

## Personal Responsibility and Salience of the Request for Help: Determinants of the Relation Between Negative Affect and Helping Behavior

Marian Rogers, Norman Miller, F. Stephan Mayer, and Shelley Duval  
University of Southern California

Three experiments examined the relation between negative affect and helping behavior. The first hypothesis (Experiment 1), that attribution of responsibility to self for one's experimentally induced depressed mood would induce greater inclination to offer help when subsequently asked, was tested in a  $2 \times 2$  factorial design that manipulated mood (negative vs. neutral) and attribution of responsibility for it (internal vs. external). The obtained opposite result seemed attributable to the low salience of the request for help. Experiment 2 replicated Experiment 1 using a highly salient request for help and confirmed the initial hypothesis. In Experiment 3, a negative mood was induced in all subjects, and attribution of responsibility (internal vs. external) was crossed with salience of the helping request in a  $2 \times 2$  factorial design in which the confederate who requested help was totally dissociated from the experiment and blind to the experimental conditions. The obtained interaction confirmed the prediction that internal attribution of responsibility increases willingness to help (as measured either behaviorally or attitudinally) when the request is salient, but inhibits it when the request lacks salience. Self-focus, as measured by the Stroop Color-Word Interference Test, was shown to mediate these effects.

Research on the effect of negative affect on prosocial behavior has produced inconsistent results. When compared to the level of help offered when in a neutral affective state, negative affect often decreases a person's willingness to help (Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973; Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977; Underwood, Berenson, et al. 1977). Some researchers, however, have found the opposite relationship (Apsler, 1975; Brock & Becker, 1966; Carlsmith & Gross, 1969; Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Filter & Gross, 1975; Freedman, Wallington,

& Bless, 1967; Konecni, 1972; McMillen, 1971; Rawlings, 1968; Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972; Steele, 1975; Wallace & Sadalla, 1966). The two most recent theoretical formulations offered to account for this contradiction are those of Cialdini, Darby, and Vincent (1973) and Thompson, Cowan, and Rosenhan (1980).

Cialdini et al. (1973) postulated that a temporary state of negative affect may increase prosocial behavior. Their model argued that one can reduce one's negative affect by engaging in behavior that produces positive affect. People typically associate helping with outcomes that are affectively positive; consequently, when one experiences negative affect it can be reduced by behaving prosocially. Working within this model, Cialdini and Kenrick (1976) proposed that the inconsistency among the findings reported above

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Requests for reprints should be sent to Norman Miller, Department of Psychology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California 90007.

may be caused by differences in the ages and corresponding levels of socialization of subjects who participated in the studies. Specifically, as age increases, the likelihood that the person has been socialized to associate positive outcomes with helping also increases. Consequently, older individuals should be more likely than younger individuals to engage in prosocial behavior in order to reduce negative affect. To test this hypothesis, Cialdini and Kenrick recruited subjects from three age groups (6–8, 10–12, and 15–18); they then induced a negative mood in one half of each age group and a neutral mood in the other half. As compensation for participating in the experiment, all subjects received coupons that could be exchanged for gifts with values linked directly to the number of coupons. They then informed subjects that they could give some of their coupons to children who were unable to participate in the experiment. Although older children donated more coupons, there are a number of problems with the study and its conclusions.

First, a small body of studies directly contradicts Cialdini and Kenrick's conclusion, showing instead that negative affect reduces helping in adults (e.g., Underwood et al., 1977) and promotes it in children (e.g., Isen, Horn, & Rosenhan, 1973, Study 2). Thus, as they now acknowledge (Kenrick, Baumann, & Cialdini, 1979), their earlier conclusions are only partially supported by existing data. Second, Cialdini and Kenrick's design implicitly assumes equal subjective value of the coupons among all age groups. It may well be the case that younger children valued them more and, consequently, were psychologically donating as much or more than older children were. Without information on their perceived value, the relationship between age and donation rate remains ambiguous. Third, their theorizing also seems to imply that negative affect should, at least to some degree, reduce helping behavior among younger subjects. The fact that young children in the negative-affect condition donated as many coupons as did those in the control group thus appears to be inconsistent with their theoretical analysis. Finally, as others have suggested (e.g., Thompson et al., 1980) Cialdini and Kenrick's experimental

procedures did not adequately control for the possibility that the induced mood elicited a type of cognitive activity among older children that differed from that which it elicited among younger children. Older subjects may have been more inclined to take personal responsibility for their negative affective state. Thus, as these researchers now suggest, other factors must be responsible for these inconsistent findings (Cialdini, Baumann, & Kenrick, 1981).

In contrast to this explanation, Thompson et al. (1980) proposed that one's focus of attention mediates the relationship between negative affect and helping. They suggested that in studies showing that negative affect increases prosocial behavior, subjects focused their attention on the misfortunes of others, whereas in those studies that found the opposite effect, subjects directed their attention inward. To test this hypothesis, Thompson et al. asked subjects to identify with the point of view expressed in one of three audiotape narratives. There were two negative-affect conditions. In the one in which attention was directed to self, the second-person narrative (*viz.*, *you*) described how the listener would feel if his or her best friend was dying of cancer, whereas when attention was directed to another, the third-person narrative (*viz.*, *he* or *she*) described the cancer victim's plight. In a neutral-affect control condition, subjects listened to a second-person narrative about making a collage. As predicted, when attention was directed to another, subjects helped more than did those in both the attention-to-self and the control conditions, which elicited equivalent levels of help.

