



Prosocial Behaviour

Assoc. Professor Peter Strelan

Psych 1A – Social Psychology



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kaurna people,
the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we gather on.

We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the
Kaurna people to country and we respect and value their past, present
and ongoing connection to the land and cultural beliefs.

Length: 16m

Introduction

This presentation discusses prosocial behaviour with focus on how we behave in emergencies.

Learning Outcomes:

1. When do people behave prosocially?

Prosocial Behaviour

Prosocial Behaviour refers to behaviours that have positive social consequences and that contributes to the physical or psychological wellbeing of another person.

- Direct benefit to the other person, not necessarily the person committing the act
- **Altruistic Acts:** Completely selfless, purely to benefit another person

Some people are naturally more or less helpful than others. However, it also depends on the situation we are in and who it is that needs help.



CONTENT WARNING

The next slide briefly discusses
sexual assault.

How We Act in Emergencies

Murder of Kitty Genovese:

- Kitty was murdered near her apartment complex.
- Reported that 38 people heard Kitty scream, but nobody came to help

Reflects the **Bystander Effect**:

- On our own, we help 75% of the time; in a group, we help 53% of the time



Bystander Effect: Qualifying Effects

- Bystander effect is less likely when it is obvious that you need help
- Bystander effect is more likely when there is some ambiguity around what is happening and or if there is more than one bystander
- We don't always know how to help
- We might not want to help



"Maybe it is just a couple arguing. I can't see anything. I'm sure if it was serious, someone else would have called the police."

Note About Kitty Genovese Murder

The legitimacy of the initial reports has since been questioned ([New Yorker Article](#), [New York Times Article](#)).

- Nobody saw the full incident
- Kitty was stabbed in the lungs – did she actually scream?
- Some people did call for help/ tried to help

Does not disprove the bystander effect, just important to note some historical inaccuracies...



Why Don't We Help?

- **Diffusion of Responsibility:** We put responsibility on other bystanders
- **Audience Inhibition:** The presence of others might make us feel self-conscious
- **Social Influence/ Pluralistic Ignorance:** We look to others for cues about how to act – problem is that everyone is doing this!



Situational Factors

Some situational factors have been shown to affect our tendency to be altruistic.

- Similarity and or sexual attraction (see Pryzblya 1985)
- Attributions
- Social learning



Situational Factors: Attributions

Real life example from 2006:

[The Guardian Article - Aboriginal Opera Singer, Aunty Delmae Barton, left for dead at busy bus stop](#)

Did being Indigenous contribute to the lack of help?

- Prejudice and stereotyping
- Internal attributions



Photo from <https://qldmusictrails.com/artists/aunty-delmae-barton>

Situational Factors: Social Learning

Children learn to be helpful by observing role models.

Rushton & Teachman 1978:

- Children more likely to donate prize tokens if they observed an adult doing it
- Positive reinforcement increased prosocial behaviours

Bandura's Bobo Doll Studies:

- Children's treatment of the doll modelled after adult



Summary

Prosocial behaviour is desired, but not always guaranteed.

- Bystander effect shows that we are less likely to help in an emergency when others are around
- Tendency to help varies with similarity/ attraction to person in trouble, attributions, and social learning
- Prosocial behaviour, or antisocial behaviour, can be modelled

make
history.

