In Józefów, Poland on July 13, 1942, the battalion’s commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp, told his troops he had received orders to carry out a mass killing of Jews. His soldiers were to collect the Jews in the market square, take them in small groups to the outskirts of town, and shoot them there at close range. Unlike Milgram’s authority figure, Trapp was not impassive but was visibly upset about this order. He also told his men that those who did not “feel up to the task of killing Jews” could be assigned to other duties. Despite this option, only 2 percent of the 500 men stepped forward and asked to be reassigned. The rest carried out the execution of more than 1,500 Jews. It is doubtful, then, whether these soldiers were reluctantly following orders.

As it turns out, the obedience alibi may not even apply to Milgram’s own participants. At the end of several of his studies, the experimenter asked participants: “How much is each of us responsible for the fact that this person was given electric shocks against his will?” (Milgram, 1974, p. 203). If obedient participants believed they were only following orders, they should be more apt than defiant participants to blame the experimenter. The data displayed in Figure 8.14 indicate that this was not the case. What distinguished obedient participants from those who rebelled was not the extent to which they held the experimenter accountable for what happened, but the extent to which they excused themselves and blamed the victim. These findings undercut Milgram’s claim that obedient participants believed they were merely following orders.


**FIGURE 8.14**
Responsibility Ratings in Milgram’s Studies on Obedience to Authority

When asked, “Who was responsible for shocking the confederate?” obedient participants were less apt to hold themselves accountable for their actions than were disobedient ones, but they were not more apt to blame the experimenter. Instead, obedient participants blamed the victim. These findings undercut Milgram’s claim that obedient participants believed they were merely following orders.