Although Thompson et al.'s (1980) results may suggest that focusing attention on a victim whose distress is clearly internal and uncontrollable increases prosocial behavior, this explanation, too, faces problems. First, their predictions and findings are incompatible with experiments in which the manipulation of negative affect implicitly appears to increase both self-awareness and helping; for instance, embarrassment (Apsler, 1975), derogation (Steele, 1975), and deviancy (Freedman & Doob, 1968; Filter & Gross, 1975) all increased helping. Second, their results contradict a pair of recent studies that explicitly manipulate self-awareness and/or self-

focus and find that increasing it augments rather than reduces helping (e.g., Duval, Duval, & Neely, 1979; Wegner & Schaefer, 1978). Finally, if direction of attentional focus fully mediates the impact of negative affect on helping, self-focused subjects must show decreased helping relative to the control group. Their results show no difference on this critical comparison.

A recent study by Maruyama, Fraser, and Miller (1982) points to the importance of personal responsibility as a factor affecting helping behavior. When children were identified as personally responsible for the number of candies to be donated to other children who were hospitalized on Halloween night, they donated more candy. This outcome alerted us to the possibility that differences in perceived responsibility might account for disparities among the experimental findings. A review of the entire literature on the relation between negative affect and helping appeared to implicate this variable as a source of inconsistency among studies. Specifically, in studies that show increased helping as a function of negative affect, the experimental procedures used to induce it either explicitly or implicitly seem likely to have led subjects to feel responsible for their negative affect or the event that generated it, whereas those that showed decreased helping did not.

To illustrate, in some studies experimenters induced negative affect by leading subjects "accidentally" to break expensive equipment (Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972) or experimental apparatus (Brock & Becker, 1966; Wallace & Sadalla, 1966); to upset a deck of index cards (Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967); to cause someone else to drop punched computer cards (Konecni, 1972) or to lose experimental credit (Darlington & Macker, 1966); to deliver shocks to confederates (Carlsmith & Gross, 1969); or to lie about their previous knowledge of the experiment (McMillen, 1971). These procedures seem likely to have made subjects feel responsible for the negative event and/or their negative affect. Subsequently, in comparison to those in control conditions, subjects were more willing to help either by participating in another ex-

periment, signing a petition, grading exams, donating blood, or rectifying the negative consequences of the "accident." This direction of effect occurred regardless of whether the potential recipient of help was the injured party or a nonvictim.

In other studies, however, the experimental procedures seemed likely to promote an external rather than an internal attribution for the experienced negative affect. For example, in a field study showing that saddened subjects helped less than control subjects (Underwood, Berenson, et al., 1977), negative affect was presumably induced when subjects viewed a depressing film (e.g., *Lady Sings the Blues*). It seems likely that the viewers saw the film as responsible for their emotional state. Similarly, other manipulations that explicitly instruct subjects to feel sad by giving them negative mood statements to read (Aderman, 1972) or by telling them to reminisce about events that have previously made them sad (Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973; Rosenhan, Underwood, & Moore, 1974; Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977) may also have led to external attributions for the negative affect (i.e., subjects blamed the statements or the experimenter who made them read them). In each of these studies negative affect either reduced or did not affect subjects' willingness to help.

In opposition to this analysis, a critic might claim that some studies can be interpreted as arguing against the notion that a sense of responsibility affects a person's willingness to help. For example, Rawlings (1968), as well as Aderman and Berkowitz (1970), found that subjects who merely observed a negative incident (a peer receiving electric shocks or a distressed other not receiving aid from a potential helper) behaved prosocially; other researchers report similar findings (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Konecni, 1972; Regan, 1971). On the one hand, it seems reasonable that those who merely observe might sometimes feel a weaker sense of personal responsibility than that felt by those who ostensibly caused the negative event. On the other hand, observers might nevertheless feel responsible for the outcome of a negative event (e.g. a distressed person not receiving aid from a potential helper) and

for their own bad feeling with respect to it because they failed to take any actions that might alleviate the situation.

To assess this issue properly, it is necessary to use a control comparison condition that structurally precludes any possibility that the observer can help. Unfortunately, no studies in this literature contain such a comparison. Furthermore, none of the studies on observers include among their dependent variables an ancillary measure of felt responsibility that might confirm that observers do not feel responsible whereas perpetrators do. Indeed, in support of our position, research shows that factors that lessen an observer's sense of personal responsibility (e.g. group size) also lessen the observer's tendency to behave prosocially (Latané & Nida, 1981). Therefore, we do not interpret the observer studies as seriously impugning a role for responsibility as a variable that affects helping behavior.

Accordingly, we hypothesized that a feeling of personal responsibility for one's negative affect increases prosocial behavior, whereas an external attribution of responsibility for one's negative affect decreases it. This view argues that making internal attributions of responsibility for events that have negative consequences causes people to feel more aware of themselves and that this heightened self-awareness, in turn, increases prosocial behavior rather than causing it to decrease, as argued by Thompson et al. (1980). To test this notion, we instructed subjects to read mood statements designed to induce either negative or neutral affect. Subsequently, we made them believe either that they were personally responsible for their emotional state or, instead, that an external cause (the mood statements) induced their feelings. We then asked them to help a third party, expecting that those made to feel responsible for their negative affect would display a stronger level of self-awareness and greater willingness to help than those induced to externalize responsibility for it. For those in the neutral mood conditions, we did not expect the manipulation of responsibility to differentially affect their self-awareness or their inclination to help. Furthermore, we expected these latter groups to express the same level of self-awareness and inclination

to help as did those led to externalize responsibility for their negative affect.

## Experiment 1

### *Method*

#### *Subjects*

Female undergraduates ( $N = 40$ ) participated in partial fulfillment of requirements for an introductory psychology course. Each session lasted approximately 30 minutes.

