

California Writing Project

Why People Don't Help in a Crisis: Writing Arguments About Bystanders

CWP Improving Students' Analytical Writing Teacher Inquiry Team

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From Teacher to Teacher

The lesson that follows provides students with multiple strategies for interacting with and making sense of a reading passage and writing topic, “Why People Don’t Help in a Crisis,” used as the 1987 University of California’s Analytical Writing Placement Examination (AWPE) for entering freshmen students. The lesson also provides an instructional sequence that will help our students develop a clear and accurate understanding of the passage and use the ideas in the passage to discover and develop their own perspectives.

That we developed this lesson for use with our eighth grade students as well as our ninth and tenth grade students may cause some of you to question our sanity. As a part of the California Writing Project’s Improving Students’ Analytical Writing program, we have been collaborating with fellow secondary teachers across the state on effective ways to equip our under-prepared students to write more analytically. The straightforward structure of the AWPE—writing an argumentative, analytical essay in response to an issue-based, nonfiction text of about 1,000 words— gives us one example of the kind of intellectual work we want our students to learn and practice. We have no desire to use the AWPE format just for reasons of college test preparation though. Instead, the AWPE reading and writing task gives us a concrete way to begin to teach our students to write analytically and read critically, which is the currency of college work and success. Test prep is too low a bar.

For this lesson, we decided to use “Why People Don’t Help in a Crisis” because the topic is compelling to our students and the text, with thoughtful scaffolding for the reading, is surprisingly accessible even to our eighth graders.

Text Resources

For student use

“Why People Don’t Help in a Crisis,” University of California Analytical Writing Placement Examination, 1987. (Used with the permission of Educational Testing Service. See the appendixes for three versions: 1) the original as administered by the University of California; 2) the original with space for students to annotate the text; and 3) three different versions designed for use with English learners as a combination of reading and discussion, an adaptation of a Directed Reading Thinking Activity.)

The original *New York Times* article: “Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn’t Call Police” <http://www2.selu.edu/Academics/Faculty/sCraig/gansberg.html> (accessed July 10, 2012).

For teacher use

Original research report by Darley and Latané:

Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility

http://www.wadsworth.com/psychology_d/templates/student_resources/0155060678_rathus/ps/ps19.html (accessed July 10, 2012).

Teaching Context

Teachers participating in the Improving Students’ Analytical Writing program (ISAW), a statewide learning community of the California Writing Project, developed this lesson primarily for eighth, ninth, and tenth grade students. Some seventh grade students at some ISAW schools also wrote to this lesson. ISAW teams of teachers work with students at low-performing middle and high schools (all API 1-3 schools). Most of the middle school students for whom this lesson was designed were from large urban or very rural schools with high poverty and high English learner student populations.

Text Type, Genre, Writing Prompt

The AWPE genre is an Argument/Analytical Essay written in response to a nonfiction text, in this case a passage that was excerpted from an article written by John Darley and Bibb Latané. Both authors are professors of psychology and collaborated on research about bystanders' responses to emergencies.

- **Writing Prompt (an AWPE prompt includes the reading passage and the writing topic)**

Why People Don't Help in a Crisis

Students read the Darley and Latané passage and then respond:

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain—or justify—such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" itself.

For more about the AWPE and genre expectations of both argument and analysis, link here (<http://www.ucop.edu/elwr/index.html>) and scroll down to these sections: 1) The University-wide Requirement and Examination: Its Place in the University Curriculum; and 2) Analytical Writing Placement Examination: Design and Expectations.

Instructional Strategies

- Quick Writes
- Metacognitive marking of text
- Interacting with the text through annotation
- Interactive writing to quotations and examples from the text
- Developing examples from experience, observation, reading, and viewing
- Using student essays as models, for genre analysis, and for assessment
- Self-assessment and peer assessment after early drafts
- Revision and editing conferences

Common Core State Standards

Standards in bold are focus standards. Those not in bold are important supporting standards.

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Grade 8

- 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.**

Grade 9-10

- 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.**

Writing Standards

Text Type and Purposes

Grade 8

- 1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.**
 - a. Introduce claim(s)**, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
 - b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence**, using accurate, credible sources and **demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text**.
 - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.
 - d. Establish and maintain a formal style.
 - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.**

Grades 9-10

- 1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts**, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
 - a. Introduce precise claim(s)**, distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
 - b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.**
 - c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
 - d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
 - e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.**

English Language Development Standards Grades 8, 9, and 10

Collaborative: Bridging

1. Exchanging of information/ideas
2. Interacting via written English
3. Adapting language choices

Interpretive: Bridging

5. Listen Actively
6. Reading/viewing closely a) and b)

Productive: Bridging

10. Writing
11. Justifying/arguing
12. Selecting language resources

Structuring Cohesive Texts: Bridging

1. Text structure
2. Cohesion

Connecting and Condensing Ideas: Bridging

6. Connecting ideas

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

Interact with an informative/analytical text by using the following critical reading strategies to prepare for writing essay:

- taking notes
- asking questions of the text and the author
- reacting to the ideas of the text
- connecting personal experiences to the ideas of the text
- choosing and explaining quotations from the text
- developing examples and comparing them to the examples in the text
- relating observations and other readings to the ideas and examples in the text
- taking a reader's position on the author's ideas

Session One: Setting the Stage for Reading and Writing About the Issue

1. Select and copy the version of "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" that you want to use with your students. See the appendix for the three different versions.
2. Before passing out the passage to students and to prepare students for reading it, read them the introductory note that prefaces the text.

"The following passage is adapted from an article published in 1968 by John Darley and Bibb Latané. Darley and Latané, both professors of psychology, collaborated on research about bystanders' responses to emergencies and crimes. Interest in this subject was high during the 1960's as a result of people's surprise and shock at the behavior of witnesses to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese. After cries for help awakened them, Genovese's New York City neighbors watched from their apartment windows but did not call police or otherwise aid Genovese during the half hour that she was repeatedly stabbed in a parking lot across the street."

Ask students to write their first reactions to and questions about the introductory note. Have students share and discuss what they wrote, using a strategy that works for you: pair-share, volunteers, or triads.

Have students reread what they wrote and add any new ideas from the discussion. Then ask them to write any reasons that occur to them for why not one of thirty-eight witnesses helped Kitty Genovese in any way, not even by calling the police.

Note: Students can read about this event in the New York Times article, "Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call Police" at this link: <http://www2.selu.edu/Academics/Faculty/scraig/gansberg.html>

3. Post, project, or read the following prompts for Quick Writes.

Write a Quick Write on what comes to mind when you read these two questions:

- Do you recall a time when you saw someone in crisis or who needed help, but you did not take action? Write about it.
- Do you recall a time when you observed someone who saw another person in crisis but did not take action? Write about it.

