

# Attributions of Responsibility for Helping and Doing Harm: Evidence for Confusion of Responsibility

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The social inhibition of helping is well documented, and this phenomenon has been explained in terms of the general processes of audience inhibition, social influence, and diffusion of responsibility. In the present research, we adapted the paradigm used in studies of the attribution of responsibility for an accident to examine a specific audience-inhibition process that may contribute to the social inhibition of helping. Evidence from two experiments showed that an individual who adopted the perspective of a helper following an accident expected to be held increasingly responsible by arriving onlookers for the victim's plight as the number of extant bystanders increased. Results also indicated that there was an objective basis for this expectation: Subjects who adopted the perspective of a newly arriving onlooker increasingly attributed responsibility for doing harm to the individual helping the victim in the accident as the number of bystanders described as already at the scene increased. The distinction between confusion and diffusion of responsibility is emphasized, and limitations to confusion of responsibility for accidents are discussed.

Previous research on attributions of responsibility for accidents has focused on the victim (Howard, 1984; Walster, 1966; see review by Burger, 1981). The present focus is on the helper rather than the victim. The thesis advanced in the present research is that individuals who adopt the perspective of a helper expect to be held increasingly responsible by arriving onlookers for the victim's plight following an accident as the number of extant bystanders increases. Specifically, evidence is reported for an attributional process that appears to increase the social cost of helping as the number of bystanders increases.

## Social Inhibition of Helping

According to Latane and Darley (1970), a bystander in a situation in which a victim needs help is in an unenviable position. The bystander must notice the event, interpret it as an emergency, assume the responsibility to act, know an appropriate form of assistance, and act on the decision to help. Moreover, the bystander oftentimes is at risk of incurring substantial costs, personal and social, by acting on his or her decision to help (cf. I. M. Piliavin, J. A. Piliavin, & Rodin, 1975). Because these potential costs increase as the number of bystanders increases, it is perhaps less than surprising that "despite the great diversity of styles, settings, and techniques among the studies, the social inhibition of helping is a remarkably consistent phenomenon" (Latané & Nida, 1981, p. 308).

Latané and Darley specified three general social psychological processes that could short-circuit a bystander's decision to help

when others were present but clarifying communications were not. The first, diffusion of responsibility, specifies that an individual who recognizes there is a need for help may fail to feel personal responsibility for helping because the individual feels incompetent to help, the victim is viewed as being undeserving or unrelated, or the individual thinks others are present and available to help.

If only one bystander is present at an emergency, he carries all of the responsibility for dealing with it; he will feel all of the guilt for not acting; he will bear all of the blame that accrues for nonintervention. If others are present, the onus of responsibility is diffused, and the finger points less directly at any one person (Latané & Darley, 1970, p. 90).

Latané and Darley's diffusion of responsibility hypothesis has stimulated considerable research both on the social inhibition of helping (cf. Latané & Nida, 1981) and on social loafing generally (e.g., Brickner, Harkins, & Ostrom, in press; Harkins & Petty, 1982; Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979).

Social influence was a second general process postulated by Latané and Darley (1970) to contribute to the inhibition of helping by the presence of others. A potential helper, confronted with a situation in which another may be in need of assistance, was posited to look to the reactions of others to help define the situation (cf. Schachter, 1959; Shaver & Klinnert, 1982). According to this view, a bystander would be less likely to decide that intervention was appropriate or necessary when the actions of others indicated the situation was not an emergency.

Latané and Darley (1970) also noted in their discussion of social influence that the potential cost of making an inappropriate response—such as embarrassment and shame—increases as the number of bystanders increases (pp. 37-38). This discussion of audience-inhibition processes was embedded in their discussion of social influence because of the posited interactive effects of these two processes: "If each bystander sees other bystanders momentarily frozen by audience inhibition, each may be misled

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into thinking the situation must not be serious" (Latane & Darley, 1970, p. 125).