#### *Design*

The factorial design crossed two levels of affective state, negative and neutral, with two conditions of responsibility for it, internal and external.

#### *Procedure*

Subjects were individually recruited for an experiment entitled "Autosuggestion and Task Performance." As each subject arrived, she was greeted by a female experimenter who briefly explained that the experiment was designed to clarify the hitherto perplexing relationship between an individual's mood and her performance on certain tasks.

*Premeasure.* To premeasure mood, each subject responded to a word-association task during which her spontaneous associations to eight words were unobtrusively taped. The premeasure was adapted from a measure used by Velten (1967), which showed that subjects experiencing negative affect had a longer total association time than did subjects with neutral affect. Eight words were selected from Velten's list of 16: paper, wood, life, music, love, parent, hate, and school.

*Mood induction.* To induce either a negative or neutral mood, subjects read 45 mood statements (Velten, 1968), each typed on a  $4 \times 6$  index card that the experimenter handed to her in a slow, methodical manner. The negative statements became progressively more depressing (Card 1, "Today is neither better nor worse than any other day."; Card 45, "I want to go to sleep and never wake up."). The neutral statements consisted of factual sentences (e.g., "The man is dressed in red."). To increase the impact of the treatment, subjects in the negative-affect condition were instructed to reread the last 15 statements.

*Mood postmeasure.* Immediately after the mood induction, subjects completed the Depression scale of the Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist (MAACL; Zuckerman, Lubin, & Robins, 1965).

*Responsibility manipulation.* To prepare the subjects for the manipulation of responsibility for their affective state, they received information concerning their responses on the MAACL. In consonance with their assigned experimental condition, they were informed that their responses revealed that they were feeling neither particularly good nor bad or that they were feeling depressed. To induce an internal attribution of responsi-

bility, they were then told that because their emotions were largely a matter of their own responsibility, they should assume complete responsibility for their present mood state. To induce an external attribution, they were told that their present state was caused by the statements they had read and that they should not assume any responsibility for the way they felt.

*Measure of self awareness.* We expected our procedure for inducing an internal attribution of responsibility for their negative affect to cause subjects to focus their attention on themselves. To assess this possibility, we administered a modified version of the Stroop Color-Word Interference Test (Siegel, Note 1). Previous use of a similar modification (Geller & Shaver, 1976) showed that subjects exposed to procedures designed to induce self-awareness exhibited longer response latencies for self-relevant words than for non-self-relevant words, whereas those exposed to procedures designed to minimize self-awareness exhibited no differences in their response times to the two word sets. In the present experiment, subjects viewed slides of cards, measuring 30 cm × 50 cm, on which five self-relevant words (me, mine, I, myself, self) and five non-self-relevant words (up, theory, a, week, tool) were printed. The words in each set are matched for frequency of usage, length, and number of syllables. Each word was presented separately. Colors were randomly assigned to words within each set of five and were counterbalanced between the two sets. With a concealed tape recorder, the experimenter recorded the subjects' response latency for identifying the color of each word.

*Additional postmeasure of mood.* Experimentally depressed subjects write significantly fewer numbers in 1 minute than do normal subjects (Velten, 1967). Therefore, a writing speed task was used as an additional manipulation check of mood. Subjects were given a paper and pencil and were asked to help prepare for a later task by writing the numbers from 100 to 1 in descending order. After unobtrusively timing the subject for 1 minute, the experimenter interrupted to inform her that a sufficient quantity of numbers had been written.

*Dependent measures.* Before leaving the laboratory for the expressed purpose of preparing materials for the second part of the experiment, the experimenter asked subjects to fill out a questionnaire that had arrived too late to be included in the survey packet that each student in introductory psychology had completed during the first class session. It included a brief description of a campus agency that offered crisis intervention services to students and stated that volunteer workers were needed to help meet their needs. The plea for help stated that because of cyclical escalations in the frequency of callers, the agency needed students to volunteer during certain peak weeks. An *attitudinal* measure of helping asked students how willing they were to help their fellow students through the intervention services. A measure of *behavioral intention* to help asked students the number of hours they were willing to volunteer during a 1-week period. Although the instructions on the questionnaire asked them to provide their names and telephone numbers, subjects were assured that only the campus agency would be aware of their responses. To increase their perception of confidentiality, subjects were in-

structed to place their completed questionnaires in a manila envelope partially filled with other questionnaires.

*Restoration of positive affect and debriefing.* After the subject responded to these written measures, the experimenter announced that unforeseen scheduling problems required that the experiment be prematurely concluded. To restore subjects to their preexperimental state, those who had been exposed to negative-mood statements read, both silently and aloud, 20 statements designed to induce positive affect. To examine whether or not hypothesis guessing or suspiciousness occurred, all were asked to briefly describe in a written statement any ideas they had concerning the experiment. Subjects were thoroughly debriefed by phone during the following semester.

## Results

### Premeasure

A 2 × 2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the word association task revealed that subjects in the four treatment conditions exhibited no initial differences in their preexperimental mood.

### Manipulation Check of Mood

To remove potential bias resulting from nonsignificant pretreatment differences in individual mood states, the scores from the word-association task were used as a covariate in the analysis of responses to the MAACL. The highly significant main effect of affective state,  $F(1, 39) = 102.0, p < .001$ , confirms an effective manipulation of mood (see Table 1); the induction of negative affect caused subjects to describe themselves as feeling more depressed than did those who read the neutral statements.

