

Bystander

Loss of Individuality through Social Negligence

Human beings cannot live alone; thus they form groups and societies. Ironically, however, this characteristic of human beings does not guarantee that individuals always form intimate ties with others. In the past, Agricultural society allowed individuals to depend on and support each other and form naturally intimate relationships as farming couldn't be done alone. They shared in joys and sorrows of life, helping each others from sowing to reaping. There were times when people even knew how many spoons their neighbors had. With the onset of industrialization, people no longer needed help from each other and to form close ties with others. Before we knew it, people were forming societies in which individuals were completely indifferent to each other.

The term Bystander Effect was given after a murder case in US. In 1964, an American woman named Kitty was murdered in front of her house in New York. 38 people witnessed her murder, but until she was stabbed to death, none of them called the police or the ambulance, or try to stop the crime. Even when an individual was in a fatally critical situation, 38 witnesses just remained bystanders. At the time, this event became a huge social issue.

However, this wasn't a social problem of only just that time. Bystanders are evident everywhere. One of the biggest issues in Korea in 2011 was youth violence in schools where many would assault one 'outcast'. The assault was beyond joking around to serious violence. Middle school students took part in sadistic beating and mental assault of one student, causing the victim to eventually commit suicide or causing serious mental and physical damages. The more serious problem was that although such assaults were being taken place openly in classrooms, witnesses like other students or teachers were keeping silence as bystanders.

Although the media cannot cover all cases of bystander effect, people remain bystanders in every facet of society, even myself, at times. What's more serious is that everyone, regardless of age, is affected by the problem. There aren't too many people who would help someone passed out on the streets. Children also remain bystanders; even when their friends are being left out and assaulted at school, they rarely ask for intervention from their parents or teachers. We are being bystanders to someone when they are down and out and asking for help, and we turn aside focusing only on our own problems.

Countless things that happen quietly in our society are cases of bystander effect that make select individuals into outcasts. Thinking how I can become a social outcast due to the distant indifferent bystanders, I find this a serious problem that can't be overlooked in silence. This work traces individuals becoming an outcast in a society, and how the majority or the society overlooks the individual outcast in silence.

Departing from previous materials or working approach, I made small figures for this work. Taking two different postures, the figures either have their arms crossed, or have hands tied behind their back. The two postures symbolize bystanders, hiding their hands and saying "I have no hands to help you" and "I have nothing to do with you."

The figures are like small 8 inch dolls. Like architectural models that present the whole overview of the buildings, I made miniature models of people to demonstrate in one view, the majority being indifferent to an individual social outcast. Rather than using fabric, I decided to use thread, wrapping each of the bystanders with different color thread. The patterns in which they are wrapped are all different, signifying the individuality of the figures.