

Paying it forward: how helping others can reduce the psychological threat of receiving help

Katherina Alvarez, Esther van Leeuwen

VU University Amsterdam

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Katherina Alvarez, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, VU University Amsterdam, van der Boechorststraat 1, 1081 BT Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: k.alvarez@vu.nl

doi: 10.1111/jasp.12270

Abstract

This paper shows that receiving help could be psychologically harmful for recipients, and passing on help to others after receiving help (“helping forward”) is a good strategy to improve and restore help recipients’ self-competence. Participants ($N = 87$) received autonomy- or dependency-oriented help and anticipated helping forward or not. Compared to receiving autonomy-oriented help, receiving dependency-oriented help negatively affected participants’ self-competence and their evaluation of the helper. Anticipation of future helping increased the liking for and evaluation of the helper. After paying help forward, participants felt more self-competent than before helping, and this effect was more pronounced among former recipients of dependency-oriented help. These results show that helping forward can negate the psychological threat associated with receiving help.

Helping interactions are very common, ranging from small, informal acts of assistance to large-scale institutionalized policies. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals, for example, include helping countries reduce poverty levels, and providing primary education and health care worldwide. Yet despite the widespread prevalence of help efforts, both at a small and a large scale, researchers and practitioners have been pointing to the downside of help exchanges for more than a decade (Buchanan, 2010; Deelstra et al., 2003; Halabi, Nadler, & Dovidio, 2011; Lee, 1997; Nadler, 2002; Schneider, Major, Luhtanen, & Crocker, 1996). Receiving help could increase feelings of dependency and incompetence (Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011; Halabi et al., 2011; Nadler, 2002), as a result of which help offers may be declined (Lee, 1997). For instance, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina was one of the most destructive and costly natural disasters. However, when Cuba was the first country to offer help to the United States, the United States declined this offer. Another problem with aid is that recipients often become dependent upon the aid, instead of becoming empowered and self-sufficient (Halabi & Nadler, 2010; Khumalo, 2003). These reactions raise the question: How can we shape our help efforts such that recipients can enjoy the instrumental benefits of help without suffering the negative side effects in terms of depressed self-competence and negative interactions with the helper? In this paper, we explore the degree to which receiving help allows recipients to retain their sense of

autonomy and maintain a positive relationship with the helper. Moreover, we examine a strategy to improve help recipients’ self-competence by providing recipients the opportunity to help others in the future.

Consequences of Receiving Help

Helping relations are inherently unequal, and typically portray the provider of help as competent and powerful, while the recipient is cast in a dependent and incompetent role (Gilbert & Silvera, 1996; Hardy & van Vugt, 2006; Lee, 1997; Nadler, 2002; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2011). Accepting help creates an inequitable relationship with the helper and promotes feelings of indebtedness if recipients are unable to reciprocate (Buunk, Doosje, Jans, & Hopstaken, 1993; Greenberg & Westcott, 1983; Gross & Latane, 1974; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983; Midlarsky, 1991). These feelings of inequity and indebtedness are likely to boost negative affect (Buunk et al., 1993), distress (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983), and negative evaluations of the helper (Gross & Latane, 1974; Midlarsky, 1991). The evaluation of the helper influences recipients’ responses. For example, people are more likely to refrain from seeking help from others with whom they have a conflictive relationship (van Leeuwen, Täuber, & Sassenberg, 2011). Conversely, students who perceived their teachers as more supportive seek more teachers’ help (Karabenick & Sharma, 1994). Moreover, help that conveys negative

information about the self could decrease feelings of self-esteem, self-competence, and positive affect, and increases stress (Deelstra et al., 2003; Halabi et al., 2011; Schneider et al., 1996). These consequences can have profound adverse effects on the recipients. For example, lower self-esteem is related to less effective coping strategies to alleviate stress (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991), lower academic achievements (Lockett & Harrell, 2003), and more depression (Brown, Bifulco, Harris, & Bridge, 1986). Given the profound negative consequences of receiving help for recipients and their relationship with the helper, it seems imperative that we learn more about the factors that can avert these problems.

