WHY DON'T BYSTANDERS HELP?
BECAUSE OF AMBIGUITY? [1]

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Two experiments investigated the effects of ambiguity of an emergency situation on helping behavior. In Experiment I, 70 male undergraduates waiting either alone, with a stranger, or with a friend heard a maintenance man fall and cry out in agony. Half of the two-person groups were naive; the other half included a confederate who was instructed to react as passively as possible. In contrast to the finding of Latané and Rodin's "lady in distress" study, all subjects intervened. In Experiment II, subjects either alone, with one other, or with four others were exposed to either a nonambiguous or an ambiguous emergency situation. At least one subject in all of the nonambiguous conditions responded to the needs of the victim, whereas approximately 30% of the subjects in the ambiguous condition included a helper. Subjects in the latter two- and five-person groups were less likely to help and intervened slower than was expected on the basis of the alone subjects' performances. These results were attributed to the degree of ambiguity and seriousness of consequences employed in the emergency situation.

Several studies have demonstrated that individuals faced with an emergency situation are more likely to render aid when alone than when in the presence of others (Darley & Latané, 1968; Latané & Darley, 1968, 1969, 1970a, 1970b; Latané & Rodin, 1969; Schwartz & Clausen, 1970). The typical procedure involves exposing one or more persons to an emergency, that is, presence of smoke, overhearing an adult or child fall from a chair with accompanying crying and groaning, or listening to a seizure victim's plea for help. The main dependent variables are whether the person(s) help(s) the victim and how long it takes him (them) to do so. Results from the previous studies have shown that the probability that a given individual will help in an emergency situation decreases as the number of people who witness it increases. Also, the amount of time required to aid a victim in distress is longer with more

observers. This phenomenon is referred to in the literature as the social inhibition of bystander intervention.

Not all studies have found frequent helping when a person is alone. Latané (1967) found that virtually all undergraduates failed to intervene on the behalf of an assaulted child even when they were alone. Similar results were obtained in a study by Kaufman (1968). Only 11% of the subjects who were asked to observe a teacher deliver what seemed to be increasingly severe and dangerous shocks to a learner responded to the learner's pleas for help. Other studies have reported some instances of helping. A developmental study by Staub (1970b) found that first and second graders, in contrast to fourth and sixth graders, were more likely to help another child who appeared to fall from a chair and hurt himself. The probability of helping has been found to increase when an observer is held completely responsible for what happens (Staub, 1970a; Tilker, 1970); when an observer has previously seen another individual render aid to a victim (Bryan & London, 1970; Bryan & Test, 1967; Staub, 1971; Test & Bryan, 1969); and when individuals with specialized skills to cope with an emergency are present (Kazdin & Bryan, 1971). Nevertheless, the bulk of research overwhelmingly casts doubt on the suggestion that in most situations the individual is more

likely to receive help if more people are present during an emergency.

In a series of unique psychological experiments, Latané and Darley (1970a) have offered substantial evidence which rejects the importance of man's apparent lack of conscience, inhumanness, and apathy as causal determinants of whether individuals will intervene in an emergency. Instead, they have postulated that social factors arising from the interaction with others affect a witness's responses in these situations. They have identified social influence and diffusion of responsibility as two determinants of bystander intervention. The present paper is primarily concerned with the former process.

Latané and Darley's basic assumption is that most emergencies are, or at least begin as, ambiguous events. As the bystanders are deciding whether an event is an emergency, each bystander looks to the others for guidance before acting. However, he misinterprets their behavior as indicating lack of concern and therefore decides that the emergency is not serious. Seeing others remain passive causes the bystander to interpret the ambiguous situation as nonserious.

To test this social influence hypothesis, Latané and Darley (1968) constructed a situation in which subjects either alone, with two other naive persons, or with two stooges who were coached to appear blasé were engaged in a written task when smoke began to billow through a wall vent. They found that 75% of the subjects in the alone condition reported the smoke, 38% of the pairs in the naive condition included a reporter of smoke and only 10% of the pairs in the passive stooge condition reported the smoke. Responses to a postexperimental questionnaire indicated that more of the subjects in the group conditions than in the alone condition interpreted the smoke as a nondangerous event. These results are consistent with the social influence hypothesis. The presence of others, particularly when they are instructed to remain passive and ignore the emergency situation, leads the individual to assume that the situation is nonserious and therefore decreases his probability of responding.

