It was predicted that orientations to help-avoidance (HA) would predict styles of help seeking (HS). In Study 1, a total of 1,029 pupils aged 10–12 years rated reasons for HA in math class. Ratings formed 3 factors reflecting autonomous strivings for independent mastery, ability-focused concerns to mask poor ability, and expedient perceptions that help would not expedite task completion. In Study 2, a total of 272 pupils who had endorsed one or another HA orientation could request help for math problems. An autonomous orientation was associated with autonomous HS, which promoted independent mastery, and an expedient orientation with executive HS, which expedited task completion. Pupils, especially boys, with an ability-focused orientation exhibited avoidant-covert HS: they requested least help and were most likely to cheat. HS was moderated by perceived threat to competence (ability-focused orientation) but not by perceived competence.

Students often refrain from asking questions or requesting help when they have difficulty with their schoolwork (Dillon, 1982; Good, Slavings, Harel, & Emerson, 1987; Karabenick & Knapp, 1988; Newman & Goldin, 1990; van der Meij, 1988). Studies of help seeking in other contexts also report that people often do not seek help, even when doing so may alleviate real distress (see DePaulo, Nadler, & Fisher, 1983). Seeking help when one cannot solve a problem alone seems preferable to giving up or continuing to persist unsuccessfully alone (Newman, 1991). Failure to do so can thus be construed as a form of motivated behavior that arises when the benefits of overcoming difficulty are outweighed by the costs of requesting help (Nadler, 1997), or, in other words, by powerful reasons or motives to refrain from help seeking (Butler & Neuman, 1995). This article thus focuses on pupils’ perceived reasons for academic help avoidance. Although help-related perceptions and behaviors are affected also by situational factors, the present focus is on individual differences in pupils’ perceptions and their impact on behavior. Specifically, I integrate and expand on prior analyses of help-related perceptions and behaviors to propose, first, that one can distinguish among different types of reasons for help avoidance in the classroom and, second, that attribution of help avoidance to one or another type of reason will be associated with qualitatively different help-seeking behaviors when pupils encounter difficulty on an academic task.

Reasons for Help Avoidance and Patterns of Help Seeking

The literature on help seeking in both educational and other contexts has focused on two main reasons why people may be reluctant to seek help. First, help seeking may be perceived as a dependent behavior that conflicts with personal needs for autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1987) and with Western social cultural emphases on independent mastery and self-reliance (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Studies have confirmed that many pupils explain reluctance to ask for help in terms of strivings for independent mastery (Butler & Neuman, 1995; van der Meij, 1988) and that teachers view independent persistence as a more desirable coping strategy than asking for help (Nelson-Le Gall & Scott-Jones, 1985). Second, people may be reluctant to ask for help because they perceive help seeking as evidence of incompetence and thus as threatening to their perceptions of ability. Findings that people are more reluctant to request help for ego-central than for non-ego-central activities (Nadler, 1987; Tessler & Schwartz, 1972) and request less help when tasks are presented as a test of ability than when they are presented as opportunities to learn (Butler & Neuman, 1995) confirm the role of concerns about ability in inhibiting help seeking. Pupils, also, may cite fears of appearing incompetent to explain reluctance to request help for schoolwork (Newman & Goldin, 1990), especially when asked to account for help avoidance by another rather than the self (Butler & Neuman, 1995).

These two types of reasons often are treated together (e.g., Newman, 1990) as representing similar kinds of costs, which, if salient, both result in the same outcome: reluctance to seek help. However, there seem to be grounds for proposing instead that each reason for help avoidance may be associated with different patterns of help seeking. Pupils who perceive help avoidance as stemming from concerns to
mask incompetence should indeed be reluctant to request help when they have difficulty with schoolwork, because they perceive such requests as proof of inadequate ability. However, not asking for help is also problematic, because failure in classroom tasks also indicates poor ability. One can venture that such pupils may be tempted to resolve the dilemma between exposing inadequacy by failing and exposing inadequacy by asking for help by adopting an avoidant-covert pattern. Thus, they may seek covert help, for example, by copying answers from peers or from the back of the textbook.

In contrast, students who perceive help avoidance as stemming from strivings for independent mastery may be willing to ask for help if their attempts to overcome a difficulty on their own are unsuccessful and if the help available enhances understanding and is thus supportive, in the long run, of their autonomy. Definitions of adaptive help seeking (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985; Newman & Schwager, 1995) concur in considering help seeking to be adaptive when (a) it is necessary and initiated when pupils cannot overcome a difficulty alone and (b) pupils prefer help that supports understanding and subsequent mastery rather than help that serves just to expedite task completion. These authors thus consider requests for hints or explanations to be more adaptive than requests for answers. However, some pupils may request hints because they perceive this to be more socially desirable than asking for the answer but may use the hints received to solve the immediate problem rather than to promote understanding and subsequent independent problem solving. Moreover, labeling as adaptive only help seeking that promotes independent mastery does not include the possibility that an avoidant-covert style, by which pupils strive to succeed without exposing difficulty, may be adaptive for pupils concerned mainly with masking poor capacity. Thus, in this article, I use the term autonomous help seeking to refer to help-seeking behavior that (a) is initiated after the pupil spends time trying to solve a problem alone, (b) is expressed in requests for hints that clarify strategies rather than requests for the answer, and (c) results in improved capacity to solve subsequent problems independently. I predict that pupils who construe help avoidance in terms of striving for independent mastery will display such autonomous help seeking when they cannot solve a problem on their own.

This analysis implies that the degree to which pupils respond to difficulty with overt help avoidance and covert cheating, or with autonomous help seeking, will depend on the degree to which they construe reluctance to seek help in terms of concerns to mask inadequate ability, on the one hand, or of concerns to maintain autonomy, on the other. Studies (Nelson-Le Gall, 1987; Newman & Schwager, 1995) have, however, identified a third pattern, which Nelson-Le Gall (1985) termed executive help seeking. Some children request help often, even when they do not need it, ask for answers rather than hints, and, in general, prefer to have someone else solve a problem for them rather than trying to solve it alone. This pattern emerged in experimental studies, where children were given the explicit option to request answers, but this is rarely the case in classrooms.

Teachers may ignore or disapprove of requests for help, and if they do respond, they rarely just provide the answer (e.g., Nelson-Le Gall & Glor-Scheib, 1985). Thus, some pupils may not ask for help in the classroom, not because they wish to maintain autonomy or mask inadequate ability, but because they do not expect help requests to expedite task completion. Such pupils may, however, request help often and prefer help that expedites task completion in settings where executive help is available and legitimate.