Autonomy versus dependency-oriented help

In his model of intergroup helping, Nadler (2002) distinguished between *autonomy-oriented help*, which refers to the provision of tools or hints that allow recipients to solve their problems on their own, and *dependency-oriented help*, which refers to the provision of full solutions to a problem. Whereas dependency-oriented help might have a higher short-term instrumental value, autonomy-oriented help is more respectful of the recipients' need for autonomy and has a higher educational value, which will reduce the likelihood of needing assistance in the future (Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011; Nadler, 2002). Literature shows that people are more reluctant to seek dependency- than autonomy-oriented help, because dependency-oriented help emphasizes status inequality (Nadler, 1997, 2002; van Leeuwen et al., 2011). However, whereas previous researchers have explored the likelihood of seeking or providing autonomy- or dependency-oriented help, little is known about the psychological consequences of *receiving* both types of help. One study found that participants who received autonomy-oriented help felt more competent and positive after receiving it than those who received dependency-oriented help (Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011). Related research showed that recipients who received help from a helper who had a personal choice and internal motivation to help experienced better well-being and higher self-esteem, and responded more positively to the helper than recipients who received help from a helper who had no personal choice to help (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). Moreover, in practical settings, developmental aid agencies recognize the importance of autonomy-oriented help, such as providing technical assistance for capacity development, over dependency-oriented help (Godfrey et al., 2002). These results demonstrate the importance of help recipients' sense of autonomy.

Since little is known about how autonomy- and dependency-oriented help influences recipients' self-competence and their evaluations of the provider of help, our first aim was to study the consequences of receiving autonomy- or dependency-oriented help on a range of

psychological variables. In line with previous research (Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011), the recipients of this help would feel more positive and competent than recipients of dependency-oriented help because of the self-enhancing properties of autonomy-oriented help. We also reasoned that providing autonomy-oriented help requires more effort and better ability to explain the solution to a problem than providing complete answers. Finally, because autonomy-oriented help is more respectful of recipients' autonomy, the helper who provides this help would be better evaluated and more liked than the dependency-oriented helper.

Paying Help Forward

The second aim of the current research was to investigate the effects of providing subsequent help to others as a means of improving self-competence among recipients of (in particular) dependency-oriented help. The notion of paying help forward has been acknowledged for many years. In Catherine Ryan Hyde's (1999) novel that turned into a movie titled "Pay It Forward," a 12-year-old character comes up with the idea of offering three good deeds to others in response to a good deed that one receives. This fictional tale describes the notion of paying help forward. In a nutshell, paying help forward means that one person helps a second person, the second person pays the help forward to a third person, etc.

Paying help forward interventions have been used among practitioners. For instance, nurses in Botswana trained peer group leaders on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infection (STI) awareness and prevention (Norr, Norr, McElmurry, Tlou, & Moeti, 2004). These peer group leaders subsequently trained their coworkers. This intervention proved to be successful on increasing knowledge about HIV/AIDS and STI transmission and prevention, and increased positive attitudes toward condom use. However, this study did not evaluate the psychological consequences of paying help forward for the *providers* of help. According to practitioners, paying it forward has the benefit of passing help and knowledge through the society at a higher ratio. That is, as people help forward, there will be more potential recipients and helpers. As an example, peer leaders continued to train coworkers on HIV/AIDS intervention even though the research funding had finished (Norr et al., 2004). We expect an additional psychological benefit of paying help forward: The notion of helping forward may have self-enhancing properties for the recipient of help, because providing help in itself is empowering and could restore the recipient's image and status.

Research has shown that providing help can be beneficial for the providers' feelings of self-worth (Midlarsky, 1991; Schwartz, Keyl, Marcum, & Bode, 2009), mental health, well-being and quality of life (Post, 2005; Schwartz & Sendor, 1999), longevity (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003),

and fewer depressive symptoms (Musick & Wilson, 2003). Having the opportunity to change roles from recipient to provider may reduce the self-threat related to seeking and receiving help, and boost self-competence. Moreover, research shows that helping is a means of improving reputation and public prestige (Hardy & van Vugt, 2006; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2011, 2012), which implies that helping forward would allow former help recipients to restore their status and increase self-competence. To our knowledge, no research has been conducted on the potential psychological merits of paying help forward for the recipients.

Many studies have focused on reciprocity (e.g., Buunk et al., 1993; Greenberg, 1980; Greenberg & Westcott, 1983; Gross & Latane, 1974; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983; Midlarsky, 1991; Zhang & Epley, 2009). Research on reciprocity norms has shown that individuals are aware that one should repay the person who helped them to avoid feelings of indebtedness (Buunk et al., 1993; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983; Midlarsky, 1991). However, reciprocity is not the same as helping forward. In reciprocal relationships, there is a mutual exchange of favors, such as “I scratch your back and you scratch mine” (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983). Contrary to reciprocity, helping forward means that the help is passed to another person, different from the person who has provided initial assistance. This setup may have some practical advantages over reciprocity. First, in case recipients cannot return the favor to the initial helper, recipients could “return” the help to a third person. Second, since helping forward implies that the help is passed on to others, it has the potential to disseminate knowledge or information to many more individuals. Our aim was to investigate if helping forward is an effective strategy to increase self-competence and to reduce the threat of receiving dependency-oriented help. We additionally aimed to understand if just the mere anticipation to help forward would have a buffering effect on the evaluation of the helper.