Further evidence for the hypothesis stems from Latané and Rodin's (1969) "lady in distress" study. Male subjects either alone, with a naive stranger, with a passive confederate, or with a naive friend were introduced to a game and puzzle preference task by a female experimenter. She told them that she would be working next door while they completed the task. She left by opening a collapsible curtain which divided the two rooms. Minutes later the subjects heard a loud noise resembling heavy objects falling and cries from the experimenter indicating that she had fallen and needed help. Despite the fact that this design ruled out any possible cost of intervention, save possible embarrassment, the results closely paralleled the "smoke study." Subjects in groups were less likely to respond than the alone subjects, with friends intervening faster than strangers and the subjects in the confederate condition responding the least.

The authors account for the higher percentage of helping from friends by arguing that they are less likely to misinterpret each other's initial inaction than strangers (also, friends are less likely to fear possible embarrassment). Apparently, friends are much more likely to convey their concern nonverbally and eventually discuss a course of action. Thus, social influence is less likely to lead friends to decide that there is no emergency. It follows then that if one of the friends is instructed to convey the impression that the situation is not serious, the naive friend is likely to conclude that the situation is nonserious, and his likelihood of responding should be reduced. Experiment I provides a test of this hypothesis by comparing informed friends versus naive friends. The other three conditions were comparable to those in the Latané and Rodin (1969) study (subjects alone, naive strangers, and informed strangers).

EXPERIMENT I

Method

Subjects

A total of 70 naive male undergraduates at Florida State University participated in the experiment: 10 for the alone and each of the informed conditions and 20 (10 pairs) for each of the uninformed conditions. The subjects volunteered to participate in an experiment involving sexual attitudes among college students.

All subjects, except for informed friends, were recruited from the general psychology population.

If two persons who had known each other for at least 4 months appeared for the experiment, they were then assigned to the uninformed friend condition. Subjects in this condition had been friends for an average of 3 years. To obtain subjects in the informed friends condition, the experimental confederates were requested to bring a friend with them to the laboratory. The average time of acquaintance was 2 years.

Each subject, except for those in the informed friends condition, received credit for his participation. Friends recruited by the experimental confederates received no extrinsic reward for their participation.

Procedure

The subjects met in the experimenter's office where they were told that the purpose of the experiment was to determine how, why, and under what conditions sexual attitudes change. Their task would be to fill out a standard inventory on sexual attitudes (adopted from the July 1970 issue of *Psychology Today*), and afterwards they would attempt to change the sexual attitudes of one female (alone subjects) or two females (two-person subjects). Specifically, they were to persuade the female(s) to adopt a more liberal position on several sexual topics. After the subjects understood what they would be doing, they were taken down the hall to a vacant room to begin filling out the questionnaire. They were seated at a table approximately 15 feet from the door leading to the room where the emergency would take place. In the informed conditions, the naive subject was seated closest to the door. In all conditions, the experimenter left the room, indicating that the subjects, after completing the questionnaire, were to meet him in a designated room on the floor above to begin the discussion phase of the experiment. He then went into another room where he could observe the subjects behind a one-way mirror. None of the subjects were observed to have noticed the mirror which was obscured with packing crates and not easily identifiable.

The emergency. Approximately 6 minutes after the departure of the experimenter, a victim posing as a uniformed Florida State University maintenance employee entered the room carrying a ladder and a venetian blind. He passed the subjects and entered an adjacent room where he could be heard working through the closed door. This same person had been observed working in the hallway as the subjects reported for the experiment and again when they were taken to the laboratory.

Three minutes after entering the room where the contrived accident was to take place, the victim suddenly pushed the ladder against the wall of the laboratory and to the floor. Simultaneously he pulled a set of venetian blinds from a 13-foot window and fell himself, groaning sharply with the impact. For the next 5 seconds, he grunted heavily with each breath. He then exclaimed in a moderately loud voice, "Oh my back, I can't move." He continued to groan with each breath and knocked the fallen ladder into the wall in a struggle to stand. At 15

seconds, he gave out a single cry for help, then his cries became less audible and frequent, until at 45 seconds they ceased altogether. For an additional 30 seconds nothing was said or done by the victim.