To summarize, my first proposal is that reasons for help avoidance in the classroom are multidimensional and can be conceptualized in terms of three orientations: an autonomous orientation, whereby help avoidance is attributed to striving for independent mastery; an ability-focused orientation, whereby it is attributed to desires to mask incompetence; and an expedient orientation, whereby reluctance to seek help is attributed to perceptions that asking for help will not expedite task completion. My second proposal is that each class of reasons for help avoidance will be associated with qualitatively different styles of responding to academic difficulty. Specifically, I predict that an autonomous orientation to help avoidance will be associated with an autonomous style of help seeking, whereby pupils will first try to solve problems on their own, will request hints rather than solutions if they do not succeed, and will apply the hints received to solve later problems alone. I expect pupils with an expedient orientation to display an executive pattern: They will request help relatively early, will prefer help relevant to expediting task completion, and will be unlikely to improve independent problem solving over time. This pattern is similar to that described by Nadler (1997) as a dependent overuse of help, whereby people prefer to have others solve a problem for them. Finally, I predict that pupils with an ability-focused orientation to help avoidance will display an avoidant-covert style of responding to difficulty, whereby they will request little overt help and will be most likely to seek covert help.

The Role of Perceived Competence Versus Perceived Threat to Competence

Although discussions of personal influences on academic help seeking always address the possible role of perceived or actual competence, it is not clear how competence moderates help seeking. Some studies (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Newman, 1990) support a vulnerability hypothesis, which predicts that willingness to seek help will be lowest among less able students anxious to avoid further confirmation of low ability. Others (Nelson-Le Gall, DeCooke, & Jones, 1989; Newman & Schwager, 1995) support a consistency hypothesis (Tessler & Schwartz, 1972), which predicts least help seeking among able individuals anxious to maintain favorable perceptions of ability. Yet others (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Karabenick & Knapp, 1988) support a third position that predicts that willingness to seek help will be lower at both high and low than at intermediate levels of competence (Butler & Neuman, 1995).

In all cases, the variable assumed to mediate the relation between competence and help seeking is threat to percep-
tions of ability, but none of the studies mentioned in the previous paragraph have measured this directly. Thus, it is possible that in some of the contexts studied, less competent students experienced greater threat and that in others, more competent students felt more threatened. If so, one can venture further that when perceived threat is high and uniform, competence itself may not moderate help seeking because students at all levels will be reluctant to seek help. In a similar vein, competence may not moderate help seeking also when perceived threat is low, but in this case, most students will seek help when they need it. In the present context, it seems reasonable to assume that agreement with ability-focused reasons for help avoidance reflects the degree to which the need for help is perceived as threatening to perceptions of ability. Another aim of this article is to examine the contrasting predictions of the vulnerability and consistency hypotheses more directly by examining whether perceived threat, as measured by endorsement of ability-focused reasons for help avoidance, is higher at low or at high levels of perceived competence. In addition, my analysis suggests that actual help seeking will be moderated by perceived threat to competence rather than by perceived competence. Thus, I predict that perceived competence will not moderate reluctance to seek help among pupils with an ability-focused orientation to help avoidance, among whom perceived threat is similar and high, and will not moderate willingness to seek help among pupils with an autonomous or expedient orientation, among whom perceived threat to perceptions of ability is similar and low.

The Role of Gender in Moderating Help-Related Perceptions and Behaviors

Findings that women request more help than men have been attributed to the greater social acceptability of passive dependency in women (e.g., Merton, Merton, & Barber, 1983). In contrast, Greenglass (1993) and Nadler (1997) have suggested that they may reflect active social coping among women and underuse of social support among men. Evidence that males are more invested in maintaining favorable perceptions of ability (Roberts, 1991) suggests that in academic settings, males may be more likely than females to underuse help because of concerns about exposing poor ability. The focus in this article on qualitative differences in help-related perceptions and behaviors may clarify the role of gender in two ways. First, if boys are indeed more likely to underuse social support, at least in part because they are more concerned with masking low ability, they may be more likely than girls to endorse reasons, especially ability-focused reasons, for help avoidance. Second, one can predict that girls will request more help when they encounter difficulty than will boys but that this difference will derive from higher rates of covert help avoidance and covert cheating in boys and possibly from higher rates of autonomous help seeking among girls but not from higher rates of executive, or dependent, help seeking among girls.

No studies have simultaneously tapped the three distinct styles of help seeking described here, but some prior findings are consistent with my predictions. For instance, Newstead, Franklin-Stokes, and Armstead (1996) have reported higher rates of academic cheating among male than female college students, and some studies with elementary school children have found no sex differences in executive help seeking (Nelson-Le Gall, 1987; Nelson-Le Gall & Glor-Scheib, 1985).

I conducted two studies. Study 1 examined the proposed three-dimensional structure of perceptions of help avoidance among a large sample of pupils in Grades 5 and 6, who rated their agreement with autonomous, expedient, and ability-focused reasons why pupils did not ask for help when they encountered difficulty in math class. I asked about math because pupils perceive math to be a difficult subject (Stodolsky, 1988) that evokes greater need for help than, for example, reading (Newman & Goldin, 1990). I studied children in the later grades of elementary school because developmental analyses of help seeking (e.g., Newman, 1991) suggest that by this age, help seeking is moderated more by perceptions of the costs and benefits of help seeking, which are the focus of the present study, than by cognitive limitations in understanding when one needs help and how to elicit help from one’s surroundings. In addition, ability-focused concerns to maintain positive perceptions of ability do not emerge clearly before about age 10–12 (Nicholls, 1983). I first report the methods and findings from Study 1. I then report Study 2, which examined the prediction that pupils who endorsed mainly autonomous, expedient, or ability-focused orientations to help avoidance in math class would engage in autonomous, executive, or avoidant–covert help-seeking behaviors, respectively, as they worked on difficult math problems several months later.

Study 1

Method

Participants. The sample comprised 1,029 Jewish Israeli children (526 boys and 503 girls, mean age 11 years 4 months), attending 38 fifth- and sixth-grade classrooms in 10 Jerusalem elementary schools, defined by the Ministry of Education as serving similar student populations (about 60% middle to high socioeconomic status [SES] and 40% low SES, according to an index that considers parental education and housing conditions). Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Jerusalem Department of Education and by school principals. The Department of Education does not require parental consent for group-administered surveys that do not use experimental manipulations and do not elicit confidential information about pupils. Children were told that they could choose whether to respond to the questionnaires; none refused.

Materials and procedure. Study 1 was group administered in math class during the 4th month of the school year by one of six female college students, as part of a larger study of attitudes toward math. For this study, we explained that we were conducting research on pupils’ perceptions of math class. Reasons for help avoidance were measured with a questionnaire labeled “reasons for not requesting help in math class,” developed for this study. Pupils read the following:

Imagine a math class. The teacher has taught some new material. She gave pupils some problems and said they could ask her for help if they were having difficulty. Some of the
pupils who had difficulty with one or another problem did not ask the teacher for help. We want to understand why pupils do not ask for help. Below are different reasons why pupils do not ask for help. Rate for each the degree to which you agree that it explains why pupils did not ask for help when they had difficulty with math problems.