Overview of the study and hypotheses

We had four goals for this study. First, we wanted to explore the psychological consequences of receiving help for participants' self-competence and their evaluation of the helper. Using an elaborate puzzle-solving paradigm successfully employed in the past (Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011), participants in this study sought and received either dependency- or autonomy-oriented help (depending on the condition) to solve difficult puzzles and responded to a questionnaire that measured their reactions to the help. In line with previous research (Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011), we predicted that recipients of autonomy-oriented help would feel more positive about seeking help, and more respected and self-competent after receiving help, than recipients of

dependency-oriented help (Hypothesis 1a). Regarding the evaluation of the helper, we predicted that participants would view the autonomy-oriented helper as putting more effort into helping, as more qualified, and evaluate the helper more positively and as more desirable to interact with, than the dependency-oriented helper (Hypothesis 1b).

Our second goal was to test the positive effects of paying help forward on recipients' self-competence. After receiving help in an initial puzzle-solving task, all participants were requested to provide help to other participants in a subsequent task. We assessed their responses to providing help. Because of the self-enhancing properties of providing help, we expected that subsequent helping would boost help recipients' self-competence (Hypothesis 2a). Furthermore, since after helping participants would become helpers themselves, we expected an increase in participant's perceived similarity to the helper (Hypothesis 2b). To this end, self-competence and perceived similarity to the helper were measured twice: once directly after receiving help, and again after providing help to other participants.

We further expected that the self-competence restoring effect of paying help forward would be particularly effective among prior recipients of dependency-oriented help, who suffered the greatest decline in self-competence as a result of receiving help. Paying help forward allows them to restore their initially depressed self-competence. We thus expected that recipients of dependency-oriented help would feel more positive about subsequently helping other participants than recipients of autonomy-oriented help (Hypothesis 3a), and that the self-competence boosting effect of paying help forward would be higher among former recipients of dependency-oriented help than among former recipients of autonomy-oriented help (Hypothesis 3b).

Finally, we investigated the effect of the mere anticipation of paying help forward as a means of improving the relationship between helper and recipient. Research on reciprocity has shown that individuals like a helper more when they are able to reciprocate the help (Gross & Latane, 1974), and that available help is refused when individuals are unable to reciprocate (Midlarsky, 1991). Although reciprocity is not the same as paying help forward, and to our knowledge no research to date has investigated the effect of anticipating to help, it seems plausible that the anticipation of helping others in the future could buffer against the negative effects of receiving help for the relationship with the helper, in the same way as reciprocity can. We thus manipulated participants' awareness of the fact that, after receiving help, they would have an opportunity to help others (i.e., all participants would, in the end, be asked to help others, but only half of the participants were aware of this potential for future helping in the beginning of the study when they were still receiving help themselves). We predicted that the anticipation of future helping would result in a better evaluation of and more liking for the helper (Hypothesis 4).

Method

Participants and design

The study was conducted at the VU University Amsterdam, with 87 undergraduate students (57 females, 30 males, $M_{\text{age}} = 20$, $SD = 2.16$) who arrived at the laboratory and volunteered to take part of the experiment in exchange for a small fee. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (help type: autonomy-oriented help or dependency-oriented help) \times 2 (anticipation of helping or no anticipation of helping) between-participants experimental design.

Procedure

Participants arrived at the laboratory and were seated in separate cubicles with a computer that provided them with instructions, tasks, and questionnaires. Participants worked on a help-receiving task, for which they had to complete ten logical mathematical puzzles (see Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011). Participants who were unable to complete a puzzle could ask for a help card and try again. After the fourth attempt to solve a puzzle (with a maximum of two help cards), participants were automatically redirected to the next question.

Participants were told that a trained peer, who had previous experience and training in problem solving, created the help cards. Literature shows that people prefer to receive help from individuals they perceive to have more expertise and knowledge (Hofmann, Lei, & Grant, 2009; Karabenick, 2003; Nadler, Ellis, & Bar, 2003; Newman & Goldin, 1990), and people would seek information from coworkers who have more expertise in a specific job (Morrison, 1993). Thus, to avoid status incongruent behavior (see Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011; Nadler, 1997; Nadler, Fisher, & Itzhak, 1983; Nadler et al., 2003), the helper was portrayed as a peer with more relevant experience in the task than the help recipients. Although the trained peer had special expertise and knowledge on the task, this trained peer was another student from the VU University Amsterdam, similar to the participant in every other aspect and assumed to be of comparable station. The helper's name was gender consistent. Participants were assured that the help cards were accurate.