### Measure of Self-Awareness

The cell variances associated with the response latencies to the modified Stroop Color-Word Interference Test did not meet Hartley's test of homogeneity (Winer, 1971). Cell means and variances tended to be correlated, and the response latencies were positively skewed. Therefore, a logarithmic transformation was applied to raw latencies. In addition, before we analyzed the response measure, we subtracted transformed response latencies associated with the five non-self-relevant words from those obtained with

the five self-relevant words. Positive scores on this difference-score index indicate that subjects had longer latencies for self-relevant words than for non-self-relevant words.

The main effect for affective state,  $F(1, 39) = 9.5, p < .004$ , obtained in the analysis of the Stroop difference scores revealed that negative affect produced longer latencies for self-relevant words than did neutral affect and that internal responsibility induced greater self-focus than did external responsibility. The interaction between the independent variables,  $F(1, 39) = 4.39, p < .043$ , as anticipated, shows that the main effects for affective state and responsibility are primarily explained by the high level of self-awareness induced when subjects were made to feel responsible for their negative affect (see Table 1).

#### Postmeasure of Mood

The main effect for affective state obtained in the analysis of the writing-speed task,  $F(1, 39) = 5.4, p < .05$ , confirms that, as expected, subjects with neutral affect wrote more num-

bers during the 1-minute period than did those with negative affect (see Table 1).

#### Dependent Measures of Helping

The attitudinal and behavioral measures of helping were highly correlated ( $r = .64, p < .0001$ ), the pattern of cell means for each measure was identical, and the analysis of the two measures resulted in a similar interaction between affect and locus of responsibility. Accordingly, standardized responses on the two indicators were summed to provide an overall index of helping. However, because responses on the behavioral measure were positively skewed and contained a modest number of extreme outliers, a logarithmic transformation was performed before standardizing them and combining them with responses to the attitudinal measure (Tukey, 1979). The obtained interaction,  $F(1, 39) = 4.78, p < .035$ , indicates that subjects who were made to feel responsible for their negative affect were *least* inclined to help, whereas those in the three other conditions were equally inclined to help (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Experiment 1: Manipulation of Mood and Responsibility

Responsibility	Affect			
	Negative		Neutral	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MAACL				
Internal	31.1 <sub>a</sub>	4.9	13.9 <sub>b</sub>	5.2
External	32.4 <sub>a</sub>	6.6	14.0 <sub>b</sub>	5.5
Stroop				
Internal	1.9 <sub>a</sub>	1.3	.1 <sub>b</sub>	.70
External	.6 <sub>b</sub>	.57	-.1 <sub>b</sub>	.25
Number production				
Internal	39.0 <sub>a</sub>	5.6	44.0 <sub>b</sub>	5.6
External	38.3 <sub>a</sub>	4.1	46.0 <sub>b</sub>	5.3
Helping				
Internal	2.76 <sub>a</sub>	1.7	5.04 <sub>b</sub>	1.5
External	5.2 <sub>b</sub>	1.2	4.77 <sub>b</sub>	2.7

Note. Means and standard deviations are based on summed raw scores. As indicated in the text, statistical analyses of the Stroop and the helping measures were performed on transformed scores. Larger numbers indicate greater depression, self-awareness, number production, and willingness to help. Within each measure, means without a common subscript differ from each other. MAACL = Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist, Stroop = Stroop Color-Word Interference Test.

### *Discussion*

We expected that subjects who were made to feel responsible for their negative affect would help more than those made to externalize responsibility for it. The results of Experiment 1 directly contradicted our predictions. This is particularly puzzling because, as we expected, subjects who were induced to internalize responsibility for their negative affect exhibited greater self-awareness than those in the other three conditions, and some studies show that raising self-awareness increases helping behavior.

In retrospect, it seemed likely that this unexpected result could be explained by examining the influence of self-awareness on subjects' awareness of the request or need for help. Latané and Darley (1970) and Bar-Tal (1976) posit that the need for help must be noticed before a person will offer it. In addition, Berkowitz (1972) suggests that excessive self-preoccupation can interfere with one's awareness of others' needs. Indeed, a recent study shows that subjects who experienced a temporary loss in self-esteem, an experience that might focus attention inward, were more likely to help a confederate when she explicitly drew attention to her distress than when the need for help was not salient (McMillen, Sanders, & Solomon, 1977). Thus, if a potential helper is distracted by self-concerns and the request for help lacks salience or impact, it may pass unnoticed or may be defined as a situation that is not serious enough to necessitate personal involvement.

The request for help used in Experiment 1 certainly lacked salience. It was plainly typed in black ink on standard white typing paper and the experimenter deliberately downplayed its significance relative to the primary purpose of the experiment. In addition, because subjects were left alone to read and respond to it, those who were self-focused could readily shift their attention away from it and back to themselves. In sum, it seems possible that the self-involvement of those induced to feel responsible for their depressed state may have made them less attentive to the request for help, and consequently they helped less. This line of reasoning suggests that the salience and vividness

of the request for help is another important variable in predicting the effect of negative affect on helping behavior.

### *Experiment 2*

In the second experiment we strongly increased the salience of the request for help and reexamined the relationship between negative affect, attribution of responsibility, self-awareness, and helping behavior. As argued above, in Experiment 1, the heightened self-awareness of subjects in the internal negative-affect condition may have disrupted their attention from the request for help. Increasing its salience should serve to momentarily redirect self-focused attention and, thus, allow subjects to respond to it. Therefore, in Experiment 2, we again predicted that those induced to take responsibility for their negative affect would be more willing to help than either those induced to externalize the cause of their negative affect or those in the neutral-affect conditions.