To close the session or for homework, ask students to write their reaction to the question: Why don't people help in a crisis?

Session Two: Reading, Marking Up, Annotating

1. If students have not done so already, ask them to share their answers to the Quick Writes, especially their thinking about why people don't help others who are in urgent need of help. Chart their ideas.
2. Distribute copies of the passage, "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" and tell students that they will be reading what two researchers, Darley and Latané, found when they created a research study to answer that question.
3. Most of the teachers collaborating on this lesson put students to work reading the passage and using the following metacognitive marking strategy. A few of us read the first two paragraphs to model the process and make sure students understood it.

Metacognitive Marking:

- Students draw a box around (or highlight) a section they are confused about and put a question mark in the margin.
 - They draw a circle around a word they don't recognize or know.
 - They place an exclamation point next to a paragraph they mostly understand.
 - At the end of the passage, if they mostly understand the text, they draw a smiley face. If they mostly didn't understand the passage, they draw a sad face.
4. Some teachers used the annotation version of the passage with their students. They included the following instructions with the passage.
 5. Read the essay "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis." As you read, you may use the margins to note your thoughts, reactions, and questions. You may also underline passages you think are memorable or important.
 6. Teachers who felt their students would need more support for their reading used one or all of the supported reading versions to read and discuss the passage along with their students.
 7. After students have read the passage, using any of the versions, lead a discussion to clarify what was confusing, define words that are unknown, and answer any other questions students have. Reread any parts that are particularly thorny.
 8. Ask students to read the passage again and then write a Quick Write to the following questions:
 - What reasons do Darley and Latané give for people not helping others in crisis?
 - What is your first response to their reasons? Are their reasons similar to yours?

Have students share and discuss their writing.

Session Three: Interacting with the Text and Other Texts

1. Ask students to create a double-entry journal or a T-chart. Post or project the two quotations from the essay listed below. Have students write the quotations on the left side of their journal or T-chart. On the right side, ask them to write their ideas about each of the quotations. They might consider how these quotations are alike or different, what they remind them of in their own life, or any other questions or comments that seem appropriate.
 - a. "People trying to interpret a situation often look at those around them to see how to react. If everyone else is calm and indifferent, they will tend to remain so; if everyone else is reacting strongly, they are likely to do so as well."

- b. "Instead, we often find that a bystander to an emergency is an anguished individual in genuine doubt, wanting to do the right thing but compelled to make complex decisions under pressure of stress and fear."
2. Then ask students to work individually or with a partner to find at least two additional quotations that were important to their understanding of the text. Have students add these to their journal or T-chart and then respond.
 3. Have students reread the passage and note specific examples Darley and Latané use to explain how people can see someone in crisis but not take any steps to help. Then have them skim the Quick Writes they wrote of their own experiences with or observations of people not helping.

Now give students time to think about and write down counter examples:

- Do you recall a time when you saw someone who needed help and you took action? Write about it.
- Do you recall a time when you observed someone who saw another person in crisis and did take action? Write about it.
- What do you think now? Why don't people help someone in crisis? When, how, and why do people help?

Ask students to think of their reading experiences. Can they recall examples from their reading of newspapers, novels, biographies, or stories when someone saw others in need of help and had to decide to help or not?

Have them think about television news programs or documentaries that featured people in crisis? Did someone help or choose to let someone else act instead?

Some teachers encouraged their students to collaborate on web searches of online newspapers or television news stations. Their task: finding news stories of bystanders who remained bystanders and of others who became upstanders and helped.

4. Give students time to write about some of these examples. After, have students share and discuss their responses.

Session Four: From Generating Ideas to Selecting and Summing Up

1. Give students time to look back and think over all of their Quick Writes, annotations, etc. Ask them to write their answers to the following questions:
 - What you think about Darley and Latané's ideas? What do they say are the reasons for people's lack of response to someone who needs help?
 - Do the reasons they found in their research for people not helping others explain why people made that decision?
 - Do the reasons they found in their research justify not helping someone in crisis.
 - What do your experiences, observations, and readings tell you? Do they support what Darley and Latané are saying? Partially support? Do not support at all?
 - What are the best examples you have already written about that support the position you are taking?
2. Now ask students to read the writing prompt/topic and compare what they just wrote to the questions in the prompt. Have them discuss and share how ready they are to tackle the essay.

Session Five: Using Student Essays as Examples and Models

1. Copy the UC Sample A and B essays for your students, so they can mark them up and analyze them. Project copies of these essays on a document camera or use similar tools so that you can support them with any modeling they may need. But as soon as they are ready, have them work on analyzing the sample essays in pairs or triads.

Where does the writer answer the questions in the writing topic?

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain—or justify—such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" itself.

- a. Where in the essay did the writer include the factors Darley and Latané say are the reasons why people do not help others in crisis? There is no requirement to include all of the researchers' reasons, but how many reasons does the writer include? Mark on the student essay where you find your answers.
 - b. Where in the essay does the writer discuss if the researchers' reasons explain or justify why people don't help others? If the writer doesn't write about that, can you tell what the writer believes from the examples, language, tone, etc.? Mark on the student essay where you find your answers.
 - c. Write two or three sentences that sum up how the writer is answering the first two questions of the writing topic. Then find where in the essay the writer includes examples from the passage, experience and observations, or other readings to back up or support that answer.
 - d. How are the essays similar or different? How are the introductions similar or different? How is the structure or logic of each similar or different?
2. Have students share their ideas and discuss as a whole class.

Session Six: Planning and Drafting

1. Because this is the first time our students wrote this type of analytical essay, we decided to do most of the drafting in class. Make sure your students have all their notes, Quick Writes, their annotated copies of the text, etc.

Have them begin planning their essay by thinking on paper about how they will answer the questions of the writing topic, what their own "summing up" sentences are, and what examples they want to use to back that up and in what order.

2. Once they have a map of their ideas, let them know they are ready to write or compose on a computer and support them along the way. They'll have questions, the most frequent being, "Is this OK?"

Session Seven: Self-Assessment, Peer Assessment, Editing, Revision

1. Distribute the assessment guide to students. (See the Assessment Guide below)
Explain that they will be looking at their own essays from two perspectives – how well they answered the questions of the writing topic, and how well they incorporated examples and reasons into their essays.

Ground them by asking them to assess the two UC sample essays they read in Session Five. They have already marked up and discussed these essays, but it often surprises students when they

realize how naturally they can discuss what the writers did well and what they could improve. Focus the assessment discussion on the first three dimensions—Response to Essay Topic, Understanding and Use of Text, and Development.

2. Next, ask students to read and assess their own first draft, making notes on the essay about what they have done well and what they want to change.

Specifically ask them to note on their essay where they have answered the first two questions of the writing topic and what examples and reasons they used to back up their answer. This should lead them to find places for revision.