The *type of help* was manipulated by presenting in the help cards a hint that could assist to solve the problem (autonomy-oriented help condition), or the complete answer to the puzzle (dependency-oriented help condition). The second help card provided a second hint, or the answer again (depending on the condition). In the *anticipation of helping* condition, participants were informed before the first set of puzzles for which they could seek and receive help that, in a second part of the study, they would be given an opportunity to create help cards for future participants.

In the *no anticipation of helping* condition, participants were also informed of the existence of a second part of the study, but no mention was made of any opportunity to provide future help.

Participants then performed a second task, consisting of ten new logical mathematical puzzles, with neither help nor feedback on their performance.¹ After completing these puzzles, the computer randomly chose three puzzles that the participants answered correctly. All participants were then asked to *provide help cards*, which could be either hints or answers, for other participants. We counted how many hints or answers participants provided, and measured their psychological reactions in a subsequent questionnaire.²

Measures

A questionnaire assessed the dependent variables on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Participants were asked to what extent they felt they received a *hint* ("The help that I received while working on the puzzles looks more like a hint than a complete answer") or a *complete answer* ("When I requested a help card while I was working on the puzzles, I felt I received a complete answer"). *Perceived instrumentality* of the received help was measured with three items (e.g., "The help I received while working on the puzzles always directly enabled me to answer the puzzle correctly," $\alpha = .65$). *Perceived educational value* of the received help was measured with four items (e.g., "The help that I received while working on the puzzles generally gave me more insight into the problem," $\alpha = .89$). *Feeling positive about seeking help* was measured with three items (e.g., "I enjoyed requesting the help cards," $\alpha = .82$). *Feeling incompetent after receiving help* was measured with two items (e.g., "The help that I received often gave me the feeling that I was not capable of solving the problems on my own," $r = .52$). *Feeling respected after receiving help* was measured with two items (e.g., "The help that I received often gave me the feeling that I was respected," $r = .66$). *Self-competence* was measured with seven items (e.g., "After working on the puzzles for a while, I felt pretty competent," $\alpha = .91$). The previous variables were assessed with scales adopted from Alvarez and van Leeuwen (2011).

How much *effort the helper put into creating the help cards* was measured with three items (e.g., "The helper worked hard in creating the help cards," $\alpha = .94$). *Helper's qualification* was

¹Analysis of variance revealed no significant effect of our manipulations on participants' performance during the second task. Overall participants provided $M = 4.60$ ($SD = 1.88$) correct answers.

²We computed two variables, one counting the number of hints and one counting the number of answers a participant provided. The analysis revealed no significant effect of our manipulations. Overall, participants provided more hints ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .90$) than answers ($M = .89$, $SD = .90$; $F(1, 70) = 33.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .33$).

measured with four items (e.g., “The helper is qualified to make the help cards,” $\alpha = .84$). *Helper’s good intentions to help* was assessed with two items (e.g., “The helper wanted other people to be able to solve the puzzles,” $r = .50$). *Desire for future interaction with the helper* was measured with two items (e.g., “I feel that I would very much enjoy working with the helper in the future,” $r = .58$). *Positive evaluation of the helper* was measured with four items (e.g., “Indicate how would you describe the helper after the received help card . . .” “nice,” $\alpha = .70$). Perceived *similarity to the helper* was measured with five items (e.g., “The helper is similar to me,” $\alpha = .92$). How much the participants *liked the helper’s help* was measured with four items (e.g., “I think that the help cards created by the helper were really good,” $\alpha = .92$).

Helping forward

After creating the help cards following the second task, a second questionnaire was administered assessing, again, participants’ *self-competence* ($\alpha = .84$) and perceived *similarity to the helper* ($\alpha = .93$). Additionally, we measured *positive feeling after helping* with three items (e.g., “Having the opportunity to create help cards made me feel good,” $\alpha = .89$). Participants were then thanked for their participation, debriefed, and paid.

Results

Unless otherwise indicated, all variables were analyzed in separate 2 (help type) \times 2 (anticipation of helping) between-participants’ analyses of variance.

Checks

Significant main effects of help type (Table 1) revealed that autonomy-oriented help was felt more like a *hint*, less like an *answer*, and was viewed as less *instrumental* and more *educational* than dependency-oriented help. This shows that the manipulation of help type was successful.