### *Method*

#### *Subjects*

Subjects were 48 female undergraduates who participated in the study in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

#### *Design*

Similar to Experiment 1, two levels of affective state, negative and neutral, were crossed with two conditions of responsibility for affective state, internal and external, in a  $2 \times 2$  factorial design.

In addition, a control condition was added to provide information on the comparability of subjects recruited for Experiments 1 and 2 and to help assess the impact of changing the format of the helping request. Eight subjects were randomly assigned to the affectively neutral internal-responsibility condition and exposed to the same low-salience request for help used in Experiment 1.

#### *Procedure*

The procedure exactly paralleled that used in Experiment 1 except that the request for help was made highly salient for subjects in all groups other than the low-salience control group. Salience was heightened by breaking the information contained in the request into three paragraphs, each typed in a different type, and by circling the request for help with asterisks and exclamation points and underlining it.

## Results

## Measure of Self-Awareness

## Premeasure

As in Experiment 1, subjects in the four treatment conditions exhibited no initial differences in their preexperimental mood states. A comparison of the pretreatment mood of subjects in the helping-request control condition with that of subjects in the parallel experimental condition (internal responsibility, neutral affect) also showed no difference in mood,  $t(1, 16) = .16, ns$ .

## Manipulation Check of Mood

As in Experiment 1, the scores from the word-association task were used as a covariate in the analysis of responses to the MAACL. As expected, the main effect for affective state,  $F(1, 35) = 213.5, p < .0001$ , showed that affectively neutral subjects described themselves as less depressed than did those induced to have negative affect. A comparison between subjects in the helping-request control condition and the parallel experimental condition (internal responsibility, neutral affect) showed no difference in mood state,  $t(1, 16) = .57, ns$  (see Table 2).

As in Experiment 1, a logarithmic transformation was applied to the raw response latencies of the modified Stroop Color-Word Interference Test to eliminate differences in the cell variances. The results on this measure parallel those of Experiment 1. The main effects revealed that subjects induced to internalize responsibility for their affect were more self-focused than those led to externalize it,  $F(1, 34) = 11.9, p < .001$ , and that negative affect produced higher levels of self-awareness than did neutral affect,  $F(1, 36) = 13.07, p < .001$ . Again, the interaction between the independent variables showed that these main effects were attributable to the high self-focus of those made to feel responsible for their negative affect,  $F(1, 36) = 17.26, p < .001$ . Planned comparisons revealed that subjects in the control condition differed only from those in this latter condition  $t(1, 16) = 3.97, p < .001$ ; they exhibited the same relatively low level of self-awareness as did those in the other three conditions—internal neutral,  $t(1, 16) = .28, ns$ ; external negative,  $t(1, 16) = 1.07, ns$ ; external neutral,  $t(1, 16) = .34, ns$  (see Table 2).

Table 2  
Experiment 2: Manipulation of Mood and Responsibility

Responsibility	Experimental groups				Low-salience control group	
	Negative affect		Neutral affect		Neutral affect	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MAACL						
Internal	33.7 <sub>a</sub>	4.6	11.9 <sub>b</sub>	3.8	11.1 <sub>b</sub>	3.1
External	31.7 <sub>a</sub>	4.7	13.3 <sub>b</sub>	4.1		
Stroop						
Internal	2.20 <sub>a</sub>	1.4	-.20 <sub>b</sub>	.77	.10 <sub>b</sub>	.81
External	-.25 <sub>b</sub>	.81	-.03 <sub>b</sub>	.82		
Number production						
Internal	41.5 <sub>a</sub>	3.3	44.6 <sub>b</sub>	5.0	46.2 <sub>b</sub>	4.9
External	40.2 <sub>a</sub>	6.3	47.9 <sub>b</sub>	9.9		
Helping						
Internal	5.79 <sub>a</sub>	1.6	3.53 <sub>b</sub>	2.2	3.02 <sub>b</sub>	1.6
External	3.66 <sub>b</sub>	1.7	4.30 <sub>b</sub>	1.9		

Note. Means and standard deviations are based on summed raw scores. As indicated in the text, statistical analyses of the Stroop and the helping measures were performed on transformed scores. Larger numbers indicate greater depression, self-awareness, number production, and willingness to help. Within each measure, means without a common subscript differ from each other. MAACL = Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist, Stroop = Stroop Color-Word Interference Test.



*Postmeasure of Mood*

Again, on the postmeasure of mood, the main effect obtained for affective state,  $F(1, 36) = 6.6, p < .01$ , showed that subjects with negative affect wrote significantly fewer words during the 1-minute interval than did those with neutral affect. Planned comparisons showed that whereas the writing speed of those in the control condition was faster than that of both groups with negative affect—internal,  $t(1, 16) = 1.72, p < .05$ ; external,  $t(1, 16) = 2.17, p < .05$ —the writing speed did not differ from that of those in the two neutral-affect conditions—internal,  $t(1, 16) = .17, ns$ ; external,  $t(1, 16) = 1.04, ns$ .

*Dependent Measure of Helping*

As in Experiment 1, the attitudinal and behavioral measures of helping were strongly correlated ( $r = .70, p < .001$ ), the pattern of cell means for each measure was identical, and separate analyses of each showed parallel interactions between affective state and locus of responsibility. Therefore, the two measures were again combined to form a general indicator of helping. As in Experiment 1, the treatment means and variances of the behavioral measure were correlated and the cell distributions were asymmetric and positively skewed. Therefore, before we combined the variables, we logarithmically transformed the behavioral measure.