3. Repeat the assessment with a peer partner who will read their partner's first draft from the same two perspectives—how well the partner answered the questions in the writing topic and how well the partner incorporated examples and reasons into their essays. Partners should write notes—questions, suggestions, and compliments—for each other.
4. Partners share their peer assessments, ask questions of each other, and strategize how to improve their essays.
5. Either as a whole class or in small group conferences address language issues that will help students with their editing: the mix of verb tenses for discussing examples of experience of from the text, transition and cohesion phrases, quotations, etc.
6. Students revise, edit, and proofread their essay. Again, we devoted class time to all of these steps, so that we could support our students through the complete process.

Assessment Guide

ASSESSMENT GUIDE FOR ARGUMENTATION/ANALYTICAL WRITING					
	Not in Evidence	Some Evidence of Competency	Approaching Competency	Competent	Exceeds Competency
Response to Essay Topic: The writer responds effectively to the writing task. The writer demonstrates that he or she can present the ideas of the author(s) cogently and develop his or her own ideas in response					
Understanding & Use of Text: The writer provides the reader a clear and accurate understanding of the text(s) and effectively uses the ideas in the text(s) to develop the writer's response.					
Development: The writer develops the essay effectively by analyzing well-chosen examples from passage, experience, observation or other readings in ways that make his or her perspective compelling					
Organization: The writer organizes the essay effectively, establishes a focus, and guides the reader through a coherent, well-ordered presentation of his or her ideas. It is clear how each new paragraph advances the writer's response to the essay topic.					
Word Choice & Sentence Structure: The writer uses a wide variety of sentences in ways that help convey and reinforce his or her ideas and chooses words that convey his or her ideas clearly and precisely.					
Grammar, Usage, & Conventions: The writer makes sophisticated use of grammatical relationships and punctuation to support the effective communication of his or her ideas.					

The teacher may use all or part of the assessment guide to evaluate student writing.

The categories and descriptions that make up this assessment guide are taken from the Analytical Writing Improvement Continuum (AWIC) developed by high school, community college, and university teachers of writing who are Teacher Consultants with the California Writing Project. The scoring guide in these modules is just a slice of the AWIC and gives a glimpse into this improvement assessment tool that is organized by 18 essential attributes of analytical writing and uses no deficit language. Contact the California Writing Project for more information about the ISAW assessment tools and the ways they support preparing students for college- and career-readiness.

Reflections

Overall, we were pleased with how our students engaged with this difficult task. Since understanding the passage seemed critical to responding to the prompt, we decided to concentrate on scaffolding students' understanding of and interacting with the text, making sure the strategies we used supported the thinking they would need to lean on for drafting. We wanted to make sure that students could explain in their own words what was significant about the prompt and the passage.

Although we didn't specifically name the genre features of claim and evidence yet, we set the stage for that as a next step. Many students didn't know yet that many of them were writing claims—their position on if the factors explained or justified the lack of response—but they will in the next lessons. Our ongoing challenge is to help students build a bridge from the reading to their writing and revising, while also assisting students to discover the relationship between their ideas and those in the text. This lesson is the first step of many sequential, intentional steps across that bridge.

Although this lesson scaffolds reading and thinking strategies in response to the passage "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," the strategies can be adapted easily to other texts. For example, the strategies can just as easily be adapted to "My Turn" essays that were published in *Newsweek* magazines and are now archived on *The Daily Beast* website. Magazine and newspaper editorials or other non-fiction texts that take a position on an issue will work, too.

Instructional Resources and Professional Resources

University of California Office of Student Affairs. (2012). *Analytical Writing Placement Exam*
<http://www.ucop.edu/elwr/process.html> (accessed July 12, 2012).

Digital Resources

The Daily Beast. (2008) *Why Didn't Anyone Help?*
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/06/11/why-didn-t-anyone-help.html>
(accessed July 12, 2012).

Student Sample A

Who Cares?

People just don't care about one another anymore or do they? After several cases in which people in emergencies were not given help and seemingly ignored by witnesses, several researchers have set out to discover if people do in fact still care. In their article, "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," John Darley and Bibb Latané reveal several factors that may explain people's lack of response to others' distress. These factors include how others around a witness affect what he or she interprets from a situation, but American society has taught us not to pay too close attention to other people in public, that a person may not treat the event as an emergency for the fear of looking like a fool, and that people feel their responsibility to do something is diffused and diluted when other people are around. These factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress quite nicely, but in no way can such behavior be justified.

Reacting as those around us react is very common and most everybody does this in "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," Darley and Latané say, "People trying to interpret a situation often look at those around them to see how they react." This is often used by people to gauge how to react in new and different situations.

Closely related to reacting as others react is not wanting to look like a fool by treating a situation like an emergency. Darley and Latané say that, "In a crowd, each individual fears looking like a fool as a result of behaving as if a situation is an emergency when, in fact, it is not." When the individual starts to take action toward the emergency he or she no longer is reacting as the rest of the crowd. When it is discovered by the individual that it was not, in fact, an emergency the crowd can single the individual out because he or she was the only person who made the wrong assessment of the situation. If, of course, a group reacts to a false emergency, members of that group will not feel so foolish because they were not alone.

Of course, there is little reason for people to feel foolish if Americans do not notice people in a bona fide emergency, what reason would they have to notice a person in a false one. "Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public," say Darley and Latané. This stems mainly from two things. First, Americans are self absorbed. Second, we are taught to respect the privacy of others, so they will respect ours.

Another factor cited by Darley and Latané is that, "The presence of other bystanders may make each person less likely to intervene," because they feel their responsibility is diluted. People are unwilling to do anything because they feel that somebody is or will take action. If you are in a room with another person and ask them to do something it is very likely they will do what you ask because it is implied you are speaking directly to them. However, if you are in a room full of people and make the same request it is unlikely action will be taken because people assume you are talking to someone else, someone else is more qualified, or some other rationalization they make for their inaction.

People don't help in a crisis for many reasons. Some reasons are legitimate, such as having an emergency of your own. Others not so much, such as not wanting to look like a fool. However, these reasons do not change the fact that you cannot depend on people to help in a crisis. Therefore, follow these simple steps to avoid the callused and indifference of the crowd. Step 1: Don't get yourself into an emergency. Step 2: Call 911. It's their job to respond to emergencies not mine.

Annotation for Student Sample A

As fluid and lively as this essay is, it does not address all the questions of writing topic. In truth, it is an extended summary of the passage that addresses only the first question—what factors explain people's lack of response.

More interesting is that the writer reverses course from a lack of response not being justified to it's not my problem; call 911. Surprising is that he includes no examples beyond the reading passage.