The 21 items were considered a priori to tap attributions of help avoidance to autonomous strivings for independent mastery, to ability-focused concerns of masking incompetence, or to expedient perceptions that asking for help would not accelerate task completion (see Appendix A). Pupils rated their agreement with each on 5-point scales anchored at 5 (definitely agree) and 1 (definitely disagree). Children were asked to explain help avoidance in other pupils because pupils seem to be more willing to attribute help avoidance in others than in themselves to concerns with masking low ability (Butler & Neuman, 1995). Pupils were then given the Scholastic Competence items of the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982), modified to refer to math. Scores for each of the seven items could range from 4 (high perceived competence) to 1 (low perceived competence). Items from the Physical Competence and Social Competence scales of Harter’s measure were interspersed as fillers.

Finally, we explained that pupils respond in different ways to the questionnaires and that we would be asking different types of pupils to participate in another study. To do this, we needed to know who they were. Pupils who were willing for us to identify their questionnaires were asked to write their names on a separate page. We emphasized that if we contacted them, we would describe the new study and that pupils would be free to choose whether to participate.

Results

Structure of the “reasons for not requesting help in math class” questionnaire. The first hypothesis was that pupils’ ratings of reasons why pupils did not ask for help would load on three factors corresponding to autonomous, ability-focused, and expedient classes of reasons for help avoidance, respectively. Principal components analysis with oblique rotation on all 21 items yielded three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which accounted for 50.9% of the variance. As Appendix A indicates, most items loaded on their predefined factor, but some loaded low and others loaded high also on other factors. After examining factor loadings and the contribution of individual items to internal reliability, I retained 17 items, which are listed in Table 1. Principal-components analysis on these items yielded a more satisfactory three-factor solution, which accounted for 61.3% of the variance. Internal reliability was .72 for expedient items, .82 for autonomous items, and .87 for ability-focused items.

Table 1

Factor Loadings for Reasons for Not Requesting Help in Math Class, Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Ability-focused</th>
<th>Autonomous</th>
<th>Expedient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want friends to see they are having difficulty</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want everyone to look at them</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want teacher to see they don’t understand</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They were embarrassed</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t want to look stupid</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to overcome difficulty by themselves</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that if they try they will work it out themselves</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think most important thing is to use their own head</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will feel good if they work it out alone</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to try to work out the problem by themselves</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy it more if do it alone</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think teacher won’t tell them the answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think their answer won’t count if they get help</td>
<td></td>
<td>.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think explanation will take so long they won’t finish</td>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think teacher doesn’t like them to ask for help</td>
<td></td>
<td>.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that it will take them even longer to finish</td>
<td></td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that what teacher says won’t help them get the answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Factor loadings less than .30 were not reported.
Ryan & Pintrich, 1997) how best to characterize individual different help-related behaviors. It is, however, less clear in different orientations to help avoidance are associated provide preliminary justification for examining whether tively different reasons for help avoidance. The results thus factor and that Expedient perceptions formed a third factor dependency and of low competence as representing psycho-

Discussion
Analyses for gender differences on each scale of perceptions of help avoidance and sex, F(2, 2046) = 4.64, p < .001. Analyses for gender differences on each scale of perceptions of help avoidance were significant only for expedient perceptions F(2, 2046) = 11.47, p < .001, M = .61. Boys (M = 2.27) endorsed expedient perceptions more than did girls (M = 2.11). The finding that endorsement of autonomous perceptions of help avoidance did not differ by gender was consistent with proposals (e.g., Nadler, 1997) that females’ greater willingness to request help need not reflect greater dependency. However, my proposal that gender differences in help seeking might derive, at least in part, from stronger tendencies among males to perceive help seeking as evidence of low ability was not supported, because boys and girls endorsed ability-focused reasons to the same extent. One aim of Study 2 is to examine whether boys will engage in more overt help avoidance and covert help seeking than will girls, as originally predicted, or whether they will engage in more executive help seeking, as implied by their stronger endorsement of expedient perceptions.

Study 2
The main aim of Study 2 was to examine my predictions that endorsement of autonomous, expedient, or ability-focused orientations to help avoidance in math class will be associated with autonomous, expedient, or avoidant–covert styles of help seeking in math, respectively. These predictions could be adequately tested only in a setting where all three help-seeking styles could be expressed. In the classroom, even pupils with an autonomous orientation might not engage in autonomous help seeking if the teacher does not know how to give useful hints, and pupils with an expedient orientation might not engage in executive help seeking if the teacher does not tell them the answer. Study 2 thus examined help seeking in an experimental setting where pupils could choose whether and when to ask for help and what kind of help they want. Pupils worked individually on difficult math problems that were based on common principles. They could ask for hints that drew attention to these principles and were relevant to solving later problems. Thus, I was able to examine whether asking for hints for early problems facilitated subsequent independent problem solving and whether, as expected, pupils with an autonomous orientation to help avoidance would be most likely to apply early hints to solving later problems alone. The alternative to asking for a hint was to ask for directions on how to compute the answer. Asking for directions was not relevant to solving later problems but was clearly a request for help, because children could check their answers independently from an answer sheet. Children could request help before they recorded an answer, so operationalizing the necessity of requests for help in terms of prior failure (e.g. Newman & Schwager, 1995) was not appropriate. Instead, I measured latency for help requests, on the assumption that this would reflect the degree to which children tried to solve problems alone and experienced difficulty before asking for help. I predicted that children who had endorsed autonomous perceptions of help avoidance would spend more time than children who had endorsed expedient perceptions on trying to solve problems alone before requesting help. Finally, children could “cheat” by copying the answer from the answer sheet. I predicted that children who had endorsed an ability-focused orientation to help avoidance in the classroom would be least likely to ask for overt help (hints and directions to compute the answer) and would be most likely to copy the answer.
My predictions that different perceptions of help avoidance would be associated with qualitatively different help-seeking behaviors rested on the assumption that children construct, and are guided by, distinctive perceptions of both the costs and the benefits of seeking help. For example, I argued that pupils who endorsed autonomous perceptions of help avoidance would be most likely to engage in autonomous help seeking because they would tend to construe help seeking as guided by autonomous strivings to learn and promote mastery. Thus, in Study 2, I examined both help-seeking behaviors and pupils' perceived reasons for seeking help in the experimental setting. I predicted first that perceptions of help seeking also would load on three factors representing autonomous perceptions of help seeking, as guided by strivings to promote mastery; expedient perceptions of help seeking, as guided by desires to expedite task completion; and ability-focused perceptions that help seeking reflected low ability and desire to avoid failure, respectively. I predicted second that agreement with autonomous, expedient, and ability-focused perceptions of help seeking in the experimental setting would be highest among pupils who had endorsed autonomous, expedient, or ability-focused perceptions of classroom help avoidance, respectively.