Audience-inhibition processes have since become an interesting focus of research in their own right (e.g., Petty, Harkins, Williams, & Latane, 1977). In an important set of studies, for instance, Schwartz and Gottlieb (1976, 1980) argued that bystanders who believe that others are aware of their presence may be apprehensive regarding others' expectations and evaluations of their behavior; accordingly, bystanders are viewed as seeking to optimize these evaluations (cf. Schlenker, 1980). Schwartz and Gottlieb (1980) reported data consistent with the notion that bystanders' anonymity inhibited helping when they believed other bystanders thought helping to be an appropriate response, whereas anonymity enhanced helping when they believed other bystanders viewed helping as an inappropriate response.

### Confusion of Responsibility

The present research probed an audience-inhibition process based on people's attributions of the helper's responsibility for doing harm. Specifically, we reasoned that an individual who adopts the perspective of a helper following an apparent accident expects to be held increasingly responsible by newcomers for the victim's misfortune as the number of extant bystanders increases. A corollary to this hypothesis is that there is a basis for this belief: An individual who is seen with a victim tends to be held responsible for the victim's misfortune, and this tendency increases as the number of bystanders increases.

The initial basis for these postulates came from the literature on the manner in which people draw inferences and on affirming the consequent in particular. For instance, because people approach things they like, they tend to infer that they like the things they approach (Triandis, 1971). Similarly, because in our society people are expected to help those they have unintentionally harmed, helpers may anticipate being held partially responsible for harming the very victim they are helping unless evidence to the contrary is present. Furthermore, if the presence of non-helping bystanders enhances the attention drawn to the event or the uniqueness of the helper's actions in the eyes of arriving onlookers, then the perceived connection between the helper and victim should be strengthened. Consequently, people who adopt the perspective of a helper may anticipate that the number of extant bystanders would increase the attributions of responsibility for doing harm assigned to them by arriving onlookers.

Note that the emphasis here is not on the responsibility a potential helper (e.g., a bystander) feels for helping a victim, but rather it is on the responsibility for harmdoing the potential helper believes others will attribute to him or her should he or she help the victim. In this respect, the present research is more similar to the research on attributions of responsibility for doing harm in accidents than to traditional research on social inhibition. Nevertheless, if as we have suggested people anticipate being assigned greater responsibility for doing harm when they are helping a victim and bystanders are present than when they and the victim are alone, then this "confusion of responsibility" would represent a perceived social cost to helping that would vary as a function of the number of bystanders present.

Walster's (1966) methodology for studying the attributions of responsibility for doing harm was adapted for use in the present

study. Walster presented subjects with information about a stimulus person, including a description of an accident in which the person was supposedly involved. Some subjects were informed that the person's parked car rolled a short distance down a hill and struck a tree stump, resulting in minor damage. Others were informed that the car rolled all of the way down the hill and struck a tree, resulting in considerable damage. Whether the stimulus person and other people were or could have been injured was also varied. Results revealed that subjects attributed more responsibility for the accident to the stimulus person when the consequences of the accident were severe rather than mild.

In the present studies, students were informed of a realistic campus-situation in which a student was seen providing help to the victim following an apparently minor mishap. The situation was described from the point of view of a person just arriving on the scene, and the victim and helper were described either as being alone or as the focus of the attention of varying numbers of silent bystanders. In some conditions, subjects were asked to adopt the perspective of the helper, and in others subjects were asked to adopt the perspective of the arriving onlooker. Subjects were asked to attribute responsibility for doing harm (Studies 1 & 2) and helping (Study 2). To assure that the bystander information was salient to subjects, the number of existing bystanders described as being at the scene served as a within-subjects factor in both experiments—although the design of Study 2 allowed both between-subjects and within-subjects comparisons to be performed.

### Study 1

#### Method

*Subjects and design.* A 4 X 2 (Number of Extant Bystanders: 0, 1, 5, or 10 X Subject's Perspective: Helper or Arriving Onlooker) within-subjects factorial design was used in which 220 students in an undergraduate psychology class served as subjects. All subjects were tested during a class early in the semester while they were seated at desks in a large auditorium.