Next steps for this writer include:

- 1) First—conferencing with him to determine if he was unsure of the writing task, or if he chose not to respond to it. After all, students in upper elementary and middle school have practiced lots of summaries for the CST.
- 2) No matter what the answer, this writer is more than ready to learn to expand on examples from the passage and to develop and use examples from experience, observation, and other texts. He's ready to learn to turn his recognizable point of view into a claim to which he can link his examples. He's ready to learn how to use his skills with summary to orient his readers to an issue-based reading passage as a way for him to develop his ideas and examples in response to the issue.

Student Sample B

Why People Don't Help in a Crisis

When people see someone else in distress, they don't tend to help because they think that it's not an emergency. People think that it's not their responsibility and don't want to invade someone else's privacy. When people are busy in the working world they don't care about anyone else. It's the typical American culture. They don't about anyone else besides themselves.

In an American society their behavior is all the same. If it's not your family or friends getting hurt, why should you go stop and help out. My theory is that people just don't care because of greed. The greed for money. For example, a guy couldn't be late to work or else he would get fired and lose his paycheck. Therefore he had no time to help the child that sprained his ankle while crossing the street because he couldn't forfeit his job.

But not all the people are the same. Not all people ignore people in a crisis. My mother and father always taught me not to ignore people when in need. And if you don't help others then who will help you when you are in need. People just act differently but not all the people are the same.

One time when I was a small child when I was around 13 years of age, I fell off my bike and hurt myself right in the middle of the street and people did stop to help me, but the only reason why they stopped to help me was because I was blocking the roadway for them to pass. If I were to just hurt myself on the sidewalk or something, I bet they would just pass and not notice a thing.

That just shows how people reach under certain circumstances. If you're not in emergency because you're blocking them, there's not reason for them to help you. And that's the truth.

Annotation for Student Sample B

This tenth grade special education student has written a final draft that she wanted to keep working on, so her teacher kept conferencing with her. The student did have an understanding of the factors the researchers discussed for why people don't help those in crisis, and she knew that she knew. She also knew she had more opinions than examples for them. When her teacher asked what she really wanted to say, she pointed to the last paragraph—sometimes people, under certain circumstances. That's where she and her teacher began to work on a revision, developing examples for those certain circumstances.

Student Sample C

The Gawking Crowd

It is true. Everyday someone somewhere is in need of help. Sometimes they get help and other times a sea of people flow by as if that person wasn't even there. There are many reasons for this; as Darley and Latané said, it could be that people look to see how others react to get their own reaction. Sometimes it is caused by respecting the privacy of others. Even after that, a person still has to decide if it is really an emergency; and when there is the presence of others, many people simply become a fish and follow the school of people. I think that Darley and Latané's idea explain people's lack of response to others in distress almost perfectly. My own experiences, observations of others, and examples from "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" all fit with their ideas.

An example from my own experience is when my mother cut her finger. I remember hearing her yell, so I ran downstairs to make sure that she is okay. It turned out that she cut her finger while she was making dinner. I ran to the sink to wet a paper towel for her and talked to her about it. There were no other people around so of course I was going to react, and it was obvious that something was wrong because blood was coming out of her finger. Respecting the privacy of others was not an issue because if you hear a scream you come running.

I was sitting down in the bleachers at the Buchanan High track where a meet was being held. The next event was the 110m hurdles. The gun sounded and the athletes exploded over the hurdles. One of Buchanan's own was in the lead when all of the sudden he hit a hurdle and went down hard. Former teammates that had set out the hurdles came rushing to his assistance. He was in pain and limping, but okay. It think that they came to his assistance because he is a good friend and was obviously hurt. Privacy was not an issue because everyone was watching the race. When a lot of people came rushing I think it gave them confidence to proceed because many people obviously did the same thing.

In "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," 38 witnesses stared out their window just gawking at the murder of Kitty Genovese. I think that the main reasons they didn't help was for fear of their own lives and they probably don't want Kitty Genovese or the attackers to know that they were invading their privacy. The presence of others was an issue because when there is all those other people who are watching, you can't help but wonder why doesn't someone else go help. Besides, I don't think that many people want to put their life on the line for someone they don't even know.

I guess that getting help is like the lottery today, all you can do is hope. There are always factors that increase or decrease the chance, a big one is when there are a lot of other people. Darley & Latané ideas fit with almost any situation with a person in need of assistance. All we can do is hope that a cut finger, a fallen individual, and an attacked person will receive help.

Annotation for Student Sample C

What this writer has paid careful attention to is addressing the questions of the writing topic. Factors from Darley and Latané's research for why people don't help others in crisis. First paragraph—check. Explain or justify—my examples fit—end of first paragraph—check. An example from experience, observation, the text—a paragraph each—check.

Next steps for this writer include:

- 1) A conference with the writer to let him know what he's done right and what there is to begin building on.
- 2) A discussion about the last paragraph. Does he really believe that getting help is like playing the lottery or that all we can do is hope for help? If yes, how can he rework or strengthen the claim beyond what he has written: Do the examples fit the researchers' factors? What is the so what or the significance? Supporting students to move beyond just presenting ideas to making a case for the significance of them takes time, examples, and practice. This writer is ready to make those moves.

Student Sample D

Thunk! I watched as a shovel was violently swung at a man's head only a few feet away from me. I heard his skull sickly crack when his head and the shovel made contact. He falls to the ground and is unconscious as his attacker dashes out of site, leaving the murder weapon behind. I stood there frozen in fear holding a spoon filled with fruit salad half way to my mouth. I was at a Bar B Que and never in my life did I expect to witness something so terrible. My thoughts ran wild. What should I do? I have to go for help! Why won't my legs move? There's a lot of people here. They'll help! This can't be happening! I have to help!

There was silence all around me, like when you press the mute button on TV. Everyone just stood there and watched as this man in his own puddle of blood. It was like we were hypnotized and could not move. It went on like this for 5 minutes until someone finally screams out "Quick call 911" and just like that the spell was broken. Everyone including myself scattered around looking for a phone.

How could I have just stood there for 5 minutes and not even make an attempt to save this mans life. I felt so ashamed. In John Darley and Bibb Latané's essay "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," they express that the reason why people don't help even when they want to is because people are "compelled to make complex decisions under pressure of stress and fear" and also that "the bystander's reactions are shaped by the actions of others." I strongly agree with Darley and Latané because in a time of crisis not everyone is strong enough to decide to help and not able to think clearly and what is right.