Help type

Significant main effects of help type (Table 1) showed that participants who received autonomy-oriented help felt more positive about *seeking help*, less *incompetent*, more *respected* after receiving help, had higher *self-competence*, *evaluated the helper* more positively, *liked the help* better, and felt that the helper put more *effort into creating the help cards* than participants who received dependency-oriented help. Moreover, participants who received autonomy-oriented help perceived the helper as more *qualified*, as having better *intentions to help*, and as more *similar to the helper* than participants who received dependency-oriented help. These results are in line with Hypothesis 1a and b.

Anticipation of future helping

A significant main effect of anticipation of helping (Table 2) revealed that participants who expected to help *liked the help* better and *evaluated the helper* more positively than the ones who did not expect to help at a later stage. These results support Hypothesis 4. Unexpectedly, participants who

Table 1 Main Effects of the Type of Help Received

	Autonomy-oriented help <i>M (SD)</i>	Dependency-oriented help <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>F</i> (1, 83)	η_p^2
Checks				
Receiving a hint	5.12 (1.10)	1.66 (1.57)	144.40***	.64
Receiving a complete answer	3.98 (1.68)	6.66 (.94)	84.21***	.50
Instrumentality of the help	4.22 (1.03)	6.22 (1.09)	76.43***	.48
Educational value of the help	5.16 (.73)	2.10 (1.34)	197.91***	.70
Reactions to help type				
Feeling positive about seeking help	5.16 (1.09)	3.86 (1.73)	17.13***	.17
Feeling incompetent after receiving help	3.43 (1.44)	4.34 (1.66)	7.37**	.08
Feeling respected after receiving help	4.42 (.76)	2.73 (1.28)	54.53***	.40
Self-competence	3.60 (1.10)	3.08 (1.29)	4.02*	.05
Positive evaluation of the helper	4.92 (.48)	4.42 (1.42)	5.49*	.06
Effort put into creating the help	4.59 (.83)	2.63 (1.84)	40.78***	.33
Helper’s qualification	5.04 (.95)	3.34 (1.52)	38.91***	.32
Helper’s good intentions to help	4.78 (.89)	3.95 (1.58)	8.64**	.09
Liking helper’s help	5.13 (.97)	2.55 (1.55)	95.66***	.54
Desire for future interaction with the helper	3.98 (1.16)	3.04 (1.56)	9.85**	.11
Perceived similarity to the helper	2.97 (1.09)	2.43 (1.12)	4.97*	.06

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 Main Effects of Anticipation of Helping

	Anticipation of helping <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	No anticipation of helping <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>F</i> (1, 83)	η_p^2
Educational value of the help	3.99 (1.82)	3.23 (1.88)	10.87**	.12
Liking helper's help	4.27 (1.79)	3.37 (1.76)	11.07**	.12
Positive evaluation of the helper	5.02 (.79)	4.31 (1.23)	10.91**	.12

Note. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3 Main Effects of Helping Forward

	Before helping <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	After helping <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>F</i> (1, 70)	η_p^2
Self-competence	3.33 (1.28)	4.54 (.83)	91.38***	.57
Perceived similarity to the helper	2.69 (1.15)	2.93 (1.17)	4.11*	.06

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

anticipated helping perceived that the help had more *educational values* than participants who did not anticipate helping.

Effects of paying help forward

The responses of participants who answered at least three puzzles correctly were analyzed ($N = 74$). Cell sizes ranged from 17 to 20 participants.

Self-competence, as measured directly after receiving help (Time 1) and after helping (Time 2), was submitted to a repeated measures analysis of variance as the two levels of a within-subjects factor (helping), with help type and anticipation of helping as between-subjects factors. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of helping. Supporting Hypotheses 2a, participants reported higher *self-competence* after helping than before helping (Table 3). This finding is in line with our reasoning that paying help forward allows recipients to boost their self-competence.

Perceived similarity, as measured directly after receiving help (Time 1) and after helping (Time 2), was submitted to a repeated measures analysis of variance as the two levels of a within-subjects factor (helping), with help type and anticipation of helping as between-subjects factors. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of helping. Participants perceived to be more *similar to the helper* after helping than before helping (Table 3). This finding supports Hypothesis 2b.