Two different victims were used in the study. Approximately half of the subjects in each condition heard one victim and the other half, the second. The emergency had been rehearsed repeatedly by both victims with the aid of a stopwatch to insure uniformity. A subsequent analysis showed that both victims were equally effective.

Role of the confederate. In all informed conditions, an experimental accomplice, familiar with the design of the study, was briefed to appear neutral when confronted with the emergency. He would react initially by registering surprise at the sudden noise. He would then glance toward the emergency with an inquisitive look without speaking. Any remark made by the subject would be met and returned in the form of a question. If the subject remarked, "What do you think happened?" the confederate would reply, "I don't know; what do you think?" Or to the question, "Do you think we should look?" he would answer, "I don't know; what do you think?" The confederate was instructed to get up only after the subject had approached the door to assist the victim. All confederates had rehearsed their reactions a number of times under a variety of potential situations.

Measures. The dependent measures were the percentage of subjects either aiding the victim by direct investigation or by seeking assistance from others and the length of time required for intervention. The subjects could intervene either by entering the room where the accident occurred or by going for help through the door from which they entered. The experimenter began timing the emergency from the initial sounds of the ladder falling and stopped when either door was opened by a subject or 75 seconds had elapsed. If no help had come in that period, the experiment was terminated. All subjects were then interviewed, and any questions were answered by the experimenter.

Experimental conditions. Five experimental groups were employed. In one condition, subjects alone, each subject was by himself while he filled out the questionnaire and heard the emergency. In a second condition, *naive strangers,* two unacquainted strangers were together. In a third condition, *informed strangers,* a stranger, actually a confederate of the experimenter, was also present. In the fourth condition, *naive friends,* two friends witnessed the event together. The final condition, *informed friends,* was the same as the informed strangers except that one of the two friends was a confederate. The same five confederates were used twice for each of the two informed conditions.

Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed to answer two different kinds of questions. First, one can ask which is more efficient, the group or the individual. That is, is the victim more likely to

receive help, and will it occur sooner if a single bystander is present or if *n* others are present? Here, the percentage of alone subjects helping and their time scores are compared to the corresponding measures of the fastest member of each group.

A different question is what affect does the presence of others have on an individual's behavior. As the number of bystanders increases, one would expect the percentage of helping to increase, on the basis of chance alone, even if the individuals are acting independently. Before comparing alone subjects and groups, the former's percentages and time scores have to be corrected (see below). Although both questions are different and quite possibly may lead to different results, many investigators have primarily been concerned with the second question (see Latané & Darley, 1970a). Needless to say, from the standpoint of the victim, the first question is of most importance.

Efficiency Question

At least one subject in every condition took action to help the victim during the emergency. As Table 1 indicates, help came long before the time limit of 75 seconds was reached. A one-way analysis of variance computed on the mean reaction times of the five conditions indicated significant differences among the conditions ($F = 3.81$, $df = 4/45$, $p = .01$). A comparison of the individual contrasts using the Newman-Keuls procedure (at the 5% level) indicated that the informed friends took significantly longer to react. All subjects helped by entering the room where the accident occurred.

Effect of Group on the Individual

The above analysis treats one- and two-person groups as identical when, in fact, they may not be. Since there are twice as many people in two-person groups, one might expect the reaction times to be faster on the basis of chance alone. To correct for this, we computed a hypothetical base line by combining all possible two-person groups obtained from subjects in the alone condition and retaining the distribution of the fastest scores in each group for the hypothetical base line (Latané & Rodin, 1969). The hypothetical median was 5.9 seconds. Subsequent binomial

TABLE 1

MEAN REACTION TIMES (IN SECONDS) FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS IN EXPERIMENT I

Condition	Reaction time
Informed strangers	6.70
Strangers	6.97
Informed friends	13.86
Uninformed friends	7.32
Alone	8.83

tests showed that the distribution of obtained time scores for informed strangers and uninformed friends did not differ significantly from the hypothetical base line. Seven of the pairs for uninformed friends and strangers included a score that was slower than the hypothetical base line ($p = .10$), and only one of the informed friends pairs included a helper with a faster time ($p < .01$). Thus, the results indicate a tendency for social inhibition to occur among uninformed friends and uninformed strangers and a stronger, significant trend for a naive friend to respond slower when he is with a friend who has been instructed to ignore the emergency.