I think of myself as a nice person who is always willing to give someone a helping hand but why wasn't I the first one to help that injured man? Why did I just stand there like an idiot watching him die? Darley and Latané states that for a passerby to assist a person in need, "the bystander has to notice that something is happening. [This person] must tear [themselves] away from "their" private thoughts and pay attention." Sure, I notice what was happening but I couldn't tear myself away from my private thoughts. To afraid I actually hoped that someone else will come to this mans rescue. I don't know what would have happen if that "somebody" didn't speak up. Would we have just watched that poor man die. Darley and Latané talks about how 38 witnesses watched the murder of Kitty Genovese through their windows and did nothing. Were we all going to do the same to this man? The thought makes me mad at myself. In a crisis such as this most people's judgment goes bad.

Fear causes bad judgment. I was so afraid that I didn't and couldn't think of anything to do. Not many people are able to push away fear and clear their minds to think right and do what is rational. Some people will even try to forget that the disturbing situation had occurred. I remembered as I was fumbling around for a phone some people at the Bar B Que busied themselves with cleaning pots and pans, trying to forget that there was a man in a pool of blood just outside. Fear can cause people to do unrational things and not allow them to do what is right.

People don't help people at a time of crisis not because they don't want to but because they can't. Not everyone is strong enough to do so. Fear can overcome the mind of human beings and doesn't allow them to make the good judgment that they should be able to.

Annotation for Student Sample D

Look back at the assessment tool and annotate how well this student addressed the writing passage and prompt and how well she is learning what an analytical essay can be. She has language issues to work on, yes. She has been in ELD classes until this current year. But she is working her way across that bridge from reading to writing to revising.

University of California Passage & Topic

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The following passage is adapted from an article published in 1968 by John Darley and Bibb Latané, both professors of psychology, collaborated on research about bystanders' responses to emergencies and crimes. Interest in this subject was high during the 1960's as a result of people's surprise and shock at the behavior of witnesses to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese: after her cries for help awakened them, Genovese's New York City neighbors watched from their apartment windows but did not call police or aid police or otherwise aid Genovese during the half hour that she was repeatedly stabbed in a parking lot across the street.

Why People Don't Help In a Crisis

Andrew Mormille is stabbed as he rides in a New York City subway train. Eleven other riders flee to another car as the 17-year-old boy bleeds to death; not one comes to his assistance, even after his attackers left the car. He dies. Eleanor Bradley trips and breaks her leg while shopping on New York City's Fifth Avenue. Dazed and in shock, she calls for help, but the hurrying stream of people simply parts and flows past. Finally, after 40 minutes, a taxi driver stops and helps her to a doctor. How can so many people watch another human being in distress and do nothing? Why don't they help?

Since we started research on bystanders' responses to emergencies, we have heard many explanations for the lack of intervention in such cases. All of these explanations share one characteristic: they set witnesses who do not intervene apart from the rest of us and assume they are indifferent to what is happening. But if we look closely at the behavior of these witnesses, they begin to seem less indifferent. The 38 witnesses to the famous murder of Kitty Genovese, for example, did not merely look at the scene once again and then ignore it. They continued to stare out of their windows, caught, fascinated, distressed, unwilling to act but unable to turn away.

Why, then, didn't they act? There are three things bystanders must do if they are to intervene in an emergency: notice that something is happening, interpret that event as an emergency, and decide that they have personal responsibility for intervention. The presence of other bystanders may at each stage inhibit action.

People trying to interpret a situation often look at those around them to see how to react. If everyone else is calm and indifferent, they will tend to remain so; if everyone else is reacting strongly, they are likely to do so as well. This tendency is not merely slavish conformity; ordinarily we derive much valuable information about new situations from how others around us behave. It's a rare traveler who, in picking a roadside restaurant, chooses to stop at one where no other cars appear in the parking lot.

Suppose that a man has a heart attack. He clutches his chest, staggers to the nearest building and slumps sitting to the sidewalk. Will a passerby come to his assistance? First, the bystander has to notice that something is happening. He must tear himself away from his private thoughts and pay attention. But Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public. We are taught to respect the privacy of others, and when among strangers, we close our ears and avoid staring. In a crowd, then, each person is less likely to notice a potential emergency than when alone.

Once an event is noticed, an onlooker must decide if it is truly an emergency. Emergencies are not always clearly labeled as such; "smoke" pouring into a waiting room may be caused by fire, or it may merely indicate a leak in a steam pipe. Screams in the street may signal an assault or a family quarrel. A man lying in a doorway may be having a coronary—or he may simply be sleeping off a drunken binge. In a crowd, each individual fears looking like a fool as a result of behaving as if a situation is an emergency when, in fact, it is not.

Even if a person defines an event as an emergency, the presence of other bystanders may still make each person less likely to intervene. Each individual feels that his or her responsibility is diffused and diluted. Thus, if your car breaks down on a busy highway, hundreds of drivers whiz by you without anyone's stopping to help—but if you are stuck on a nearly deserted country road, whoever passes you first is likely to stop.

Thus, the stereotype is unconcerned, depersonalized urbanite, blandly watching the misfortunes of others, proves inaccurate. Instead, we often find that a bystander to an emergency is an anguished individual in genuine doubt, wanting to do the right thing but compelled to make complex decisions under pressure of stress and fear. The bystander's reactions are shaped by the actions of others—and all too frequently by their inaction.

Essay Topic

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain—or justify—such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis?" itself.

Topic and passage used with the permission of ETS.

University of California Passage & Topic – Version for Annotating

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The following passage is adapted from an article published in 1968 by John Darley and Bibb Latané. Darley and Latané, both professors of psychology, collaborated on research about bystanders' responses to emergencies and crimes. Interest in this subject was high during the 1960's as a result of people's surprise and shock at the behavior of witnesses to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese. After cries for help awakened them, Genovese's New York City neighbors watched from their apartment windows but did not call police or otherwise aid Genovese during the half hour that she was repeatedly stabbed in a parking lot across the street.

READING SELECTION: Read the essay "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis." As you read, you may use the margins to note your thoughts, reactions, and questions. You may also underline passages you think are memorable or important.

Why People Don't Help In a Crisis

Andrew Mormille is stabbed as he rides in a New York City subway train. Eleven other riders flee to another car as the 17-year-old boy bleeds to death; not one comes to his assistance, even after his attackers left the car. He dies. Eleanor Bradley trips and breaks her leg while shopping on New York City's Fifth Avenue. Dazed and in shock, she calls for help, but the hurrying stream of people simply parts and flows past. Finally, after 40 minutes, a taxi driver stops and helps her to a doctor. How can so many people watch another human being in distress and do nothing? Why don't they help?

Since we started research on bystanders' responses to emergencies, we have heard many explanations for the lack of intervention in such cases. All of these explanations share one characteristic: they set witnesses who do not intervene apart from the rest of us and assume they are indifferent to what is happening. But if we look closely at the behavior of these witnesses, they begin to seem less indifferent. The 38 witnesses to the famous murder of Kitty Genovese, for example, did not merely look at the scene once again and then ignore it. They continued to stare out of their windows, caught, fascinated, distressed, unwilling to act but unable to turn away.