Increasing the salience of the helping request produced the anticipated interaction,  $F(1, 36) = 6.86, p < .013$ . Those made to feel responsible for their affect expressed a greater interest in helping than did those in the other three experimental conditions; the latter groups did not differ in their inclination to help. Finally, planned comparisons showed that subjects in the low-salience control condition did not differ from neutral subjects in their willingness to help: internal,  $t(1, 16) = .20, ns$ ; external,  $t(1, 16) = 1.56, ns$ ; nor did they differ from those in the external negative treatment condition,  $t(1, 16) = .83, ns$ . These subjects were, however, less inclined to help than were those in the internal negative treatment condition,  $t(1, 16) = 3.20, p < .005$ , (see Table 2).

*Discussion*

Unexpectedly, in Experiment 1, subjects made to feel responsible for their negative affect helped less than did either those led to externalize responsibility for their negative affect or those with neutral affect. In explaining this outcome, we suspected that self-awareness obstructs the processing of the information contained in the request for help. Therefore, in Experiment 2, the format of the request for help was altered to make it more vivid and salient. Again, we predicted that when made to feel internally responsible for their negative affect, subjects would be more inclined to help. The results of Experiment 2 confirmed these predictions. Those made to feel internally responsible for their negative affect not only exhibited greater self-awareness than other subjects, but more important and in contrast to Experiment 1, displayed the greatest willingness to help distressed students.

The results of Experiments 1 and 2 together suggest that the inconsistency among previously published findings reflects variation both in the salience of the request for help and in subjects' feelings of personal responsibility for their negative affect. Although the results clearly support this interpretation, the alternative theoretical explanations previously reviewed warrant discussion. The negative-state relief interpretation might imply that externalizing responsibility alleviates negative affect whereas internalizing it heightens negative feelings; thus, when exposed to a salient request for help, subjects who are made to feel personally responsible for their negative affect help more in order to reduce their higher level of negative affect. The results of Experiments 1 and 2 show that this is not a viable interpretation. Its plausibility requires that subjects who are led to internalize responsibility for their affect exhibit greater depression (more negative feeling) than their counterparts who externalize responsibility. Although the analysis of the measure of mood taken after the responsibility manipulation revealed strong differences in the mood levels of subjects who received a negative or neutral treatment, thereby confirming that it is a sen-

sitive measure, those induced either to internalize or externalize responsibility for their negative affect did not differ. The results also counter the Thompson et al. (1980) thesis, which postulates that an external focus enhances helping, whereas self-focus reduces it. Experiment 2 produced the opposite effect; when exposed to an impactful helping request, subjects in the condition that produced the highest level of self-awareness showed the greatest willingness to help.

The designs of our two experiments, however, necessitate that the results be interpreted cautiously. As described in the Method section, the experimenter who presented the request for help was not blind to the subjects' condition. Although the fact that the results of Experiment 1 were antithetical to our own predictions would seem to suggest otherwise, the experimenter may have unintentionally presented this material in a biased manner. A second problem concerns the salience of the request for help. It was not initially anticipated that this variable would affect the willingness of self-focused subjects to help, and as is apparent, it was manipulated across, not within, the two experiments. Although among the six measures common to both experiments, the index of helping was the only one on which the comparable cells of the two experiments differed,<sup>1</sup> it nevertheless is conceivable that salience of the request for help was not critical. Instead, some chance factor may have produced the between-experiment differences on the helping measure. Experiment 3 was undertaken to rule out these residual sources of interpretive ambiguity.

### Experiment 3

The third experiment explicitly tests the prediction that when a request for help is impactful, subjects made to feel responsible for their negative affect will be more inclined to help others than will those led to externalize responsibility for it. To do so, it directly manipulates the salience of the request for help. If the manipulation of salience yields the predicted results, the possibility that the differences between the results of Experiments 1 and 2 were produced by fac-

tors other than salience is virtually eliminated. Experiment 3 also eliminates other alternative explanations for the results of the first two experiments by having a confederate who was blind to the subjects' experimental condition present the helping request, thereby ruling out the possibility that experimenter bias or demand might affect responses to the request for help.

### Method

#### Design

In Experiment 3, negative affect was induced in all subjects. The  $2 \times 2$  factorial design crossed two levels of responsibility for negative affect, internal and external, with two levels of salience of the helping request, high and low.

#### Subjects

Subjects were 60 female undergraduates who participated in the study in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an introductory psychology class.

#### Procedure

*Premeasure of mood.* After the female experimenter delivered the identical cover story used in Experiment 1, subjects responded to the Depression scale of the MAACL.

*Mood induction.* Using the procedures described in Experiments 1 and 2, we then induced all subjects to experience a negative mood.

*Responsibility manipulation.* After reading the mood statements, subjects were handed a form entitled "Subject Release Form" and instructed to read and sign it. The form consisted of a statement designed to make subjects feel that either they or the mood-induction task was responsible for their affective state. Subjects in the external responsibility condition received the following statement: "You are not responsible for your present mood state. It is entirely due to reading the mood statements." The statement given to subjects in the internal responsibility condition stated, "Because a person's emotions are largely a matter of their own responsibility you are primarily responsible for your present mood state."

<sup>1</sup> Comparison between the mean responses on the helping index by subjects in the neutral control group of Experiment 2 and its counterpart in Experiment 1 shows that the former expressed less willingness to help than the latter. Statements obtained during the debriefings in Experiment 2 suggest that this overall decrease in helping occurred because Experiment 2 was conducted immediately before students' final exams, whereas Experiment 1 was conducted earlier in the semester when subjects felt less pressure for their time.

*Postmeasure of mood.* As in Experiments 1 and 2, a writing-speed task was then administered to provide a postmeasure of affective state.

*Manipulation check of responsibility.* On a 7-point scale subjects indicated how responsible they felt for their present mood state.