Paying help forward to restore self-competence

A significant interaction of helping and help type for self-competence was found, $F(1, 70) = 6.30$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Although the effect of helping was significant for both

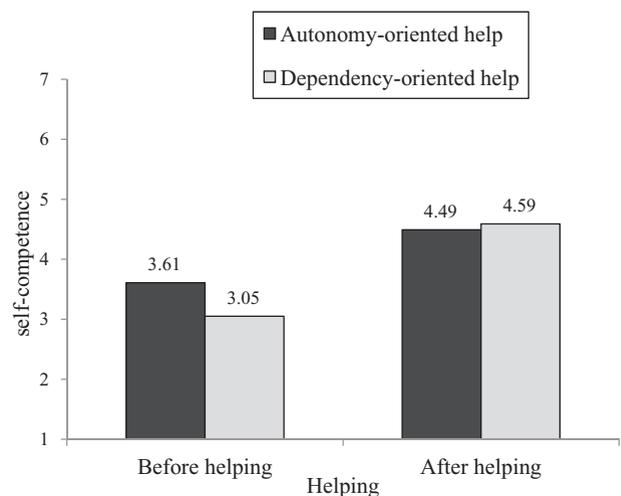


Figure 1 Mean difference values representing the effect of helping and help type on self-competence ($N = 74$).

dependency-oriented and autonomy-oriented help, the increase was more pronounced with respect to dependency-oriented help (from $M = 3.05$, $SD = 1.33$ to $M = 4.59$, $SD = .79$ for dependency-oriented help receivers; from $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.17$ to $M = 4.49$, $SD = .87$ for autonomy-oriented help receivers; see Figure 1). This finding is in line with our reasoning that paying help forward allows recipients of dependency-oriented help to restore their depressed self-competence, supporting Hypothesis 3b.

How *positive participants felt after helping* was analyzed in separate 2 (help type) \times 2 (anticipation of helping) between-participants' analyses of variance. A significant main effect of help type revealed that, compared to autonomy-oriented help, participants who previously received dependency-oriented help *felt more positive after helping* ($M_{\text{dependency}} = 4.68$,

$SD = 1.29$ vs. $M_{\text{autonomy}} = 4.03$, $SD = 1.26$; $F(1, 70) = 4.44$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$). This result supports Hypothesis 3a.

Discussion

The effectiveness of help is not always apparent, as recipients' status, independence, and self-competence are often depressed by the mere act of seeking and receiving help (Deelstra et al., 2003; Lee, 1997; Nadler, 2002; Schneider et al., 1996). Research so far has focused on the likelihood of seeking or providing help (Nadler, 1997, 2002; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2011, 2012; van Leeuwen et al., 2011), but surprisingly, research into the psychological consequences of receiving help and into the factors that can improve recipients' self-competence is virtually nonexistent (but see Alvarez & van Leeuwen, 2011). To understand how help is more likely to succeed in empowering aid recipients, we extensively studied the consequences of receiving two types of help that largely influence helping interactions: autonomy- and dependency-oriented help (Nadler, 1997, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006). Moreover, we investigated the impact of helping forward as a strategy to boost and restore recipients' self-competence.

As the results from this study demonstrated, receiving autonomy-oriented help was more positive for the relationship with the helper and was less psychologically harmful for recipients than receiving dependency-oriented help. Although dependency-oriented help provides a short-term solution to the problem, it might neither help the recipient reach independence nor establish good relationships with the helper. These findings complement existing research that demonstrated a general preference among help seekers for autonomy-oriented help over dependency-oriented help (Nadler, 1997; van Leeuwen et al., 2011).

Despite its apparent merits, the provision of autonomy-oriented help is often not possible or even desirable. For example, when the need for help is urgent (i.e., after natural disasters), dependency-oriented help is the most effective way of providing immediate aid. Furthermore, when the need for instrumental advancement is high, people more often seek dependency- than autonomy-oriented help (van Leeuwen et al., 2011). It is therefore imperative that we advance our understanding of how to reduce the threat associated with receiving dependency-oriented help. As the current research demonstrates, paying help forward is an effective strategy to overcome the self-competence suppressing effects of receiving dependency-oriented help. Once they had helped other participants, recipients of dependency-oriented help showed a greater improvement in self-competence than recipients of autonomy-oriented help. This finding is important as it shows a way of negating the

threat of receiving dependency-oriented help when recipients simply do not have a choice in what type of help they receive.

In addition to the benefits of paying help forward, the mere anticipation of future helping also generated several promising responses. Participants who were anticipating helping others in the future evaluated both the helper and the help they received more positively than participants who did not expect future helping. Moreover, participants expecting future helping also reported feeling that the help they received had more educational values compared to participants who were not anticipating future helping. It is possible that participants who anticipated future helping were paying more attention to the material on the help cards, since they would have to create similar help cards for others soon. This suggests an unexpected but positive side effect of the anticipation of future helping: Recipients of help will pay more attention to the help they receive. Future research might explore if this effect extends to actual learning and improvement of skills.