The above findings must be interpreted with some caution. The differences between the medians of the two uninformed conditions and the hypothetical base line were approximately 1 second, and the difference between the median of the informed friends and the hypothetical base line was approximately 5 seconds. It is difficult to see how a difference of 1 second would be very meaningful. In the two uninformed conditions, one subject was always seated approximately 2 feet farther away from the emergency than the other. Since the person closest to the emergency was not always the one who intervened, a difference of 1 second is not very surprising. Even the larger difference of 5 seconds between the expected and obtained scores for informed friends may or may not be an important finding. Given the present data, it is impossible to unambiguously conclude that social inhibition is operating since there were differences in recruitment practice between the way the informed friends and the other subjects were recruited. Either variable, and even chance, could have produced the observed differences. Notwithstanding, we

feel that the most important and theoretically meaningful finding of Experiment I was that all conditions included at least one helper. In fact, there was only one session in which one of the subjects remained seated while the other helped, although he asked if there was anything that he could do.

The differences in our results and those of Latané and Rodin (1969) are rather striking. Whereas we found 100% helping behavior in all conditions, they found 70% of persons in the alone condition and 70% of naive friends, 40% among naive strangers, and 7% among the informed strangers condition included at least one reporter. Obviously, then, there must be other variables occurring in the two studies. At least two possibilities exist— (a) population differences and (b) differences in the ambiguity and seriousness of the emergency situation. We shall discuss each in turn.

Differences in population characteristics are especially relevant to growing evidence that urban populations are less likely to help than are rural or small town populations (Latané & Darley, 1969; Milgram, 1970). Even though Tallahassee might not be considered a small town, there still may be significant differences (such as adaptation to stimulus overload, differences in previous exposure to stimulus overload, differences in group norms of socially desirable behavior, or a learned inclination to mind one's own business) between the physical arrangements and atmospheres of Tallahassee and larger populations such as New York City (Latané & Rodin's, 1969, study was conducted in New York City). Even though no differences were noted in the behavior of subjects from cities with over 100,000 inhabitants (50%) from the behavior of subjects who reported coming from cities with less than 25,000 inhabitants (24%), this does not eliminate the possibility of population characteristics accounting for our atypical results. It could well be that the response evoked in an emergency in this environment would not be found in a larger nonsouthern urban area.

As plausible as differences in population characteristics may appear, the magnitude of the differences between our study and those of Latané and Rodin (the largest difference was 93%; in the informed strangers condition, they found that 7% included a reporter,

whereas we found 100% intervening) and the fact that many of our subjects were from urban areas lead us to question the view that all of the differences can be attributed to population characteristics. Rather, we suggest that a substantial portion of the variance may be attributed to differences in the ambiguity and seriousness of the situation that was produced in the two studies.

In contrast to Latané and Rodin's (1969) "lady in distress" situation, our emergency was nonambiguous and involved severe consequences to the victim. In the former, the emergency was tape recorded and played at each session; the victim was also the experimenter, and the severity was at best moderate. In our study, the emergency was not taped but enacted "live" each time; the victim was not the experimenter, he was not even seen as part of the experiment; and the severity of the situation was extreme. There is no question that the subjects thought that the victim was severely hurt. Upon entering the room, many subjects would kneel beside the victim and attempt to physically assist him. In short, the emergency was perceived as an unmistakeable emergency.

When an emergency situation is nonambiguous, involving severe negative consequences to another person with minimal consequences for the person(s) who help(s), and when derogation of the victim is not an appropriate response, the presence of naive others will not cause an individual to misinterpret the situation as ambiguous, making it less likely that he will intervene. On the other hand, the more ambiguous the situation, the more likely an individual, particularly when in the presence of others, will perceive the emergency as nonserious. The purpose of Experiment II was threefold: (a) to replicate portions of the previous experiment, (b) to include larger groups, and (c) to vary the ambiguity of the emergency situation.