*Procedure.* Subjects were instructed to consider eight different scenarios. The first four scenarios involved the subjects making attributions of responsibility for another individual's behavior as the number of bystanders who were at the scene when the subject arrived was varied. In the first, subjects were instructed:

Imagine that you are leaving this building alone and you see a man lying on the ground groaning in pain. You see a pair of crutches lying on the ground next to the man and an individual lifting the man to his feet. There is no one else around.

Subjects were then asked to rate "How responsible is the individual who is lifting the man to his feet for the victim's pain and suffering?" using a 9-point scale ranging from *not at all responsible (1)* to *very responsible (9)*. The next three scenarios to which subjects responded differed only in the last sentence. In the second, third, and fourth scenarios, respectively, subjects were instructed that there was 1 other person, 5 other people, and 10 other people standing nearby simply watching the individual lift the man. Subjects again used 9-point scales to respond to each scenario.

The remaining four scenarios were similar except that the subject was asked to imagine that he or she was the person who was lifting the man to his feet; their task was to indicate how an individual leaving the building would view his or her behavior given no one else was around (fifth scenario), 1 other person was standing nearby watching (sixth scenario), 5 other people were standing nearby watching (seventh scenario), or 10

other people were standing nearby watching (eighth scenario). Following each, subjects responded to the question: "How responsible *will* someone just leaving the building think you are for the man's pain and suffering?" Subjects rated their responses on a scale ranging from *not at all responsible* (1) to *very responsible* (9).

After subjects completed their ratings, they were engaged in an active discussion regarding the purpose of the study and the methods used. Features such as the use of a completely within-subjects design and the absence of counterbalancing across scenarios were noted, and sources of artifact (e.g., sensitization) were discussed to illustrate the importance of these features. Finally, an experimental design that avoided these interpretive problems was described (see Study 2).

## Results

The 4 X 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed two main effects. First, a main effect for the Perspective factor indicated that the individual lifting the victim (the helper) was viewed as being more responsible for the victim's suffering when subjects adopted the perspective of the observer ( $M = 5.19$ ) than when they adopted the perspective of the helper ( $M = 3.77$ ),  $F(1, 219) = 94.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . This finding is consistent with the operation of the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977).

Second, and more importantly here, the number of bystanders affected subjects' attributions of responsibility,  $F(3, 657) = 76.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . Newman-Keuls pair-wise comparisons revealed that subjects rated the helper as increasingly responsible for the victim's suffering as the number of extant bystanders increased from 0 to 1, from 1 to 5, and from 5 to 10 ( $M_s = 3.39, 4.12, 4.93, \& 5.48$ , respectively; all  $p_s < .05$ ). The Bystander X Perspective interaction did not approach significance ( $F < 1$ ). Thus, subjects adopting the perspective of a newly arriving bystander not only tended to view a person engaged in a prosocial behavior as more responsible for doing harm as the number of bystanders already at the scene increased, but the attributions for harmdoing made when they adopted the perspective of the helper suggested that subjects were cognizant of this potential social cost of helping.

Although Study 1 was conducted primarily for exploratory and demonstrative purposes, analyses provided encouraging results regarding the confusion of responsibility hypothesis. A second study, therefore, was undertaken to test this hypothesis more rigorously. In addition to the counterbalancing of materials, subjects were asked to rate the extent to which the individual lifting the victim in the scenarios was (a) responsible for the victim's plight and (b) a helpful person. This was done to determine whether or not the presence of bystanders was simply enhancing any dispositional attribution subjects might form regarding the helper's behavior.

## Study 2

### Method

**Subjects and design.** We used a 3 X 2 X 3 X 2 (Number of Extant Bystanders: 0, 4, or 10 X Subject's Perspective: Helper or Arriving Onlooker X Order of Scenarios X Order of Dependent Measures) mixed model factorial. The Number of Extant Bystanders factor was manipulated within subjects, the Subject's Perspective was manipulated between subjects, and the Order of the Scenarios and the Order of the Dependent Measures were counterbalanced across subjects. Subjects were 136 undergraduates who participated to obtain credit toward their grade in an

introductory psychology course. Subjects were tested in groups of 40-60 in a large auditorium in which seating was arranged to assure that at least one vacant desk separated subjects. All experimental instructions and dependent measures were contained in booklets, which were placed face-down on the subjects' desk before their arrival, and conversation among subjects was not allowed following the onset of the session. In this way, each experimental condition was conducted during each of the experimental sessions.