**Method**

**Participants.** Almost all Study 1 participants agreed that we could identify them. To ensure confidentiality, we drew up separate lists of pupil names by pupil identification numbers for each class and discarded the page from Study 1 on which pupils wrote their names. Principals in two schools requested that we leave our lists with class teachers for safekeeping during the time that elapsed between Study 1 and Study 2. Unfortunately, three of the six teachers lost the lists, with the result that we were able to identify only 920 pupils. Participants for Study 2 were chosen from these pupils. Pupils were first identified as low, medium, or high on perceived math competence as described above. Scores on the reasons for help avoidance scales served to identify children at each level of perceived competence who endorsed autonomous, ability-focused, or expedient orientations to help avoidance, respectively. A fairly rigorous definition was used, so that pupils were selected if their score on one or another of the Autonomous, Ability-Focused, or Expedient scales was above the mean and their scores on both other scales were below the mean. I had hoped to identify about 20 children in each cell of the Perceptions of Help Avoidance × Perceived Competence × Sex MANOVA, but the final sample included 272 participants. As Table 2 indicates, for most cells, I identified about 15 pupils; 15 of the identified pupils did not participate because parents did not give their consent or because they were absent when Study 2 was administered in their schools.

**Experimental task.** The task consisted of numerical series problems. Problems consisted of two alternating series. To solve them, children needed to understand that there were two series, to identify which series led to the incomplete number, and to understand what operation they needed to perform on it to get to the answer. Problems were pretested on 45 children in two different elementary schools, who were rated by their teachers as low, medium, or high in math ability. The aim was to identify six problems that even most high-ability students would not solve alone but that even most low-ability children could solve if given a hint (see below). All problems presented alternating series but required mathematical operations of increasing complexity. Pupils also were given problems based on a single series, to identify one easy, one moderate, and one difficult problem. These problems were presented as practice problems and also served to assign pupils to different levels of initial skill. Experimental and practice problems used in Study 2 are presented as Appendix B.

**Procedure.** The experiment was administered individually during school hours in Months 7 and 8 of the school year by one of five female college students, who were unaware of pupils' orientation to help avoidance. The experimenter reminded the whole class that when they had responded to questionnaires earlier in the year, we had said that we would be asking some pupils to participate in another study. To avoid offending children who were not selected, the experimenter said that we wanted to include pupils from many different schools, so we could invite only a few in each class to participate. She then invited the selected pupils individually to a side room and explained that we were developing math materials and that the pupil would work on numerical series problems. She explained that in each series, numbers progressed according to some rule and demonstrated two examples. She then asked whether the pupil wanted to participate and said that he or she could stop at any point if they liked. All pupils agreed, and none stopped before completion of the study. Pupils were then given three practice problems and shown how they could check their answers by looking under a flap. Scores on these problems served to assign pupils to high (correct on all), intermediate (correct on easy and intermediate problems), and low (correct on none or only on the easy problem) levels of initial skill level.

Next, pupils were told that they would receive six more problems and could ask for help if they wanted. The experimenter explained as follows:

You can ask for a hint, which will give you an idea about the rule of the series, or you can ask me for directions how to

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1Pupils agreed most with autonomous reasons, so when one looks at patterns of agreement within rather than between groups, pupils did not always agree most with the class of reasons that defined the group to which they were assigned. Pupils assigned to the autonomous group agreed most with autonomous reasons \((M = 3.88, 2.49, \text{and } 1.99)\) for Autonomous, Ability-Focused, and Expedient scales, respectively, and pupils assigned to the ability-focused group agreed most with ability-focused reasons \((M = 3.16, 3.36, \text{and } 2.02)\), respectively. However, although by definition, pupils assigned to the expedient group scored above the sample mean on autonomous perceptions and below the sample mean on Autonomous and Ability-Focused scales, they agreed more with autonomous \((M = 3.18)\) and ability-focused \((M = 2.89)\) reasons than they did with expedient ones \((M = 2.48)\).
compute the answer. Take, for example, the problem 1 2 3 5 8?
If you asked for a hint, I would place this transparency over the
problem. It shows that the rule for this series is that each
number is the sum of the two before it [transparency shows
that 1 + 2 = 3, 2 + 3 = 5, 3 + 5 = 8]. Then you can try to
work out the next number. If you asked for directions, I would
use this transparency. It shows that to get the right answer you
must add 5 to the last number [transparency shows “add 5”
over the 8]. You can decide whether to ask for help, when to
ask for help, and whether to ask for a hint or for directions.

Presentation of hint and directions was counterbalanced.
The experimenter asked what she would show if asked for a hint
and for directions, to ascertain that children understood the
difference between them. She reminded pupils that they could
check their answers but emphasized that they should do so only
after they had written their solution and should not copy the answer
even after checking it. Children were then given the first problem.
Hints and directions to compute the answer were standard (see
Appendix B). For hints, the transparency presented each of the
alternating series with its progression rule in a different color. For
directions, it presented only the last number with the relevant
operation written above it. Experimenters verbalized the rule or
directions but gave no further help. For each problem, they
unobtrusively recorded whether pupils asked for help; whether they
asked for a hint or directions; time that elapsed before each request;
whether the answer was incorrect, correct, or correct after asking
for help; and whether the child copied the answer.

Finally, perceptions of help seeking were measured with a
questionnaire, which read as follows:

When we gave these problems to pupils in your grade in
another school, some asked for help when they could not solve
a problem alone and others did not. Why do you think that
kids who asked for help did so?

Pupils rated the degree to which they agreed that each of nine
reasons explained why children asked for help, on a scale of 1
(definitely disagree) to 5 (definitely agree). Reasons reflected
autonomous perceptions of help seeking as promoting learning and
mastery, ability-focused perceptions that pupils had low ability or
were embarrassed to fail, or expedient perceptions that help
seeking expedited easy task completion.

Results

Requests for help. Measures of help seeking considered
only first requests, because few children made more than one
help request per problem (from 1 to 8 children for the six
problems). In no cases did children who had solved a
problem correctly ask for help. Simply counting the number of
requests was not appropriate, because children differed in
the number of problems they solved alone. Thus, following
Butler and Neuman (1995), three measures were con-
structed: requests for help (number of problems for which a
child requested help divided by number of problems not
solved alone), requests for hints (problems for which a child
requested a hint divided by problems not solved alone), and
and requests for directions (problems for which a child
requested directions divided by problems not solved alone).