*Termination of laboratory procedures and exposure to helping request.* At this point the experimenter announced that she was behind schedule and, thus, forced to prematurely conclude the experiment. As she thanked each subject for participating in the study, she guided her to the building's exit. After the subject walked approximately 200 feet away from the building a female confederate, blind to the subject's experimental condition, approached her. She introduced herself as a representative of the campus radio station and asked the subject to take a few moments to read some literature concerning it. The material stated that as a consequence of inadequate financial support, the station was forced to discontinue broadcasting; it needed \$23,999 to build a new studio and update its equipment. The helping request solicited volunteers to telephone interested alumni and local businessmen and ask them for donations. For those subjects exposed to a highly salient request, the printed material was presented in six paragraphs, and different typefaces were used for each. In addition, the specific sentence containing the request for help was circled in black ink and surrounded by asterisks and exclamation points. Those exposed to the request designed to lack salience read a plainly typed single-spaced paragraph that contained the same information.

*Helping measures.* The page following the material concerning the radio station contained an identical set of questions for all subjects. A behavioral measure asked how many phone calls they would agree to make. (Information contained in the request for help had indicated that the representative could supply subjects with a maximum of 10 phone numbers.) An attitudinal measure asked subjects to indicate on a 7-point scale how willing they were to help the radio station.

*Additional measures.* All subjects then responded to two additional questions that measured, both generally and specifically, the extent to which the salience of the request for help influenced their perceptions of how much help the radio station needed; on two 7-point scales, they indicated how much financial assistance the station needed and how much assistance, in general, it needed.

## Results

### *Premeasure of Mood*

Analysis of the responses to the MAACL showed no differences in subjects' pretreatment mood level.

### *Postmeasure of Mood*

As expected, the treatments did not differentially influence subjects' writing speed. In other words, the responsibility manipu-

lation did not differentially affect the mood level of subjects in the four treatment conditions (see Table 3).

### *Manipulation Check of Responsibility*

The main effect for responsibility,  $F(1, 56) = 19.3, p < .001$ , found in the analysis of subjects' responses to the measure designed to assess their perception of the locus of responsibility for their affective state confirms an effective manipulation of responsibility (see Table 3).<sup>2</sup>

### *Helping Measures*

Analyses of both the attitudinal and behavioral measures of helping produced a strong interaction between responsibility and salience of the request for help. Because the pattern of means for both measures were again similar, the two response scales were standardized and summed to provide a general index of willingness to help. The analysis revealed main effects for salience,  $F(1, 56) = 6.8, p < .01$ , and responsibility,  $F(1, 56) = 5.13, p < .027$ . The direction of differences between the means showed that a salient request and internal responsibility for one's negative affect produced more willingness to help than did the respective comparison conditions. More important, however, the interaction between responsibility and salience,  $F(1, 56) = 29.4, p < .001$ , showed that these main effects were primarily due to the greater inclination to help exhibited by those made to feel responsible for their negative affect and then exposed to the salient request for help. Additional analysis revealed

<sup>2</sup> Experiments 1 and 2 previously showed that our manipulation of responsibility affected self-awareness. However, because two experimenters were used to conduct Experiment 3, the procedures for manipulating responsibility were slightly modified in order to reduce potential experimenter variability (see Method section, Experiment 3). Given this change, we thought it important to assess the effectiveness of the new procedure. Therefore 14 subjects were asked to respond to the modified Stroop Color-Word Interference Test after reading statements designed to produce perceptions of either internal or external responsibility. Analysis of the transformed response latencies confirmed that those led to feel personally responsible for their negative affect had longer response latencies than those led to externalize responsibility.

Table 3

*Experiment 3: Manipulation of Salience of the Helping Request and Responsibility*

Responsibility	Salience			
	High		Low	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MAACL				
Internal	13.1 <sub>a</sub>	6.1	14.2 <sub>a</sub>	5.4
External	13.6 <sub>a</sub>	5.7	13.9 <sub>a</sub>	6.2
Number production				
Internal	45.1 <sub>a</sub>	4.9	44.8 <sub>a</sub>	5.9
External	42.7 <sub>a</sub>	5.3	46.1 <sub>a</sub>	4.7
Helping				
Internal	11.67 <sub>a</sub>	4.1	3.87 <sub>b</sub>	2.8
External	4.20 <sub>b</sub>	2.9	6.93 <sub>c</sub>	3.4
Perceived need for help				
Internal	4.92 <sub>a</sub>	2.2	4.65 <sub>a</sub>	1.7
External	4.73 <sub>a</sub>	2.3	5.01 <sub>a</sub>	1.9
Perceived responsibility				
Internal	5.2 <sub>a</sub>	1.1	5.6 <sub>a</sub>	.9
External	2.1 <sub>b</sub>	1.0	2.5 <sub>b</sub>	1.4

*Note.* Means and standard deviations are based on summed raw scores. Larger numbers indicate greater depression, number production, willingness to help, perceived need for help, and personal responsibility. Within each measure, means without a common subscript differ from each other. MAACL = Multiple Affect Adjective Checklist, Stroop = Stroop Color-Word Interference Test.

that these subjects helped more than those in the other treatment conditions. As shown in Table 3, when exposed to a highly salient request for help, those made to feel responsible for their negative affect were more willing to help than were those led to externalize responsibility for it. On the other hand, among subjects exposed to a request that lacked salience, those made to feel responsible for their negative affect were less willing to help than were those led to externalize responsibility for it.

#### *Measure of Perceived Need*

No differences occurred in subjects' perceptions of the amount of help needed by the radio station (see Table 3).