**Procedure.** Following introductory materials, subjects were instructed to consider three different scenarios. Subjects who adopted the perspective of an observer were told the following:

Imagine that you are leaving this building alone and you see a man lying on the ground groaning in pain. There is a pair of crutches lying on the ground next to the man, and an individual is lifting the man to his feet.

The number of bystanders was manipulated by varying the final sentence in this description, which stated that either there was no one else around, 4 other people were standing nearby simply watching, or 10 other people were standing nearby simply watching. After reading each scenario, subjects responded to two questions: "How responsible is the individual who is lifting the man to his feet for the man's fall?" (1 = *not at all responsible*, 5 = *very responsible*); and "How would you characterize the individual who is lifting the man to his feet?" (1 = *not at all helpful*, 5 = *very helpful*).

Subjects who adopted the perspective of the helper read the following paragraph:

Imagine that you are leaving this building alone and you see a man lying on the ground groaning in pain. There is a pair of crutches lying on the ground next to the man, and you stop to help him. As you are lifting the man to his feet, another individual leaves the building and sees that you are lifting the man.

The number of bystanders was again manipulated by varying the final sentence of this description. Subjects read that either there was no one else around, 4 other people were standing nearby simply watching, or 10 other people were standing nearby simply watching. After reading each scenario, subjects responded to two questions: "How responsible *will* this individual think you are for the man's fall?" (1 = *not at all responsible*, 5 = *very responsible*); and "How do you think that individual would characterize you?" (1 = *not at all helpful*, 5 = *very helpful*).

## Results

A 3 X 2 X 3 X 2 ANOVA of subjects' attributions of responsibility for doing harm revealed the expected main effect for Number of Extant Bystanders,  $F(2, 248) = 5.24$ ,  $p < .01$ , as well as a Bystander X Perspective interaction,  $F(2, 248) = 4.68$ ,  $p < .05$ . Cell means and Newman-Keuls pair-wise comparisons are summarized in Table 1. Briefly, subjects who adopted the perspective of the helper indicated they believed that a newcomer to the scene would hold them increasingly responsible for having harmed the victim as the number of bystanders already on the scene increased. Subjects who adopted the perspective of an arriving onlooker, however, made intermediate attributions of responsibility for doing harm regardless of group size. No other main effect or interaction was significant for this measure.

Analyses of the attributions of helpfulness revealed a main effect for the Perspective factor, reflecting the fact that subjects again tended to make more dispositional attributions to others ( $M = 4.79$ ) than to themselves ( $M = 4.18$ ),  $F(1, 124) = 30.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . Importantly, however, the main effect for the Bystanders

Discussion

Table 1  
*Attributions of Helpfulness and Responsibility for Doing Harm As a Function of Number of Bystanders and Subject's Perspective*

No. of extant bystanders	None	4	10
Attributions of responsibility for doing harm			
Helper	2.47.	2.90 <sub>a</sub>	3.09
Arriving onlooker	2.79 <sub>a</sub>	2.77 <sub>a</sub>	2.80 <sub>b</sub>
Overall	2.63.	2.84 <sub>b</sub>	2.95.
Attributions of helpfulness			
Helper	4.39 <sub>a</sub>	4.11.	4.03.
Arriving onlooker	4.79	4.81.	4.78.
Overall	4.58.	4.46.	4.40.

Note. Means with differing subscripts differ by the Newman-Keuls test,  $p < .05$ .

factor was not significant, and the trend revealed that subjects tended to rate the individual lifting the victim as less rather than more helpful as the number of extant bystanders increased (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup> In addition, the correlation between the attributions of responsibility for doing harm and the attributions of helping were significantly but negatively correlated ( $r = -.23$ ). Thus, no evidence was found for the notion that ratings of responsibility for doing harm and of helpfulness were affected similarly.