"Peer-to-peer helping networks," in which recipients receive help from qualified helpers, and subsequently help others in a recursive process, could be a strategy to empower recipients and multiply the help. Some caution needs to be observed, however, before implementing this strategy. Although peer helping has been widely used in practical settings (i.e., Norr et al., 2004), and has been argued to have the potential to spread help (e.g., knowledge, materials) to many people, to our knowledge it is still unknown how to maintain a chain reaction of good deeds. As the current study showed, once people have helped they may feel the benefits of helping. However, it is possible that people will refuse helping forward, especially if the requested assistance requires much effort or resources from them.

Moreover, research has demonstrated that people are less likely to pay kindness forward than greed. Gray, Ward, and Norton (2014) found that people who received greedy divisions of money were more selfish in their subsequent dealings, while people who received generous divisions of money were not more generous to third parties, but provided equal divisions of outcomes. Although helping forward could have positive outcomes for the recipient, it is important to determine which variables encourage chains of forward helping in the long run.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by a grant from the SENACYT Institute (Grant No. FID 09-020) and the Mozaïek (Mosaic) from The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) (Grant No. 017.008.067).

References

- Alvarez, K., & van Leeuwen, E. (2011). To teach or to tell? Consequences of receiving help from experts and peers. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 41*, 397–402.
- Brown, G. W., Bifulco, A., Harris, T. Q., & Bridge, L. (1986). Life stress, chronic psychiatric symptoms and vulnerability to clinical depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 11*, 1–19.
- Brown, S. L., Nesse, R. M., Vinokur, A. D., & Smith, D. M. (2003). Providing social support may be more beneficial than receiving it: Results from a prospective study of mortality. *Psychological Science, 14*, 320–327.
- Buchanan, M. (2010). Foreign aid on trial. *New Scientist magazine, 2790*, 41–43. Retrieved May 18, 2011, from <http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg20827901.300-foreign-aid-on-trial.html?full=true>
- Buunk, B. P., Doosje, B. J., Jans, L. G. J. M., & Hopstaken, L. E. M. (1993). Perceived reciprocity, social support, and stress at work: The role of exchange and communal orientation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65*, 801–811.
- Deelstra, J. T., Peeters, M. C. W., Schaufeli, W. B., Stroebe, W., Zijlstra, F. R. H., & Van Doornen, L. P. (2003). Receiving instrumental support at work: When help is not welcome. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*, 324–331.
- Gilbert, D. T., & Silvera, D. H. (1996). Overhelping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 678–690.
- Godfrey, M., Sophal, C., Kato, T., Vou Piseth, L., Dorina, P., Saravy, T., et al. (2002). Technical assistance and capacity development in an aid-dependent economy: The experience of Cambodia. *World Development, 30*, 355–373.
- Gray, K., Ward, A. F., & Norton, M. I. (2014). Paying it forward: Generalized reciprocity and the limits of generosity. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 143*, 247–254.
- Greenberg, M. S. (1980). A theory of indebtedness. In K. J. Gergen, M. S. Greenberg & R. H. Willis (Eds.), *Social exchange: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 3–26). New York: Plenum Press.
- Greenberg, M. S., & Westcott, D. R. (1983). Indebtedness as a mediator of reactions to aid. In J. D. Fisher, A. Nadler, & B. M. DePaulo (Eds.), *New directions in helping* (Vol. 1, pp. 251–279). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Gross, A. E., & Latane, J. G. (1974). Receiving help, reciprocation, and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 4*, 210–223.
- Halabi, S., & Nadler, A. (2010). Receiving help: Consequences for the recipient. In S. Stürmer & M. Snyder (Eds.), *The Psychology of prosocial behavior: Group processes, intergroup relations, and helping* (pp. 121–138). Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Halabi, S., Nadler, A., & Dovidio, J. F. (2011). Reactions to receiving assumptive help: The moderating effects of group membership and perceived need for help. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 41*, 2793–2815.
- Hardy, C. L., & van Vugt, M. (2006). Nice guys finish first: The competitive altruism hypothesis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 32*, 1402–1413.
- Hatfield, E., & Sprecher, S. (1983). Equity theory and recipient reactions to aid. In J. D. Fisher, A. Nadler, & B. M. DePaulo (Eds.), *New directions in helping, vol. 1: Recipients reactions to aid* (pp. 113–141). New York: Academic Press.
- Hofmann, D. A., Lei, Z., & Grant, A. M. (2009). Seeking help in the shadow of doubt: The sensemaking processes underlying how nurses decide whom to ask for advice. *The Journal of Applied Psychology, 94*, 1261–1274.
- Hyde, C. R. (1999). *Pay it forward*. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- Karabenick, S. A. (2003). Seeking help in large college classes: A person-centered approach. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 28*, 37–58.
- Karabenick, S. A., & Sharma, R. (1994). Perceived teacher support of student questioning in the college classroom: Its relation to student characteristics and role in the classroom questioning process. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 86*, 90–103.
- Khumalo, L. (2003, September). *An evaluation of existing and past poverty alleviation programmes*. Paper presented at the Development Policy Research Unit, Trade and Industry Policy Strategies Forum Conference, Johannesburg.
- Lee, F. (1997). When the going gets tough, do the tough ask for help? Help seeking and power motivation in organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 72*, 336–363.
- Lockett, C. T., & Harrell, J. P. (2003). Racial identity, self-esteem, and academic achievement: Too much interpretation, too little supporting data. *The Journal of Black Psychology, 29*, 325–336.
- Midlarsky, E. (1991). Helping as coping. In M. S. Clark (Ed.), *Prosocial behavior* (pp. 238–264). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Morrison, E. W. (1993). Newcomer information seeking: Exploring types, modes, sources, and outcomes. *The Academy of Management Journal, 36*, 557–589.
- Musick, M. A., & Wilson, J. (2003). Volunteering and depression: The role of psychological and social resources in different age groups. *Social Science and Medicine, 56*, 259–269.
- Nadler, A. (1997). Personality and help seeking: Autonomous versus dependent seeking of help. In G. R. Pierce, B. Lakey, I. G. Sarason, & B. R. Sarason (Eds.), *Sourcebook of social support and personality* (pp. 379–407). New York: Plenum.
- Nadler, A. (2002). Inter-group helping relations as power relations: Maintaining or challenging social dominance between groups through helping. *The Journal of Social Issues, 58*, 487–502.
- Nadler, A., Ellis, S., & Bar, I. (2003). To seek or not to seek: The relationship between help seeking and job performance evaluations as moderated by task-relevant expertise. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 33*, 91–109.
- Nadler, A., Fisher, J. D., & Itzhak, S. B. (1983). With a little help from my friend: Effect of single or multiple act aid as a function of donor and task characteristics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 44*, 310–321.
- Nadler, A., & Halabi, S. (2006). Intergroup helping as status relations: Effects of status stability, identification, and type of help on receptivity to high status group's help. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 91*, 97–110.