Measures could range from 0 (child never asked for help
when he or she did not solve the problem) to 1 (always asked
for help when did not solve the problem). These measures
were analyzed with a 2 (help request: hint vs. directions) \times 3
(help-avoidance orientation: autonomous, ability focused, or
expedient) \times 3 (perceived math competence) \times 2 (sex)
analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures on
the first factor. In this and subsequent analyses, significant
interaction effects were decomposed with tests for simple
effects, using degrees of freedom and relevant mean square
errors from the general analysis; where appropriate, Scheffé’s range test \((p < .05)\) was used to compare means within
a factor.

As predicted, perceptions of help avoidance affected both
the frequency and the nature of help requests. A between-
subjects main effect for help-avoidance orientation, \(F(2, 254) = 15.82, p < .001,\) was qualified by a within-subjects
effect for orientation by type of request, \(F(2, 254) = 16.60, p < .001,\) \(MSE = .13\) (see Table 3 for cell means). As
predicted, pupils with autonomous or expedient orientations
requested significantly more help than did pupils with an
ability-focused orientation. Separate analyses for the effects
of orientation on each kind of help request confirmed that
help orientation had significant, but different, effects on
measures. In no cases did children who had solved a

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Autonomous</th>
<th>Ability focused</th>
<th>Expedient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for hints</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for directions</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All help requests</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheating</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request latency</td>
<td>63.62</td>
<td>25.89</td>
<td>58.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous perceptions of HS</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability-focused perceptions of HS</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expedient perceptions of HS</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As predicted, perceived competence did not moderate help seeking in any group. The prediction that girls would request more help, but not more executive help, was supported. A significant main effect for sex on help seeking, \( F(1, 254) = 14.12, p < .001 \) (\( M_s = .77 \) for girls and .63 for boys), was not qualified by a significant interaction effect with kind of requests. It was, however, qualified by an unexpected significant effect for the interaction of Help-Avoidance Orientation \( \times \) Sex, \( F(2, 254) = 4.09, p < .05, \) \( MSE = .04 \) (see Table 4 for cell means). Although orientation moderated help seeking among both boys \( F(2, 254) = 36.57, p < .001 \), and girls, \( F(2, 254) = 6.05, p < .01, \) the tendency for girls to request more help than boys was significant only for pupils with an ability-focused orientation, \( F(2, 254) = 45.19, p < .001, MSE = .04. \)

Cheating. The results confirmed that pupils who endorsed ability-focused reasons for help avoidance made fewest overt requests for help. I predicted also that these children would be most likely to seek covert assistance, or, in the present context, to cheat. The measure of cheating consisted of the number of problems for which children copied the answer. A 3 (help-avoidance orientation) \( \times \) 3 (perceived competence) \( \times \) 2 (sex) ANOVA yielded the predicted main effects for orientation, \( F(2, 254) = 5.97, p < .01, \) and for sex, \( F(2, 254) = 6.01, p < .01, \) the findings that children with an ability-focused orientation cheated most (see Table 3) and that boys (\( M = 0.63 \)) cheated more than girls (\( M = 0.33 \)) were, however, qualified by a significant effect for the Help-Avoidance Orientation \( \times \) Sex interaction, \( F(2, 254) = 4.99, p < .01, MSE = .83. \) Separate analyses for the effect of sex within each help-avoidance orientation (see Table 4 for cell means) were significant only for the ability-focused group, \( F(2, 254) = 21.66, p < .001, MSE = .83. \) Thus, the prediction that cheating would be most common among pupils with an ability-focused orientation was supported for boys, but help-avoidance orientation did not moderate cheating among girls.

Latency for requests for help. I predicted that children who endorsed autonomous reasons for help avoidance would spend longer trying to solve problems alone before requesting help than would those who endorsed expedient reasons. Request latency was computed as the mean time over all problems for which help was requested that elapsed before children made their first request for help. Data were missing for 25 children who never requested help. A 3 (help-avoidance orientation) \( \times \) 3 (perceived competence) \( \times \) 2 (sex) ANOVA yielded a significant main effect for help-avoidance orientation \( F(2, 229) = 7.36, p < .001 \) (see Table 3 for cell means). As predicted, pupils in the expedient orientation group asked for help significantly faster than did ones in the autonomous and ability-focused groups.

Using hints to improve independent problem solving. It has been argued that asking for hints is adaptive because it promotes understanding. I examined whether requesting hints for early problems led to increasing capacity to solve later ones alone and hypothesized that this pattern would be received mainly among pupils who had endorsed autonomous perceptions of help avoidance. Children were divided into frequent or infrequent hint requesters according to a median split on requests for hints for the first three problems. Independent problem solving was analyzed with a 2 (time: Problems 1–3 solved alone vs. Problems 4–6 solved alone) \( \times \) 3 (help-avoidance orientation) \( \times \) 2 (frequency of requests for hints for early problems) \( \times \) 3 (perceived competence) \( \times \) 2 (sex) ANOVA with repeated measures on the first factor. As expected, the effect for the Time \( \times \) Help Avoidance Orientation \( \times \) Frequency of Hint Requests interaction was significant, \( F(2, 236) = 5.03, p < .01, MSE = .49. \) Separate 2 (time: Problems 1–3 solved alone vs. Problems 4–6 solved alone) \( \times \) 2 (infrequent vs. frequent requests for hints for early problems) ANOVAs conducted within each orientation yielded a significant interaction effect only for pupils who had endorsed an autonomous orientation, \( F(2, 236) = 17.69, p < .001, MSE = .49. \) As predicted, pupils with an autonomous orientation who requested more hints for early problems solved more later than earlier ones alone. The number of independent solutions did not increase over time among pupils with an ability-focused or expedient orientation, even if they asked for hints for early problems (see Table 5 for cell means).

Help-avoidance orientation and help-seeking style. The results provided consistent support for my proposal that different orientations to classroom help avoidance would be associated with different patterns of help seeking in an
experimental setting. To further clarify these associations, I operationally defined the three styles of help seeking as follows: autonomous (above the mean on requests for hints, below the mean on requests for directions, and above the mean on response latency); executive (above the mean on requests for directions, below the mean on requests for hints, and below the mean on response latency); and avoidant-covert (below the mean on requests for hints and directions and above the mean on cheating). I examined the association between perceptions and behavior among the 183 pupils who exhibited one of these styles, using log-linear modeling with backward elimination, starting with a 3 (help-seeking style) × 3 (help-avoidance orientation) × 2 (sex) saturated model; a preliminary analysis retained no effects involving perceived competence. The best fitting model, χ²(6, N = 183) = 7.97, p = .240, retained the second-order effects for Style X Orientation X Sex, but the third-order effect for Style X Orientation X Sex approached significance (p < .10; see Table 6 for cell frequencies). As expected, the autonomous style was displayed by a far higher proportion of pupils who endorsed autonomous perceptions than of ones who had endorsed executive or ability-focused perceptions. In contrast, the executive style was most common among those in the ability-focused group. The association between help-seeking style and gender also was illuminating. Similar proportions of boys and girls engaged in autonomous and executive help seeking, but more boys adopted the avoidant-covert style. Table 6 clarifies that help-seeking styles among pupils with autonomous and expedient orientations did not differ by gender. In contrast, the ability-focused orientation was associated with autonomous or executive help seeking among girls but with the avoidant-covert style among boys.