Why, then, didn't they act? There are three things bystanders must do if they are to intervene in an emergency: notice that something is happening, interpret that event as an emergency, and decide that they have personal responsibility for intervention. The presence of other bystanders may at each stage inhibit action.

People trying to interpret a situation often look at those around them to see how to react. If everyone else is calm and indifferent, they will tend to remain so; if everyone else is reacting strongly, they are likely to do so as well. This tendency is not merely slavish conformity; ordinarily we derive much valuable information about new situations from how others around us behave. It's a rare traveler who, in picking a roadside restaurant, chooses to stop at one where no other cars appear in the parking lot.

MY THOUGHTS, REACTIONS, AND QUESTIONS

Topic and passage used with the permission of ETS.

Why People Don't Help In a Crisis continued

Suppose that a man has a heart attack. He clutches his chest, staggers to the nearest building and slumps sitting to the sidewalk. Will a passerby come to his assistance? First, the bystander has to notice that something is happening. He must tear himself away from his private thoughts and pay attention. But Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public. We are taught to respect the privacy of others, and when among strangers, we close our ears and avoid staring. In a crowd, then, each person is less likely to notice a potential emergency than when alone.

Once an event is noticed, an onlooker must decide if it is truly an emergency. Emergencies are not always clearly labeled as such; "smoke" pouring into a waiting room may be caused by fire, or it may merely indicate a leak in a steam pipe. Screams in the street may signal an assault or a family quarrel. A man lying in a doorway may be having a coronary—or he may simply be sleeping off a drunken binge. In a crowd, each individual fears looking like a fool as a result of behaving as if a situation is an emergency when, in fact, it is not.

Even if a person defines an event as an emergency, the presence of other bystanders may still make each person less likely to intervene. Each individual feels that his or her responsibility is diffused and diluted. Thus, if your car breaks down on a busy highway, hundreds of drivers whiz by you without anyone's stopping to help—but if you are stuck on a nearly deserted country road, whoever passes you first is likely to stop.

Thus, the stereotype is unconcerned, depersonalized urbanite, blandly watching the misfortunes of others, proves inaccurate. Instead, we often find that a bystander to an emergency is an anguished individual in genuine doubt, wanting to do the right thing but compelled to make complex decisions under pressure of stress and fear. The bystander's reactions are shaped by the actions of others—and all too frequently by their inaction.

**MY THOUGHTS, REACTIONS,
AND QUESTIONS**

Essay Topic

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain—or justify—such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis?" itself.

Topic and passage used with the permission of ETS.

University of California Passage & Topic – Supported Reading Version A

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The following passage is adapted from an article published in 1968 by John Darley and Bibb Latané. Darley and Latané, both professors of psychology, collaborated on research about bystanders' responses to emergencies and crimes. Interest in this subject was high during the 1960's as a result of people's surprise and shock at the behavior of witnesses to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese: after her cries for help awakened them, Genovese's New York City neighbors watched from their apartment windows but did not call police or otherwise aid Genovese during the half hour that she was repeatedly stabbed in a parking lot across the street.

Who is Kitty Genovese? What happened to her? How does Darley and Latané's research relate to the Genovese story?

WHY PEOPLE DON'T HELP IN A CRISIS

Andrew Mormille is stabbed as he rides in a New York City subway train. Eleven other riders flee to another car as the 17-year-old boy bleeds to death; not one comes to his assistance, even after his attackers have left the car. He dies. Eleanor Bradley trips and breaks her leg while shopping on New York City's Fifth Avenue. Dazed and in shock, she calls for help, but the hurrying stream of people simply parts and flows past. Finally, after 40 minutes, a taxi driver stops and helps her to a doctor. How can so many people watch another human being in distress and do nothing? Why don't they help?

What do these two examples have in common with Kitty Genovese?

Since we started research on bystanders' responses to emergencies, we have heard many explanations for the lack of intervention in such cases. All of these explanations share one characteristic: they set witnesses who do not intervene apart from the rest of us and assume they are indifferent to what is happening. But if we look closely at the behavior of these witnesses, they begin to seem less indifferent. The 38 witnesses to the famous murder of Kitty Genovese, for example, did not merely look at the scene once and then ignore it. They continued to stare out of their windows, caught, fascinated, distressed, unwilling to act but unable to turn away.

Why, then, didn't they act? There are three things bystanders must do if they are to intervene in an emergency: notice that something is happening, interpret that event as an emergency, and decide that they have personal responsibility for intervention. The presence of other bystanders may at each stage inhibit action.

What 3 things need to happen so a person decides to help in an emergency?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

People trying to interpret a situation often look at those around them to see how to react. If everyone else is calm and indifferent, they will tend to remain so; if everyone else is reacting strongly, they are likely to do so as well. This tendency is not merely slavish conformity; ordinarily we derive much valuable information about new situations from how others around us behave. It's a rare traveler who, in picking a roadside restaurant, chooses to stop at one where no other cars appear in the parking lot.

Think of a time when it makes sense - or it might be safer - to do what everyone else is doing. Describe that time.

Suppose that a man has a heart attack. He clutches his chest, staggers to the nearest building and slumps sitting to the sidewalk. Will a passerby come to his assistance? First, the bystander has to notice that something is happening. He must tear himself away from his private thoughts and pay attention. But Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public. We are taught to respect the privacy of others, and when among strangers we close our ears and avoid staring. In a crowd, then, each person is less likely to notice a potential emergency than when alone.

Once an event is noticed, an onlooker must decide if it is truly an emergency. Emergencies are not always clearly labeled as such; "smoke" pouring into a waiting room may be caused by fire, or it may merely indicate a leak in a steam pipe. Screams in the street may signal an assault or a family quarrel. A man lying in a doorway may be having a coronary—or he may simply be sleeping off a drunken binge. In a crowd, each individual fears looking like a fool as a result of behaving as if a situation is an emergency when, in fact, it is not.

Even if a person defines an event as an emergency, the presence of other bystanders may still make each person less likely to intervene. Each individual feels that his or her responsibility is diffused and diluted. Thus, if your car breaks down on a busy highway, hundreds of drivers whiz by without anyone's stopping to help—but if you are stuck on a nearly deserted country road, whoever passes you first is likely to stop.

What reasons do Darley and Latané give to explain why people decide not to help someone in trouble?

Thus, the stereotype of the unconcerned, depersonalized urbanite, blandly watching the misfortunes of others, proves inaccurate. Instead, we often find that a bystander to an emergency is an anguished individual in genuine doubt, wanting to do the right thing but compelled to make complex decisions under pressure of stress and fear. The bystander's reactions are shaped by the actions of others—and all too frequently by their inaction.