#### General Discussion

The results of all three experiments consistently revealed that internal attributions of responsibility for negative affect heighten self-awareness. The results of Experiment 1

suggest, however, that when the helping request lacks impact, being made to internalize responsibility for negative affect *decreases* the tendency to help. When, instead, the request for help is made salient, as was the case in Experiment 2, internalizing responsibility for negative affect *increases* the willingness to help. The results of Experiment 3 substantiate these findings. Those made to feel responsible for their negative affect and then exposed to an impactful helping request were more willing to help than those led to externalize their responsibility but otherwise exposed to similar experimental manipulations. A less salient request for help produced the opposite relationship between focus of responsibility and willingness to help. These results confirm our explanation of the unexpected results from Experiment 1, namely, that the self-awareness caused by internalizing responsibility for negative affect obstructs awareness of or responsiveness to the need for help.

Although the results of the three experiments greatly clarify the relations among

negative affect, feelings of personal responsibility, self-awareness, salience of the request for help, and one's willingness to offer it, two aspects of the results of Experiment 3 warrant further comment. First, among those led to externalize their negative affect, more help was offered by those exposed to the request that lacked salience. The most likely explanation of this difference points to greater reactance elicited in those who received the highly salient request for help. Whereas the procedures of Experiments 1 and 2 were unlikely to produce reactance in that the request for help was read in private by the subjects, this was not the case in Experiment 3. There, the confederate directly handed the helping request to the subject and waited for her to respond to it. Presumably, when the request was made highly salient the confederate appeared to be demanding help, whereas the less salient request was not viewed in this manner. Reactance was not elicited among those led to view themselves as responsible for their bad feelings presumably because their self-focused attention precluded its elicitation.<sup>3</sup>

A second puzzling aspect of the data from Experiment 3 concerns the measure of perceived need for help. On first thought, one might expect a more salient request for help to produce perceptions of greater need for help. Clearly, as seen from the data on perceived need for help, this was not the case. This outcome, however, should not be interpreted as questioning the effectiveness of the salience manipulation; other effects confirm its validity. Instead, it argues that the salience manipulation did not interfere with the encoding of information. When explicitly asked, those in the high-salience and low-salience conditions could retrieve the relevant information equally well, and consequently, their judgments concerning the need for help were also equal. However, when subjects were led to attribute responsibility for their negative affect to themselves, and thus, were self-focused, they ignored this information even though it had been encoded. The fact that the measures of perceived need for help were administered *after* those that assessed willingness to help adds further confirmation to this interpretation.

Whereas we initially viewed the theoretical

formulations of both Cialdini et al. (1973) and Thompson et al. (1980) as lacking, our results suggest that both are at least partially correct. The salience of the request for help determines when the Thompson et al. view that self-focused attention decreases helping will indeed be correct. On the other hand, the fact that a highly salient request for help augmented a willingness to help among those led to feel responsible for their negative affect, whereas it produced reactance and a disinclination to help among those led to externalize responsibility for their negative affect, seems to fit comfortably with Cialdini et al.'s (1973) negative-state relief formulation. Apparently, when one feels personally responsible for one's negative affective state, a forceful, demanding request for help does not produce reactance but instead readily elicits responsiveness to the request, presumably because it reduces or eliminates the negative affect state.

The final point that bears consideration is our reinterpretation of the literature on the relation between negative affect and helping. We initially interpreted its inconsistency as due to unintended between-experiment variation in the extent to which subjects were led to view themselves, as opposed to external factors, as responsible for their bad feelings. Our results, however, imply that in previous research the salience of the request for help must also have varied between experiments, and in addition, that it covaried with attributions of responsibility; procedures that induced internal attributions must have also contained highly salient requests for help. Although on first thought such natural covariation seems unlikely, inspection of the experimental procedures suggests that it occurs. For example, in studies employing induction techniques that we believe led subjects to externalize responsibility, the experimenter or a confederate typically delivered the request for help and then left the subject

<sup>3</sup> Although the comparison of the respective conditions of Experiments 1 and 2, in which an external attribution of negative affect was induced, appears to provide a comparable comparison in that the salience of the request for help varied between the two experiments, its usefulness is only illusory. The fact that the overall levels of help differed in the two studies precludes any meaningful comparison.

alone to respond to it (e.g., Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973; Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977), whereas in the second set of studies, experimenters or confederates generally delivered the request for help and attentively waited for subjects to respond to it (e.g., Filter & Gross, 1975; Regan, Williams, & Sparling, 1972). What might produce such consistent covariation? Differences in experimenters' style is one possibility: Some prefer a more active approach, others a more passive one. Alternatively (or in combination with stylistic differences), some procedures may naturally fit together better than others.

### Reference Note

1. Siegel, K. N. *Focus of attention as a function of the quantification of social dimensions.* Unpublished masters thesis, University of Southern California, 1977.

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#### Helmreich Appointed Section Editor, 1984-1985

The Publications and Communications Board of the American Psychological Association announces the appointment of Robert L. Helmreich, University of Texas at Austin, as Editor of the Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes section of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* for a 2-year term beginning in 1984. Helmreich will complete outgoing section editor Ivan Steiner's term. As of January 1, 1983, manuscripts should be directed to:

Robert L. Helmreich  
 Department of Psychology  
 University of Texas at Austin  
 Austin, Texas 78712.

Manuscript submission patterns for JPSP sections make the precise date of completion of the 1983 volume uncertain. Therefore, authors should note that although the current editor, Ivan Steiner, will receive and consider manuscripts until December 31, 1982, should the 1983 volume be completed before that date, Steiner will redirect manuscripts to Helmreich for consideration in the 1984 volume.