Reasons for help seeking. Reasons for help seeking were measured to examine the proposal that pupils construct guiding orientations to help which incorporate different perceptions both of reasons for avoiding help and of reasons for help seeking. I predicted first that responses to the nine items of the reasons for help-seeking questionnaire also would yield three factors incorporating autonomous, ability-focused, and expedient reasons for help seeking, respectively. As predicted, principal-components analysis with oblique rotation yielded three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (see Table 7 for factors and loadings), which accounted for 61% of the variance. The three items in each factor were averaged to create Autonomous (α = .73), Ability-Focused (α = .68), and Expedient (α = .72) scales, r(272) = .10, ns between autonomous and ability-focused perceptions; r(272) = -.23, p < .001, between autonomous and expedient perceptions; and r(272) = .16, p < .01, between ability-focused and expedient perceptions. The second prediction, that perceived reasons for help seeking would differ by orientations to help avoidance in the classroom, was examined using a 3 (perceptions of help seeking) × 3 (help-avoidance orientations) × 3 (perceived competence) × 2 (sex) MANOVA, with the first as a within-subjects factor. The analysis yielded only the predicted significant multivariate main effect for perceptions of help avoidance, F(6, 504) = 3.23, p < .05. Effects at the univariate level were significant for ability-focused perceptions; F(2, 253) = 3.78, p < .05, and expedient, F(2, 253) = 4.71, p < .01, perceptions of help seeking. Table 3 confirms that agreement with ability-focused reasons for help seeking was

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help-seeking style</th>
<th>Autonomous HA</th>
<th>Expedit HA</th>
<th>Ability-focused HA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant-cheating</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All numbers in table except ns are percentages.

Table 7

Factor Loadings for Reasons for Help Seeking in the Experimental Session, Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Expedient</th>
<th>Ability-focused</th>
<th>Autonomous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to finish quickly</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't feel like exerting themselves</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's easier to ask for help</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They're no good at math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They wanted to get the best grade</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's embarrassing to get it wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to understand math series</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were curious about rules of the series</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to understand how to solve next problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
highest among pupils with an ability-focused orientation to classroom help avoidance and agreement with expedient reasons for help seeking was highest among those who had endorsed an expedient one. The tendency for pupils with an autonomous orientation to help avoidance to agree most with autonomous reasons for help seeking was not significant, because agreement with this scale was quite high in all cells.

**Supplementary analyses: Effects of initial skill level.** Some studies of help seeking tapped actual, rather than perceived, competence, so I assigned children to high, intermediate, or low levels of initial skill level, according to their scores on the three practice problems and reanalyzed the analyses for help seeking, latency, and cheating reported above, using initial skill level instead of perceived competence. In the interests of brevity, I report only significant effects involving initial skill level. A 2 (help request: hint vs. directions) × 3 (help-avoidance orientation) × 3 (initial skill level) × 2 (sex) ANOVA with repeated measures on the first factor yielded a significant within-subjects effect for the Initial Skill Level × Help Request, interaction, F(2, 254) = 8.90, p < .001, MSE = .13. Separate analyses for the effect of initial ability on each kind of help request were significant only for hints, F(2, 254) = 6.62, p < .001. Children of low initial skill level asked for significantly fewer hints (M = .45) than did children at intermediate (M = .60) or high (M = .63) levels. The analysis for latency yielded a significant main effect for initial ability, F(2, 229) = 5.09, p < .01. Pupils who scored worst on the practice problems requested help significantly faster than did children who did best (Ms = 52.9, 57.4, 64.0 s for low, intermediate, and high levels, respectively). There were no significant effects of initial skill level on cheating.

**General Discussion**

The main contributions of these studies lies in first delineating three dimensions of reasons for pupils' reluctance to seek help and three distinct styles of help seeking and then demonstrating that different orientations to help avoidance are indeed associated with different styles of help seeking. My proposal that pupils construct distinct guiding orientations to help was supported by the finding that attributions for both help avoidance and help seeking loaded on three distinct and barely correlated factors, reflecting autonomous, ability-focused, and expedient perceptions, respectively. In addition, although autonomous reasons for help seeking were highly endorsed by most pupils, agreement with ability-focused reasons was highest among pupils who had endorsed ability-focused reasons for classroom help avoidance, and agreement with expedient reasons for help seeking was highest among pupils who had endorsed expedient reasons for classroom help avoidance. This evidence for the proposed three-dimensional structure of help-related perceptions is important in itself. Prior conceptualization of the help-seeking dilemma (Nadler, 1997; Newman, 1991) in terms of perceived benefits versus costs of help seeking have not considered the possibility that different pupils may construct qualitatively different perceptions of the costs of requesting help, which may then promote quite different patterns of behavior when they encounter difficulty. Indeed, the second main contribution of the present studies lies in confirming that this is indeed the case.

The measures of Study 2 were designed to capture my threefold distinction between autonomous, expedient, and avoidant-covert help-seeking styles and thus differed in some respects from those used in prior studies of help seeking. Comparisons of instrumental versus executive requests for help (e.g., Nelson Le Gall, 1987; Newman & Schwager, 1995) tend to address both the nature of requests (hints vs. solutions) and the necessity of help requests (whether or not pupils experienced genuine difficulty before requesting help). Here, too, the central measures of help seeking were the frequency with which pupils who did not solve a problem alone requested hints, on the one hand, and directions to compute the answer, on the other. Pupils in Study 2 were not required to record a solution before requesting help, so I could not measure necessity in terms of the frequency of help requests that followed incorrect solutions (e.g., Newman & Schwager, 1995). Instead, I measured the latency of requests for help, on the assumption that this would contribute to distinguishing between autonomous help seeking, when pupils request help after experiencing real difficulty, and executive help-seeking, when requests precede genuine attempts at solution. Finally, I reasoned that to be considered autonomous, requests for hints should actually be applied to solving subsequent problems. Thus, I also analyzed the degree to which such requests were indeed associated with increases in the rate of independent solutions during the session. No studies have examined avoidant-covert help seeking, which was captured here by considering both help avoidance (low frequency of requests for help) and covert help seeking (copying the answer).