Finally, because each scenario appeared first in one of the three sets, it was possible to examine the attributions of helpfulness and of responsibility for doing harm treating the Number of Extant Bystanders as a between-subjects factor. Effects found in this analysis are informative because they cannot be ascribed to the potential contaminating effects of within-subjects manipulations (e.g., carryover, sensitization).

The analysis of the subjects' attributions of responsibility for doing harm again revealed a main effect for Number of Extant Bystanders,  $F(2, 112) = 3.37, p < .04$ . Subjects regarded the helper associated with a victim as the least responsible for doing harm when no bystander was present ( $M = 2.42$ ), moderately responsible for harmdoing when 4 bystanders were already present ( $M = 2.73$ ), and most responsible for harmdoing when 10 bystanders were already present ( $M = 3.01$ ). Newman-Keuls pairwise comparisons indicated that the first and third means differed significantly ( $p < .05$ ). No other test involving attributions of responsibility for doing harm was significant, meaning that the confusion of responsibility effect held whether subjects adopted the perspective of the helper or of the arriving onlooker.

The analysis of subjects' attributions of helpfulness revealed two significant effects. Consistent with the fundamental attribution error, subjects made stronger dispositional attributions of helpfulness when they adopted the perspective of an observer ( $M = 4.67$ ) than helper ( $M = 4.29$ ),  $F(1, 111) = 10.20, p < .01$ . This main effect was qualified by a Perspective X Order of Dependent Measures interaction,  $F(1, 111) = 7.52, p < .01$ , which indicated that the fundamental attribution error was stronger when subjects judged the helper's responsibility for doing harm first. No other test was significant.

Results of the first study indicated that as the number of existing bystanders increased, subjects attributed increasing responsibility for doing harm to an individual who was lifting an injured man to his feet. Although an interaction in Study 2 suggested this effect was not robust when subjects adopted the perspective of a bystander, subjects who imagined they were the helper did judge that they would be held more responsible for doing harm by observers who arrived subsequently on the scene when bystanders were present than when bystanders were not. Furthermore, when analyses were performed on only the data provided in response to the first scenario, subjects attributed more responsibility for doing harm to the helper whether subjects adopted the perspective of the helper or of the arriving onlooker. Hence, the present research suggests yet another reason why groups can be a source of evaluation apprehension and inhibit people's impulse to help.

We do not however mean to suggest here that expectations regarding the confusion of responsibility are of sufficient magnitude that they alone are likely to deter an individual from helping. For instance, the attributions of helpfulness obtained in Study 2 are greater in magnitude than are the attributions for doing harm. More important, however, inspection of Table 1 indicates that the effect of group size on the anticipated social cost of helping is not offset by expectations of corresponding benefits. That is, confusion of responsibility may represent but one small deterrent to helping, but it is a deterrent that increases in magnitude as the number of silent bystanders increase.

Moreover, the present research does not imply that group size invariably fosters nonhelping or that the confusion of responsibility for harmdoing invariably increases as group size increases. For instance, the presence of others may not inhibit but rather may actually enhance prosocial behavior in situations in which there are no ambiguities regarding the cause of an emergency (e.g., the emergency was witnessed or an individual was seen going to the aid of the victim), the motive of a helper is clear

<sup>1</sup> The analyses of attributions of helpfulness also revealed four significant tests involving the order in which the scenarios or dependent measures were presented. Main effects were obtained for Order of Scenarios,  $F(3, 124) = 3.34, p < .05$ , showing that the overall judgments of helpfulness were lowest when the scenario involving no bystanders was presented first ( $M = 4.33$ ), moderate when the scenario involving four bystanders was presented first ( $M = 4.41$ ), and highest when the scenario involving 10 bystanders was presented first ( $M = 4.70$ ); and Order of Dependent Measures,  $F(1, 124) = 4.27, p < .05$ , showing that the ratings of helpfulness were higher when judgments of helpfulness were sought before ( $M = 4.52$ ) rather than following ( $M = 4.43$ ) judgments of responsibility for harmdoing. The Helper X Order of Scenarios interaction was significant,  $F(2, 124) = 3.12, p < .05$ , indicating that the fundamental attribution error was strongest when the scenario involving no bystanders was presented first and weakest when the scenario involving 10 bystanders was presented first. And a Number of Bystanders X Order of Scenarios interaction,  $F(4, 248) = 2.89, p < .05$ , revealed that the number of bystanders had no significant effect on judgments of helpfulness when the scenario involving 10 bystanders was presented first, whereas judgments of helpfulness decreased as the number of bystanders increased when the scenario involving no bystanders was presented first.

