perplexed, so they wait to see whether anyone else asks a question. Unfortunately, other students are doing the same thing, so everyone concludes that he or she is the only one who is confused and no one asks for clarification.

Pluralistic ignorance may have influenced the behavior of the participants in Latané and Darley’s (1968) study. Very likely, all of the participants were confused when smoke began to fill the room. Before registering their concern, they looked around to see whether anyone else was alarmed. Nobody wanted to be the first to look concerned, so everyone stayed calm and looked unperturbed. This led most participants to conclude that their concerns were unfounded and that nothing was amiss. Consequently, they failed to take action.

3. Stage 3: Accepting Responsibility

Noticing an incident and recognizing that it is an emergency do not guarantee that helping will occur. People must also accept responsibility for helping by deciding it is up to them to do something. Here again, the presence of other people poses a barrier to helping. When people know others are around, they may decide that they don’t have to help because other people will help or have already done so. This diffusion-of-responsibility effect may have influenced Kitty Genovese’s neighbors. As they looked out their windows, they saw many of their neighbors doing the same thing. They may have then decided that they didn’t need to intervene directly or call the police, because other people would do so.

Darley and Latané (1968) conducted an experiment to test the diffusion-of-responsibility hypothesis. Participants arrived at a laboratory and were escorted into