EXPERIMENT II

Method

Subjects

A total of 150 naive male undergraduates at Florida State University participated in the experiment, 10 for each of the alone conditions, 10 pairs (40 subjects) for each of the two-person conditions, and 10 five-person groups (90 subjects) for each

of the five-person groups. The latter groups ranged from 4 to 6 members, with an average of 4½ members. These groups are referred to as five-person groups.

Procedure

The procedure was very similar to the previous experiment. The major difference was that all of the subjects were led to believe that they would be discussing sexual topics with one female, and the experimenter was interested in seeing if one, two, or five males were more effective in changing her attitude. To rule out any familiarity effects, the subjects were asked if they were acquainted with a fictitious woman who would participate in that particular session. None of the subjects reported knowing her. In addition, only one victim was used.

Design

Either one, two, or five naive persons overheard either the maintenance man fall and cry out in agony (low ambiguity) or overheard the same fall without any verbal signs of being injured (high ambiguity). In the latter condition, the subjects heard the ladder, the venetian blind, and the victim fall without verbal cues from the maintenance man.[3] Hence, the design is a 3 × 2 factorial, varying three levels of group size with two levels of ambiguity.

Once again, the main dependent measures of interest were how many persons responded to the emergency and how long it took them to do so.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Efficiency Question

Mean reaction times and percentage of helping for the experimental conditions are reported in Table 2. First, consider the low ambiguity conditions. These results replicate and extend the previous findings. Helping behavior occurred regardless of group size in every case in which the subjects were exposed to an unambiguous emergency. In the high-

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[3] We have attached the labels of high and low ambiguity to the experimental conditions because they vary with respect to the number of cues that indicate an emergency has occurred. In one case the situation is presented as an unmistakeable emergency; in the other case, the victim may or may not be hurt. If the bystander(s), in the latter situation, bother(s) to check out the incident, he (they) would be exposed to the same situation as the low-ambiguity subjects. It is quite easy to conceive of a nonambiguous, nonserious emergency in which helping would be unlikely, but the seriousness of consequences to the victim and situational cues associated with the situation is what distinguishes bystander intervention studies from helping studies in general. Hence, since we are referring to variations in the perceived seriousness of consequences to the victim, we feel the labels are appropriate.

TABLE 2

MEAN REACTION TIMES (IN SECONDS) AND PERCENTAGE OF HELPING FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS IN EXPERIMENT II

Condition	Low ambiguity	High ambiguity
Alone	6.97 (100%)	55.67 (30%)
Two-person group	7.74 (100%)	61.59 (20%)
Five-person group	10.39 (100%)	52.18 (40%)

ambiguity conditions, a different picture emerged. Helping dropped appreciably (approximately 70%). This difference between ambiguity conditions was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 29.30$, $p < .01$). Additional chi-square tests showed that the percentage of helping did not vary with group size.

As may be seen in Table 2, the subjects who were exposed to the nonambiguous emergency situation responded faster. On the average, the subjects in the nonambiguous condition responded to the emergency within 8 seconds, and the average length of time for the subjects who overheard the ambiguous situation was approximately 56 seconds. Since the distributions of the low- and high-ambiguity conditions differed markedly due to the assigning of 75 seconds to those subjects who did not help, a procedure similar to the one used by Schwartz and Clausen (1970) was employed. The raw time scores were converted to reciprocals, and a 3 × 2 analysis of variance was computed. The results were in agreement with the chi-square analysis. The subjects rendered aid sooner in the low-ambiguity conditions than in the high-ambiguity conditions ($F = 53.83$, $df = 1/59$, $p < .01$), and speed of responding did not interact with group size ($F = 1.92$, $df = 2/59$).