How do you think that people living in a city are more affected by crowds/emergencies than people out in the country if you apply Darley and Latané's ideas?

ESSAY TOPIC

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain--or justify--such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" itself.

University of California Passage & Topic – Supported Reading Version B

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The following passage is adapted from an article published in 1968 by John Darley and Bibb Latané. Darley and Latané, both professors of psychology, collaborated on research about “bystanders’” responses – people in a crowd who are watching and possibly reacting - to emergencies and crimes. Interest in this subject was high during the 1960’s as a result of people’s surprise and shock at the behavior of witnesses to the 1964 murder of Kitty Genovese: after her cries for help awakened them, Genovese’s New York City neighbors watched from their apartment windows but did not call police or otherwise aid Genovese during the half hour that she was repeatedly stabbed in a parking lot across the street.

Who is Kitty Genovese? What happened to her? How does Darley and Latané’s research relate to the Genovese story?

WHY PEOPLE DON’T HELP IN A CRISIS

Andrew Mormille is stabbed as he rides in a New York City subway train. **Eleven other riders [run away] to another car** as the 17-year-old boy bleeds to death; not one comes to his assistance, even after his attackers have left the car. He dies.

Eleanor Bradley trips and breaks her leg while shopping on New York City’s Fifth Avenue. **She calls for help, but the hurrying people simply walk past her.** Finally, after 40 minutes, a taxi driver stops and helps her to a doctor. How can so many people watch another human being in distress and do nothing? Why don’t they help?

What do these two examples have in common with Kitty Genovese?

Since we started research on bystanders’ responses to emergencies, we have heard many explanations for **bystanders’ [not getting involved]** in such cases. All of these explanations share one characteristic: they [say that those bystanders don’t care about what is happening]. But if we look closely at the behavior of these [bystanders], they begin to seem less indifferent. The 38 witnesses to the famous murder of Kitty Genovese, for example, did not merely look at the scene once and then ignore it. They continued to stare out of their windows, caught, fascinated, distressed, unwilling to act but unable to turn away.

Why, then, didn’t they act? There are three things bystanders must do if they are to intervene in an emergency: notice that something is happening, interpret that event as an emergency, and decide that they have personal responsibility for intervention. The presence of other bystanders may at each stage inhibit action.

What 3 things need to happen so a person decides to help in an emergency?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

[Bystanders] trying to interpret a situation often look at those around them to see how to react. If everyone else is [ignoring the situation, so will the bystander]; if everyone else is [getting involved, the bystander most likely will get involved too]. [This does not mean that bystanders just don't think or that they just copy other people. A bystander can get a lot of information about what is a good thing to do from other people in a crowd. **Especially when you are in a new situation, it might be a good idea to follow along with what other people are doing** – you might assume that they know what is going on better than you do.]

Think of a time when it makes sense - or it might be safer - to do what everyone else is doing. Describe that time.

Suppose that a man has a heart attack [while walking down the street]. He clutches his chest and falls down to the sidewalk. Will a passerby come to his assistance? First, the bystander has to notice that something is happening. He must pay attention. **But Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public. We are taught to respect the privacy of others, and when among strangers we close our ears and avoid staring.** In a crowd, then, each person is less likely to notice a potential emergency than when alone.

Once an event is noticed, a bystander must decide if it is truly an emergency. Emergencies are not always clearly labeled as such. Screams in the street may be someone getting attacked or they may just be a family fight. A man lying in a doorway may be having a heart attack —or he may simply be drunk. **In a crowd, no one wants to look stupid for doing something when there is no emergency.**

Even if a bystander recognizes an emergency, the presence of other people may still cause the bystander to do nothing. For example, if your car breaks down on a busy street in the city, hundreds of cars go by without anyone stopping to help—but if your car breaks down on an empty country road, whoever drives by you first is likely to stop.

What reasons do Darley and Latané give to explain why people decide not to help someone in trouble?

So, the stereotype [of city people who don't care about anyone but themselves is not true.] Instead, we often find that a **bystander wants to do the right thing but might not** because of stress and fear. The bystander's reactions are affected by the actions – or inaction - of others.

How do you think that people living in a city are more affected by crowds/emergencies than people out in the country if you apply Darley and Latané's ideas?

ESSAY TOPIC

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain--or justify--such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" itself.

Topic and passage used with the permission of ETS.

University of California Passage & Topic – Supported Reading Version C

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: The following passage is adapted from an article published in 1968 by John Darley and Bibb Latané. Darley and Latané, both professors of psychology, collaborated on research about “bystanders’” responses – **people in a crowd who are watching and possibly reacting - to emergencies and crimes.** One night Kitty Genovese was stabbed in a parking lot. After her cries for help awakened her neighbors, Genovese’s New York City **neighbors watched from their apartment windows but did not call police** or otherwise aid Genovese during the half hour that she was **repeatedly stabbed** in a parking lot across the street.

Who is Kitty Genovese? What happened to her? How does Darley and Latané’s research relate to the Genovese story?

WHY PEOPLE DON’T HELP IN A CRISIS

Andrew Mormille is stabbed as he rides in a New York City subway train. **Eleven other riders [run away] to another car** as the 17-year-old boy bleeds to death; not one comes to his assistance, even after his attackers have left the car. He dies.

Eleanor Bradley trips and breaks her leg while shopping on New York City’s Fifth Avenue. **She calls for help, but the hurrying people simply walk past her.** Finally, after 40 minutes, a taxi driver stops and helps her to a doctor. How can so many people watch another human being in distress and do nothing? Why don’t they help?

What do these two examples have in common with Kitty Genovese?

Why didn’t the bystanders act? There are three things bystanders must do if they are to help in an emergency: notice that something is happening, see that event as an emergency, and decide that they should do something to help.

What 3 things need to happen so a person decides to help in an emergency?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Suppose that a man has a heart attack [while walking down the street]. He [grabs] his chest and falls down. Will a passerby [help]? First, the bystander has to notice that something is happening. He must pay attention. **But Americans consider it bad manners to look closely at other people in public.**

In a crowd, no one wants to look stupid for doing something when there is no emergency.

Even if a bystander recognizes an emergency, the presence of other people may still cause the bystander to do nothing. For example, if your car breaks down on a busy street in the city, hundreds of cars go by without anyone stopping to help—but if your car breaks down on an empty country road, whoever drives by you first is likely to stop.

What reasons do Darley and Latané give to explain why people decide not to help someone in trouble?

ESSAY TOPIC

According to Darley and Latané, what factors explain people's lack of response to others' distress? To what extent do you think that their ideas explain--or justify--such behavior? Write an essay responding to these questions; to develop your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples drawn from your own experience, your observation of others, or any of your reading—including "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis" itself.

