diffuse the responsibility given an emergency situation. There were also variations on the types of people who were in the experiment. Different genders and an authority figure was introduced. The authority figure was reported as a premedical student who worked at the emergency ward at Bellevue Hospital. First, this was meant to investigate if there was any difference in responding given gender differences. Also, it was also meant to investigate if an authority figure would make a difference in the participant’s responding given that participants may assume that the medical student would take charge of an emergency situation.
The dependent variable was whether or not the participant responded to the seizure victim and the time it took the participant to respond to the person having the seizure. If within six minutes the participant did not come out of their cubicle to seek assistance for the seizure victim, the experiment was terminated. The true nature of experiment was disclosed. The participant completed several other scales to measure key personality traits such as socially responsible moral responding, authoritarianism, social desirability, and duplicity. The participant also shared basic demographic information.

**The Methods** (sometimes called Procedure) section explains what happened in the experiment. It gives the details of the participants and how the experiment was conducted.

**Why this summary of the methods/procedure are good:**

1) First of all, notice that I did not report all of the details of the study. Do not get hung up with all the details! Just report what is necessary to understand what is going on in the overall study. In order to do this successfully, you need to read the article all the way through first before trying to summarize. If you try to read and then summarize each section you might have to go back to various sections and redo parts to make it all make sense. You might decide something is an unnecessary detail but as you go on you realize you really need to report it to make sense of the article summary.

2) Notice that once again, I did not use all the terminology that the article used. I wrote the summary in my own words. (See the end of the summary where I used my own words to explain the scales that were used.)
3) It is easy to write up a summary that may not be accurate or does not explain what happened very clearly. You may have to go back over this section a couple of times to pinpoint what happened accurately.

4) All of the other general points from above still apply about grammar, cohesiveness, etc.

Results

First of all, most participants believed the seizure to be real. This is a key aspect for the experiment to be considered valid. It was found that the number of people in the experiment did have an effect on responding. All participants in the two-person group reported the seizure while only 62% of the participants in the six-person group reported the problem. Also, people in the two-person groups responded faster than three or six person groups. For example, 85% of participants in the two-person group responded to the seizure victim before the intercom was turned off in the seizure victim’s cubicle. Only 31% of participants in the six-person group responded before the intercom went off. In the three-person group, it was found that the gender or inclusion of the medically competent student made no difference in response and the amount of time to respond. Participants were given a checklist of thoughts to endorse to indicate what they were thinking during the student’s seizure. The responses endorsed most often were “I didn’t know what to do”, “I thought it must be some sort of fake”, and “I didn’t know exactly what was happening.” Participants were asked in the three and six person groups if they thought the other bystanders came to mind during the seizure. They said they thought the other bystanders had no effect on their response.
Results give the findings with all of the technical statistical jargon. This section can be difficult to understand if you want to understand all of the details. There is no way I will expect you to completely understand this section due to your lack of training in statistics. However, you can get the gist of the results and report them. This is all I require for this section.

Why this summary of the results is good:

1) Once again, I did not report everything. It is unnecessary to report everything to get the gist of what the results were. For example, I gave an example of how people in smaller groups responded faster than people in larger groups. There were several reports illustrating this difference but one was sufficient in the summary to support the statement. You have to be careful, however, not to leave out key findings. A good rule of thumb is if there are several examples of a result, just report one.

2) I did not leave out any of the basic findings. They are all there.

3) All of the previous comments about writing, etc. still apply here as well.

Discussion

Most of the participants believed that the other student participant was having a seizure. Determinants of this were: 1) the surprise to find out that the seizure was simulated when debriefed after the experiment; and 2) comments made while the student participant was having the seizure suggesting that the participant believed it to be happening.

Participants who did not report the seizure often appeared to be more anxious and concerned than those who reported the seizure. Darley and Latane suggest that the response of
these participants may be due to the on-going conflict about what they should do in the situation.
It was reported that they wanted to help, but they didn’t know if responding would be an
over-reaction and reveal the identity of the other participants (thus destroying their anonymity).
In the two-person case, the need to act appeared to be great given that the participants believed
that they were the only one aware of the emergency and capable of acting. This need to act
became less as more people were added and the responsibility is dispersed among more people.
Therefore, this confirmed their hypothesis.

Men and women responded equally fast even though theoretically it might be supposed
that men may be expected to take more initiative given societal expectations. Darley and Latane
suggest that this particular emergency did not require direct intervention but secondary
intervention, reporting an emergency to an authority. Therefore, they suggest that this is the
reason why there may have been no difference in gender or authority figure. Everyone is equally
capable of reporting regardless of gender or medical training. Personality traits such as social
responsibility, need for approval, alienation, and authoritarianism did not predict the likelihood
to help or the speed of response thus indicating that those reasons reported in the media may not
be, in fact, the actual reasons why people do not respond to emergency situations. This may
indicate that contextual factors may be stronger than personality factors in determining when and
if people will help in an emergency.

The Discussion reports the meaning of the findings. It interprets what the findings
may mean so that it is more understandable and readable than the results section.

Why this summary of the Discussion is good:
1) An example of how the findings are interpreted would be how Darley and Latane suggest a reason why people who did not respond appear just as anxious and those who did report and maybe even more anxious. You don’t really have to understand this to summarize. You just have to read the section and report a succinct summary, but it is good to understand the purpose of the section.

2) All of the previous comments about grammar, cohesiveness are still relevant here as well.