As predicted, different orientations to help avoidance in the classroom were associated with different patterns of behavior when children encountered difficulty with math problems. Pupils identified as endorsing an autonomous orientation were most likely to engage in autonomous help seeking. They spent longer than other groups working on the problem alone, asked for help if they could not solve it, and almost always asked for hints rather than directions. In contrast, pupils with an expedient orientation to help avoidance displayed an executive (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985), didactic (Asser, 1978), or dependent (Nadler, 1997) style of help seeking. They spent little time trying to solve problems on their own and also were more likely than any other group to ask for directions. Although these pupils, too, asked more often for hints than for directions, they did not use the hints

---

2Because perceptions of reasons for help seeking might have been affected by pupil's own willingness to seek help during the experiment, data also were analyzed with a (3 (perceptions of help seeking) × 3 (perceptions of help avoidance) × 2 (sex) multivariate analysis of covariance, with the measure of necessary help seeking as the covariate. The effect for the covariate was not significant, and the main effect for perceptions of help avoidance paralleled that reported in the text.
to improve subsequent independent problem solving. It is often assumed that requests for hints in themselves reflect strivings to attain independent mastery (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985; Newman & Schwager, 1995). However, I found that only pupils with an autonomous orientation to help avoidance actually used the hints received to develop understanding that enabled them to solve later problems alone. These findings further underline the importance of attending not only to the frequency and nature of help requests but also to the use people make of them. Thus, some pupils who request hints may use them, as our expedient ones seemed to do, to expedite task completion rather than to promote understanding and mastery.

For pupils who construe help in terms of the probability that it will expedite easy task completion, seeking executive help quickly in settings where it is available can be viewed as an active and even effective way of achieving their goals. In a similar vein, I expected pupils who construed help avoidance in terms of masking inadequate ability to resolve the dilemma between exposing inadequacy by requesting help and exposing inadequacy by failing by refraining from requesting overt help and by copying the correct answer instead. As predicted, pupils who had endorsed ability-focused reasons for help avoidance in math class were most likely to adopt such an avoidant-covert style. They also were most likely to attribute help seeking in another pupil to low ability or to concerns with exposing inadequacy by failing. There is prior evidence that people who are concerned with demonstrating high ability are reluctant to ask for help (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Nadler, 1987). However, studies that have measured frequency of help seeking alone shed more light on what such people do not do when they continue to encounter difficulty than on what they do. One possibility suggested by the present findings is that they will seek covert help. In a similar vein, Frey and Ruble (1985) found that once children become aware of the self-esteem costs of social comparison, overt social comparison in the classroom is replaced by more subtle and covert forms, such as inquiring about peer progress. It would be interesting to examine in future research both the forms of covert help seeking in the classroom, which may range from asking other pupils what answer they got, through copying the answer, to the more blatant forms of cheating reported by Newstead et al. (1996), and the degree to which these are predicted by pupils' help-related perceptions.

Taken together, the results provided compelling support for the proposal that differences in the way pupils construe help avoidance in the classroom will be associated with qualitative differences in help-seeking behaviors in another context. The predicted relations between ability-focused perceptions and avoidant-cheating behaviors were, however, supported in their entirely only for boys. Although an ability-focused orientation undermined overt help seeking in both boys and girls, when objective difficulty with the task was combined with "psychological" difficulty with exposing incompetence, more girls responded by asking for help, and more boys responded not only by underusing help but also by trying to succeed by "illicit" means. A recent survey also found higher rates of cheating among males (Newstead et al., 1996). Both participants and observers have higher expectations for success for males than for females and are more likely to attribute failure to low ability for females and to insufficient effort for males, especially in sex-typed domains such as math (e.g., Deaux, 1976; Eccles, Wigfield, Harold, & Blumenfeld, 1993; Roberts, 1991). Teachers also are more willing to help when pupil failure is attributed to low ability (Butler, 1994) and may thus respond more favorably to requests for help when girls experience academic difficulty. In contrast, boys may experience greater external pressure to demonstrate high ability by succeeding without help and thus may be more likely than girls to seek covert or illicit help.

The implication that societal expectations concerning ability may be crucial in mediating academic help seeking in males and females seems reasonable, but note that I found no sex differences in help seeking among pupils who endorsed expedient or autonomous perceptions of help avoidance. Overall, girls were no more likely than boys to engage in executive help seeking (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985), a behavioral pattern similar to that which Nadler (1997) terms dependent overutilization of help. Although this finding is consistent with proposals that females' greater willingness to ask for help reflects active social coping rather than passive dependency (Green- glass, 1993; Nadler, 1997), in the present study, girls were also no more likely than boys to engage in autonomous help seeking. Rather, the degree to which pupils displayed autonomous versus executive help-seeking behaviors depended not on gender, but on the degree to which pupils endorsed either autonomous or expedient perceptions. The findings thus imply that boys may be more willing to seek help than is commonly thought, as long as they do not perceive help seeking as threatening to their perceptions of competence.

The role of help-related perceptions in shaping behavior was further supported by the findings that help seeking was moderated by endorsement of ability-focused perceptions of help avoidance, but not by perceived competence. There is some agreement that the critical variable mediating the relation between competence and help seeking is perceived threat to self-esteem, but I know of no studies that measured perceived threat independently of perceived competence. My proposal that ability-focused perceptions of help avoidance may provide such a measure was supported by the finding that at all levels of perceived competence, pupils who endorsed an ability-focused orientation were least likely to request help. Interpretation of the lack of relation between perceived competence and help seeking to similar and high levels of perceived threat among pupils in the ability-focused group and to similar and low levels of perceived threat among pupils in the autonomous and expedient perception groups is further supported by the finding that pupils with an ability-focused orientation to help avoidance were most likely to cheat and to agree that pupils who seek help do so because they lack ability or are embarrassed to fail. Thus, these pupils' reluctance to seek help seems quite clearly to reflect a defensive attempt to mask inadequate ability rather than indifference to success or a commitment to working alone.

My findings imply first that researchers may have mea-
sured the wrong variable: perceived competence rather than perceived threat to competence. If so, prior mixed findings as to the relation between competence and help seeking in achievement settings may have been due to variations across studies and contexts in the degree to which perceived threat was greater at higher or lower levels of perceived competence. The positive correlation in Study 1 between endorsement of ability-focused perceptions and perceived competence supports the consistency hypothesis (Tessler & Schwartz, 1972), which proposes that the need for help will be most threatening when it conflicts with generally favorable self-perceptions. Further research is, however, necessary, both to establish that perceived threat does indeed predict help seeking better than does perceived competence or self-esteem and to investigate whether the relation between perceived threat and perceived competence differs in different contexts.