Topic and passage used with the permission of ETS

University of California Sample A

Six teenage girls attacked and beat my mom. I sat in disbelief as my mother tried desperately to defend herself and my teammate. Everyone used to ask me, "How could you just sit there and watch someone hurt your mom?" I never had an answer. In Darley and Latané's article, "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," they offer an explanation to why people do not respond to people in distress. They say that there are three things a bystander must realize before he/she helps another person. From personal experience, I can honestly say that this article justifies slow response very well.

My freshman year in high school made many memories and learning experience for me. One of the memories I have is quite vivid. It was a Thursday afternoon and I had a softball game. If we won this game, against the last place team, we would become league champions. The second place team knew that our win was inevitable but decided to attend our game and harass our players. The six girls got kicked out of the game and waited for us to leave. My mom drove two of my friends and me home. When we stopped to let the first girl out of the car, the six girls who were at the game, pulled up and started yelling. My mom got out of the car and told my friend to walk inside and for the other girls to leave. The six girls disobeyed and three of them ran over to my friend and started beating her up. Two of the three remaining girls ran toward my mom and one of them punched her in the face. My mom tried to defend herself as best as she could considering she could not fight back since she was an adult and they were not yet eighteen. Finally, after what seemed like hours, a man driving by stopped and began yelling. Everyone stopped and the six girls scurried to their car and drove away. Why, when people so close are getting hurt, did I not budge?

Darley and Latané's "three things bystanders must do if they are to intervene in an emergency" provide good reason for my actions, or lack thereof.

First, they say that the bystander must "notice that something is happening." I definitely noticed that something was happening although it was very unclear and I did not understand it. I grew up in a small suburb that has a crime rate of about 1%. My neighborhood is extremely sheltered. We leave our front door unlocked at night and our keys in our cars while in the driveway. Honestly, I thought I was imagining the entire scenario because it was too far out of the ordinary for six girls my age to be assaulting my mom. These things just didn't happen in my hometown, Burlingame.

Second, a person should "interpret that event as an emergency." I did not see the situation as an emergency since it happened slowly and in stages. My idea of an emergency is abrupt and unsuspected. Although I never thought something like this would happen, the yelling and anger in the voice of the six girls led me to believe something bad was about to happen. Also, the word emergency, in my mind, portrays sirens, police, and noise. I was sitting in the car with the doors shut and windows closed. I could hear nothing and not one but the people involved was around. The scene was silent and discreet.

Last, the bystander must "decide that they have personal responsibility for intervention." I had never experienced such competitive softball until that year. To me, softball was a game, played to have fun. I could not feel "personal responsibility" to intervene since I did not understand where the girls' anger was coming from. I was confused, therefore, I did not feel directly tied to the situation.

There was another friend of mine in the back seat who kept saying, "get out, hurry, get out, let's go!" I just stared in amazement and kept the door locked so she could not get out. I think that her insistence in getting out of the car made me realize that there was a problem, but at the same time, heightened my fear and made me freeze.

No one understands why I did not react in a physical manner, but it is difficult to understand if you have never been in that position before. Prior to the incident, I would have said, of course I would get out of the car and fight, but after it really happened, I realized it is easier said than done. Darley and Latané are correct when they say, "Instead, we often find that a bystander to an emergency is an anguished individual in genuine doubt, wanting to do the right thing but compelled to make complex decisions under pressure of stress and fear."

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University of California Sample B

John Darley and Bibb Latané consider a person's inability to act in a crisis the result of a few factors. The one most plausible ~~most~~ and obvious to the average citizen is indifference. According to these two professors of psychology the average citizen is mistaken. What appears to be indifference is most usually uncertainty. Once a potential emergency is noticed, a bystander must feel "personal responsibility for intervention" and risk looking foolish in front of a crowd if he assessed the situation wrongly.

Darley and Latané state that the greatest influence on a witness of an emergency is the reaction of those around him. "If everyone else is calm and indifferent, they will tend to remain so; if everyone else is reacting strongly, they are likely to do so as well." For example, a crowd draws gaping around a fallen individual on the street. Chances are, others would follow suit out of curiosity and concern. On the same street a woman sits on the sidewalk crying and on one looks in her direction. A passerby assumes the situation can't be that serious if everyone else ~~passes her~~ is walking by without consternation. Why should he take responsibility? We do this every day. I pass by the homeless in Santa Barbara without looking, hardly noticing, because I was brought up to do so. If one of the women were to be crying or clutching herself, I am sure I would create an excuse not to stop; a simple explanation of why she could be in such a state to relieve my ~~concern~~ conscience. Everyone else would be doing the same. She could have been raped or beaten. She may be starving or giving birth for all we know. Yet if we stop and the woman is angry or crazy, she may cause a scene, and then we would look foolish and feel embarrassed. I can relate to Darley and Latané's theory, and I agree with it. If I truly thought the woman had been raped or was giving birth, I would help. I am not indifferent, merely uncertain. People are not ~~bad~~ cruel by nature, but they do get scared.

In a different way, this also explains the more severe cases studied by the professors as well. The boy attacked on the subway, the woman with a broken leg, the stabbing in the parking lot; in all of these situations the crisis ~~was~~ were obvious and still no one assisted the victims. Fear and uncertainty are again the explanation. Eleven people abandoned a seventeen year old stab victim and no one went back to help him. I can imagine the frightened group huddled in a separate car, no one offering to return and all of them expecting someone else to do their duty.

A school friend of mine found herself in an ~~crisis~~ emergency not long ago and suffered the same lack of assistance. In the middle of class she began to have convulsions. They grew more violent and more intense with each passing second, but the class sat dumfounded only able to stare. At last a teacher went to her and attempted to calm her down while barking orders to the class. The police were called and she was rushed away. It was soon found out that this girl had epilepsy and had suffered her first attack. She was fine, but the rest of the class felt disturbed and guilty. They had been so appalled at the sight, so frightened, that they could not even comprehend the idea of helping her. ~~Let alone actually~~ it was not until the spell was broken by the teacher's rigid voice that their minds began to function logically again. ~~It was not because they didn't care that they did not act, it was because no one else did.~~ They did not act immediately because they were scared and no one else was setting an example. If one student had jumped up, they all would have. ~~So~~ After such an incident, I must agree with Darley and Latané in that indifference is not the cause for inaction.

Instincts tell us to do one thing, logic another, but uncertainty can make people ignore even the most obvious crisis situations. We depend on one another at such times. If only one person would show compassion or concern, the rest of us would most likely do so as well. We need to learn to control ~~the~~ fear and put other people's needs above our own. In an emergency lives are at stake, and if we continue to follow the crowd, lives may be lost. It is important for people to understand why ~~people~~ they react the way they do in crisis so they can overcome the factors that contribute to ~~such a~~ an unsatisfactory reaction, and instead react responsibly.

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