The parametric and nonparametric analyses converge to demonstrate the effect of ambiguity and seriousness of consequences for the victim on helping behavior. The subjects who are exposed to a nonambiguous emergency involving severe consequences to the victim with minimal negative consequences to themselves for responding, regardless of the presence of others, are more likely to help than are those subjects who are exposed to an ambiguous situation that allows for alternative interpretations. The subjects in the latter conditions who did not help reported

TABLE 3

MEDIAN HYPOTHETICAL REACTION TIMES (IN SECONDS)
AND EXPECTED PERCENTAGE OF HELPING FOR
THE GROUP CONDITIONS IN EXPERIMENT II

Group	Low ambiguity	High ambiguity
Two person	5.45 (100%)	40.50 (51%)
Five person	4.80 (100%)	14.30 (84%)

that the victim either just dropped something or that he was only mildly hurt, requiring no assistance. In contrast, the subjects who did help reported that the victim might have been hurt; they went into the next room to see if he was all right. The latter finding is very similar to those of Latané and Rodin (1969) and Latané and Darley (1968). The subjects who tried to assist the lady in distress or who reported the smoke thought the situation needed reporting or checking out, whereas the subjects who did not react offered various other interpretations that were consistent with their behavior.

Effect of the Group on the Individual

The previous analyses were concerned with whether a single individual or at least one member of a group was more likely to aid the victim. A different question is what effect the presence of others has on a given individual's likelihood of response. As the number of persons in a group increases, one might expect an increased probability that at least one person would intervene by chance alone and at a faster speed.

In order to compare the percentages of helping behavior between the alone and group conditions, we employed a procedure identical to the one used by Latané and Rodin (1969). The latency of individuals and groups can be compared by employing the mathematical formula $1 - (1 - p)^n$, where n is the number of persons in a group, and p is the probability that a single individual will help. The expected percentages of helping are presented in Table 3. First, consider the high-ambiguity conditions. Since 30% of the alone subjects intervened, we would expect that at least one person in 51% of the two-person groups would render aid, even if the members were acting independently of one another. In only 20% of the two-person groups did at least one person help the victim. This was signifi-

cantly different from the expected 51% (by binomial test, $p = .05$). In the five-person groups, we would, from the formula, expect at least one person in 83% of the groups to offer help to the victim. The observed frequency of 40% was significantly different from the expected frequency ($p < .01$). As expected, no discrepancies between the obtained and expected frequencies were found in the low-ambiguity conditions. All subjects in the alone condition responded, and at least one person in the two-person and five-person groups intervened.

Comparisons of individual and group time scores were made by again computing hypothetical times for the group conditions that would be expected on the basis of the alone subjects. The expected median rates may be seen in Table 3. In all cases the results showed that group members had an inhibiting influence on one another. In the low-ambiguity group conditions, only one two-person group member responded faster than the hypothetical base line of 5.5 seconds ($p < .01$), and no member of the five-person groups intervened faster than would be expected on the basis of the alone subjects ($p < .001$). For the high-ambiguity group conditions, two members of the two-person groups responded faster than the hypothetical base line ($p = .03$), and only one member of all the five-person groups responded quicker than the hypothetical five-person group base line ($p < .01$). In short, alone subject helpers exposed to an unambiguous emergency were faster to respond than were similar two- and five-person group helpers. Likewise, alone subject helpers who were exposed to an ambiguous situation were faster to respond to the needs of the victim than were either the helpers of two- or five-person groups exposed to a similar emergency.

It should be pointed out that for the low-ambiguous conditions the discrepancy between obtained medians and the median hypothetical base line was very small—a difference of 2 seconds for the two-person groups and a difference of approximately 5 seconds for the five-person groups. Unfortunately, we were unable to place each group member an equal distance from the emergency. In the two-person groups, one subject was always about 2 feet farther away from the door than the other, and three of the five-person members

were even farther away than the other two, who were placed in the same position as the two-person group members. Since in many cases the person closest to the door was not the one who responded, one would expect, on the basis of the distance to travel alone, longer response times for those subjects. Thus, the small discrepancies that were found in the low-ambiguity group condition are not surprising. Even if this confounding were not present, one would have expected much larger differences from Latané and Darley's studies (1970a). That these differences were not obtained may be attributed to the nonambiguity of the emergency. The situation that the subjects overheard could not be misinterpreted, and consequently, the presence of others had little, if any, effect on a given individual helping the victim. The fact that all low-ambiguity conditions included at least one helper and that the helpers usually reacted within 10 seconds is strong support for this view.