(e.g., the helper is labeled as such by a uniform), communication among bystanders facilitates the clarification rather than the diffusion or confusion responsibility (e.g., the helper is cheered by bystanders), and greater evaluation apprehension is aroused by not helping (e.g., the victim is identifiable as a dependent of the helper; cf. Schwartz & Gottlieb, 1976, 1980; Staub, 1974; cf. Latane & Nida, 1981). It remains an interesting possibility that group size in these situations would not affect, or perhaps even decrease, the attributions of responsibility for doing harm made by arriving onlookers as well.

Nevertheless, specific models of the process underlying the confusion of responsibility effect can be evaluated in light of the present data. For instance, Walster's (1966) methodology for examining the attributions of responsibility for accidents was simple to adapt and informative in its yield. Could these areas of study have more in common than methodology? That is, perhaps people's attributions in the present study were motivated by their desire to avoid being singled-out to help in a potentially embarrassing circumstance. It seems unlikely to us that ego-defensive attributional processes were operative in this setting, but it would nevertheless be interesting to examine other factors known to affect the attributions of responsibility for victims have similar effects on the attributions of responsibility for helpers. For instance, situational and personal similarity-variables introduced by Shaver (1970) to specify the conditions under which the severity of an accident enhances attributions for responsibility to the victim (see review by Burger, 1981)—could conceivably prove to be moderators of the confusion of responsibility effect as well. Should the parallels between the present results and those from studies on attributions of responsibility for victims extend to elements such as personal and situational similarity, then one would be more inclined to consider ego-defensive attributions as a likely mediator of the confusion of responsibility effect.

Several other accounts warrant discussion, however. The results from the second study clearly differentiated the confusion of responsibility effect from a simple augmenting effect on dispositional attributions. Although the helper's behavior could be viewed as increasingly unique by arriving onlookers as the number of extant bystanders increased, no evidence was obtained for the notion that dispositional attributions increased generally as the number of bystanders increased. Instead, subjects' attributions indicated that the number of bystanders simply standing about affected primarily their inferences regarding responsibility for doing harm. A variation of the principle that unique behaviors enhance dispositional attributions, however, could conceivably be operative here. Consider that the behavioral context from the perspective of the arriving onlooker is causally ambiguous and decidedly negative: A victim is encountered who has somehow experienced an unfortunate mishap. In addition, another individual is standing with the victim, and there is either no one else around or other people attending to but not associating with the individual and victim. To the extent that the presence of bystanders enhances the uniqueness of the helper's behavior, the negative, causally ambiguous context may motivate stronger dispositional attributions along hedonically consistent trait dimensions. This suggestion is consistent with the literature demonstrating the powerful influence of affect on attributional processes (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Isen,

Shalker, Clark, & Karp, 1978) but would require a revision of present notions regarding the factors governing dispositional attributions.

Alternatively, the operation of biases and heuristics that allow individuals in a complex social situation (e.g., bystanders, people passing nearby) to formulate judgments on the basis of limited information or information processing (e.g., why an individual might be next to a victim while others stand nearby) could be viewed as contributing to a confusion of responsibility. Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky (1982) provided evidence that judgments under uncertainty are particularly susceptible to such biases. For instance, let the letter H designate the act of helping a victim and the letter R designate the responsibility for the victim's harm. For most situations,  $P(HIR)$  does not equal  $P(RIH)$ , and to equate these probabilities (i.e., to affirm the consequent) is logically specious and generally leads to errors in human judgment. Even if people were highly likely to help someone they had harmed [e.g.,  $P(HIR) = .80$ ], observers could not logically deduce from this an individual's responsibility for having harmed a person he or she is seen helping [i.e.,  $P(RIH)$ ]. Nevertheless, to the extent that (a) the presence of bystanders renders a helping situation increasingly ambiguous to newcomers on the scene, (b) the belief that people should help those they unintentionally harm is a salient social norm, and (c) simple-heuristics such as affirming the consequent are more likely to be used in an ambiguous situation, then confusion of responsibility should indeed be more likely individually and collectively as the number of bystanders increases.