Conflicting findings as to the relation between competence and willingness to seek help also may have been due to differences in the measures of competence used, so I also measured initial skill level. Relative to pupils who scored high on the practice problems, the least able pupils requested help faster and requested fewer hints. These differences are similar to those that emerged in comparisons between older and younger children (Butler & Neuman, 1995; Nelson-Le Gall, Kratzer, Jones, & DeCooke, 1990; Newman & Schwager, 1995) and are consistent with proposals that greater knowledge or expertise enables more sophisticated help and information seeking (Miyake & Norman, 1979). Thus, although initial skill level affected help seeking more than did perceived competence, it affected the quality of help seeking rather than willingness to seek help. It is, however, likely that in the classroom these aspects are related. If poorer understanding of the subject matter is associated with less proficiency in eliciting useful help from one’s surroundings, over time, less able students may request less help than more able ones (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988, 1991; Newman, 1990) because their attempts at help seeking are less effective and satisfying. Moreover, our experimenters responded positively to all help requests, but teachers may respond more favorably to the more sophisticated requests of more able pupils.

Although perceptions and behaviors were tapped in two different contexts, several months apart, and perceptions for both help avoidance in the classroom and help seeking in the experimental setting were tapped for others, rather than the self, relations between perceptions and behaviors were remarkably consistent. In this case, it is important to inquire into possible determinants of pupils’ help-related perceptions. The distinction between autonomous, ability-focused, and expedient orientations to help avoidance is conceptually similar to distinctions in the achievement motivation literature among task, ego, and extrinsic orientations to learning (e.g., Nicholls, 1983; Ryan & Pintrich, 1997). A research program is currently examining the proposal that task, ego, and extrinsic orientations to learning will promote autonomous, ability-focused and expedient orientations to help avoidance and help seeking, respectively, and that orientations to learning and help will together predict the degree to which pupils engage in autonomous, avoidant-covert, or executive help seeking. No prior studies have systematically distinguished between the different orientations to help seeking and help avoidance and the different styles of help seeking identified here. Some support for the previously mentioned conceptualization is provided by Ryan and Pintrich (1997), who reported positive associations among task orientation, perceived benefits of help seeking for learning (analogous to autonomous reasons for help seeking), and self-reported use of help seeking to promote mastery (analogous to autonomous help seeking). In addition, Butler and Neuman (1995) found that experimental induction of ego orientation undermined willingness to seek help and enhanced attributions of help avoidance to ability-focused concerns, relative to a condition that induced task orientation.

Although the present studies focused on personal determinants of help seeking, help seeking is a social behavior that is shaped by people’s experiences in particular contexts. Thus, it seems likely that different classroom environments may promote different help-related perceptions and patterns of help seeking. One must exercise caution in generating educational recommendations from the present studies, which did not consider contextual factors. One suggestion may be to promote autonomous perceptions of help seeking, but my findings suggest that such perceptions may already be normative (see Newman, 1990; van der Meij, 1988, for similar findings from other countries). Thus, it may be more fruitful for teachers to attenuate competing ability-focused or expedient perceptions of help than to reinforce already strong autonomous ones. This proposal receives some support from a study that found that adaptive strategy use among pupils who scored high on mastery achievement goals depended on whether they also scored high or low on ego goals (Meece & Holt, 1993). My findings also suggest that deemphasizing ability-focused perceptions may be especially helpful in promoting constructive help seeking and reducing cheating among boys.

Perhaps more significantly, I observed help seeking in a context where pupils could request different kinds of help and received help immediately and without censure. Not surprisingly, the rates of help seeking reported here were far higher than those reported for classroom activities (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988, 1991; Newman & Goldin, 1990). Teachers do not always approve of requests for help, and even if they do, the large classes and frontal recitation teaching methods typical of the Israeli educational system limit their capacity to provide children with individual and constructive help. Moreover, teachers may not always know what constitutes constructive help. Thus, in another study (Butler, 1994), I found that few teachers thought it appropriate to respond to incorrect answers by helping pupils understand and overcome their difficulty. This article did not focus on the cognitive implications of different kinds of help, but the effects of hints on problem solving were quite dramatic. When pupils requested hints and were motivated to attain understanding, even some pupils who could not solve the relatively simple practice problems were later able to solve far more complex problems on their own. Thus, it
seems likely that offering help that draws attention to principles and strategies and encouraging pupils to request such help when they need it will help to allay fears that help seeking will be construed as incompetence and to reduce temptations to seek covert or executive help instead of help that can promote learning.

References


Appendix A

Items and Factor Loadings for Entire “Reasons for Not Requesting Help in Math Class” Questionnaire, Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Ability-focused</th>
<th>Autonomous</th>
<th>Expedient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want friends to see they are having difficulty^a</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want everyone to look at them^a</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want teacher to see they don’t understand^a</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are embarrassed^a</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t want to look stupid^a</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’re afraid other kids will laugh at them</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to overcome difficulty by themselves^a</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that if they try they will work it out by themselves^a</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think most important thing is to use their head^a</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will feel good if they work it out alone^a</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want to try to work out the problem by themselves^a</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy it more if they do it alone^a</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are too involved in the problem to ask for help</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think it’s more important to think than to get the answer</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think teacher won’t tell them the answer^a</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think their answer won’t count if they get help^a</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think explanation will take so long they won’t finish^a</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think teacher doesn’t like them to ask for help^a</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that it will take them even longer to finish^a</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think that what teacher says won’t help them get the answer^a</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They don’t have the time to ask for help</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Items retained to form scales of Ability-Focused, Autonomous, and Expedient perceptions of help avoidance.

Appendix B

Numerical Series Problems, Rules for Solution, and Examples of Help, Study 2

Practice problems

3 6 9 12 ? (+3)
3 5 8 12 ? (+2, +3, ...)
17 10 5 2 ? (-7, -5, ...)

Experimental problems

1 4 3 12 9 36 ? (×3 for each series)
8 12 4 6 2 3 ? (+2 for each series)
1 9 4 6 7 3 ? (+3 for Series 1, -3 for Series 2)
10 10 7 6 4 2 ? (-3 for Series 1, -4 for Series 2)
20 27 14 9 8 3 ? (-6 for Series 1, +3 for Series 2)
18 16 17 14 15 11 ? (-1, -2, etc. for Series 1, -2, -3, etc. for Series 2)

Example of hint (Problem 1)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
1 \times 3 \\
3 \times 3
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
1 \\
4 \\
3 \\
\hline
12 \\
9 \\
36
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
4 \times 3 \\
\hline
12 \times 3
\end{array}
\]

Example of directions for computing the answer (Problem 1)

\[
-9
\]

\[
36
\]

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