When one considers the more ambiguous conditions, a different picture emerges. The subjects in the group conditions were less likely to intervene and responded slower than was expected from the subjects in the alone condition. Those subjects who did not help gave alternative interpretations of what happened. The most common one was that the maintenance man had just dropped something. These results are consistent with those found by Latané and Darley (1968) and Latané and Rodin (1969) and provide support for their social influence hypothesis. That is, individuals who are exposed to an ambiguous emergency are likely to look to others for an appropriate interpretation of the event, and if everyone else in the group seems to regard an event as nonserious and the proper course of action as nonintervention, this consensus affects the perception of any single individual and inhibits the likelihood of his response. Consequently, as the present evidence indicates, the victim is less likely to receive help. Given the results in the low-ambiguity conditions, the crucial question is what factors in the situation lead the individual(s) to "misinterpret" the situation.

The results of Experiments I and II have been interpreted as indicating that the characteristics of the emergency situation are major determinants of whether an individual or a group is likely to respond to the pleas of an individual in distress. Individuals confronted with an ambiguous emergency situation, particularly when in the presence of others, are less likely to help a victim than are individuals who are exposed to a nonambiguous situation. When an emergency is nonambiguous involving severe negative consequences to another person with minimal negative consequences for the person(s) who help(s), and when the amount of effort required for intervention is minimal, derogation of the victim is not an appropriate response, and diffusion of responsibility is not likely to occur, individuals will intervene in an emergency situation. Even if a situation is perceived as serious and requiring intervention, any of the three latter conditions may prevent intervention.

The findings of Piliavin, Rodin, and Piliavin (1969) with passengers on an express train in New York City is relevant to this view. They found that in 62 of the 65 cases an "ill" man, who staggered forward and collapsed on the floor staring at the ceiling, received help. When all forms of help were considered, the victim was always successful in eliciting help. The large percentage of helping behavior could reflect the fact that the situation was nonambiguous (the public face-to-face emergency situation would only facilitate this), and the consequences to the victim were severe with no dramatic consequences affecting the helpers. Less helping occurred when a "drunk" staggered and fell. Here derogation of the victim was highly likely. Their study suggests that factors other than population differences are needed to account for bystander apathy. Indeed, subjects from a large metropolitan city responded similarly to those subjects in the present studies. Nevertheless it is still possible that population differences might be partly responsible for our findings. Future research is definitely needed to determine the relative merit of population differences as a significant variable in bystander intervention studies.

At present, which situational characteristics determine whether or not an individual perceives an emergency as ambiguous or nonambiguous are particularly unclear. In Experiment II, the only difference between the ambiguity and nonambiguity conditions was verbal cues provided by the victim. But which

of his cues were more important? Was it his constant groan of pain, his call for help, or both together with the falling of the ladder and venetian blind? Yakimovich and Saltz (1971) have shown that alone subjects exposed to an emergency are more likely to interpret the event as an emergency if the victim calls out for help. Perhaps this is an important cue in many situations. On the other hand, there are situations in which the individual may be unable to call out for help, that is, a person getting electrocuted or having a heart attack. In these situations, what are the relevant cues? No doubt, the cues are specific to the given emergency situation, but the role of ambiguity will not be understood until the situational characteristics of the emergency are clearly known. Future research will have to determine what the major cues are in a given situation that lead individuals to interpret the event as an emergency and how the presence of others affects this perception.

The present studies point to the fruitfulness of studying characteristics of the emergency situation itself, in addition to the investigation of the relationships among bystanders. Most investigators have explained the failure of bystanders to intervene in emergencies by referring to relationships among bystanders, that is, group size, presence of others, composition of groups, and modeling effects. These variables have been shown to be useful in predicting the behavior of persons in emergencies, and researchers continue to study their effects. However, the emergency situation itself has been ignored. The ambiguity and seriousness of consequences to the victim and/or bystanders may prove to be crucial determinants of bystander "apathy."

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