Could the confusion of responsibility possibly reflect a logical judgmental process? Consider the following. The probability a helper is responsible for having harmed the victim,  $P(RIH)$ , is defined by the joint probability of harming and helping the victim,  $P(R, H)$ , divided by the probability the individual would help the victim,  $P(H)$ . This is decidedly different from the probability of harming and helping the victim,  $P(R, H)$ , divided by the probability the individual would harm the victim  $P(R)$ . There are two interesting observations that can be made on the basis of these formulae. First, even if it were true that when confronted with a helping situation people consider both people's probability of helping [ $P(H)$ ] and the probability that they are involved in both doing harm and helping [ $P(R, H)$ ], this would not provide the information one would need logically to determine the basis for  $P(RIH)$ —the inference that an individual who helped a person was somehow responsible for the person's plight. Second, however, these formulae and research since Latane and Darley (1970) raise the possibility that confusion of responsibility is not entirely without basis in fact. Research suggests that in many helping situations  $P(H)$  decreases as the number of bystanders increases (Latane & Nida, 1981). Given this finding, the simplifying assumption that  $P(R, H)$  is constant, and the conditional probability,  $P(RIH) = P(R, H)P(H)$ , it can be seen that the likelihood an individual who is helping a person will be held responsible for a person's harm increases as the number of existing bystanders increases. Thus, it cannot be asserted with absolute certainty that observers are acting illogically when they attribute increasing responsibility for harmdoing to helpers as the number of bystanders increases. Of course, the nonobvious nature of the bystander effect suggests that most people believe  $P(H)$  stays con-

stant or increases as the number of bystanders increases. Hence, both the judgments of bystanders and of potential helpers, which should be guided by their beliefs rather than research facts regarding the likelihood an individual will help given the number of bystanders increase, appear even more likely to represent biased than logical information processing.

Nevertheless, the operation of a logical judgmental process cannot be completely eliminated if one considers biases that might be introduced when people try to recall the information relevant for forming their judgment regarding a helper's responsibility for doing harm. The probability an individual helps a person P(H) equals the sum of the probability the individual both harms and helps the individual P(R, H) plus the probability that the individual helps and does not harm the person P(not R, H). If the latter term is relatively high, then P(RIH) may be quite low, even though P(HIR) is high (Dawes, 1982). People may indeed feel a special responsibility for helping a person whom they have accidentally harmed (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Harvey & Enzle, 1981). Despite the salience of this norm or cognitive element (i.e., the high likelihood of P(HIR) in many people's view), most victims are helped by individuals not responsible for their harm. If these latter instances are less salient or memorable to people, and especially with respect to the effects of group size, then it could be argued that people are acting logically given the inaccurate information that is accessible at the time they formulated their judgment.

In sum, the present analysis of attributions of responsibility and the social inhibition of helping extends previous analyses in at least two respects. First, the emphasis is not on the responsibility a given bystander feels for helping a victim, but rather it is on the responsibility for doing harm the potential helper believes others will attribute to the person who tries to help the victim. If, as the present data suggest, people anticipate being assigned greater responsibility for doing harm when they are helping a victim when bystanders are standing about than when the helper and the victim are alone, then this expectation of a confusion of responsibility would constitute a perceived social cost to helping that varies with the number of extant bystanders. Second, most research on the social inhibition of helping has focused on bystanders who were present when the emergency occurred. Confusion of responsibility in these circumstances may be minimal, because all those present know that none was responsible for or contributed to the accident. In some situations in which a person needs help, however, observers (e.g., bystanders, onlookers, people passing by) do not know who was or was not present or responsible for the emergency or both. It may be precisely these types of situations that confusion of responsibility is likely to occur.

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