- Newman, R. S., & Goldin, L. (1990). Children's reluctance to seek help with schoolwork. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 82*, 92–100.
- Norr, K., Norr, J., McElmurry, B. J., Tlou, S., & Moeti, M. (2004). Impact of peer group education on HIV prevention among women in Botswana. *Health Care for Women International, 25*, 210–226.
- Post, S. G. (2005). Altruism, happiness, and health: It's good to be good. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 12*, 66–77.
- Schneider, M. E., Major, B., Luhtanen, R., & Crocker, J. (1996). Social stigma and the costs of assumptive help. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22*, 201–209.
- Schwartz, C. E., Keyl, P. M., Marcum, J. P., & Bode, R. (2009). Helping others shows differential benefits on health and well-being for male and female teens. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 10*, 431–448.
- Schwartz, C. E., & Sendor, M. (1999). Helping others helps oneself: Response shift effect in peer support. *Social Science and Medicine, 48*, 1563–1575.
- Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., & Pyszczynski, T. (1991). A terror management theory of social behavior: The psychological functions of self-esteem and cultural worldviews. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 93–159). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- van Leeuwen, E., & Täuber, S. (2011). Demonstrating knowledge: The effects of group status on outgroup helping. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 47*, 147–156.
- van Leeuwen, E., & Täuber, S. (2012). Outgroup helping as a tool to communicate ingroup warmth. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 38*, 772–783.
- van Leeuwen, E., Täuber, S., & Sassenberg, K. (2011). Knocking on the outgroup's door: Seeking outgroup help under conditions of task or relational conflict. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 33*, 266–278.
- Weinstein, N., & Ryan, R. M. (2010). When helping helps: Autonomous motivation for prosocial behavior and its influence on well-being for the helper and recipient. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 98*, 222–244.
- Zhang, Y., & Epley, N. (2009). Self-centered social exchange: Differential use of costs versus benefits in prosocial reciprocity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*, 796–810.