Reactions to Receiving Assumptive Help: The Moderating Effects of Group Membership and Perceived Need for Help

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The present study examined how group membership and need for help, variables that can operate independently or in combination, can affect reactions to receiving help. Arab participants \( (n = 164) \) received or did not receive help from an in-group member (Arab helper) or from an out-group high-status member (Jewish helper) when the task was described as easy or difficult, or when no information was given. As predicted, Arab participants who received assistance from a Jewish helper or received assistance on an easy task showed more negative reactions than did those who received assistance from an Arab helper or on a difficult task. The theoretical implications for disentangling intergroup and interpersonal influences on reactions to receiving help are considered.

Almost by definition, helping occurs between unequals, at least in that specific context. Helping occurs when a person who has superior resources directs those resources toward another person in need. Thus, helping can easily convey caring and generosity on the part of the helper. However, when the psychological processes related to the power disparities between the helper and the recipient are being considered, help may very well be interpreted otherwise.

Specifically, help can signify the dependence of the recipient on the help giver, producing resistance and rejection on the part of the recipient. At the individual level, receiving help can undermine a person’s feelings of worth, undermining their confidence and motivation to succeed (Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1982). At the group level, being offered help can sometimes exacerbate, rather than relieve, group tensions. For example,
following the 1993 Oslo agreement between Israelis and Palestinians, many attempts were made by the Israeli government, which assumed that Palestinians needed help in various spheres of life. Such efforts often met with Palestinian resistance. One recurring theme voiced by Palestinians was that by accepting such offers, they would continue their economic, academic, or cultural dependence on Israelis (Nadler & Saguy, 2004). Thus, acts of helping may not necessarily be seen as “helpful” from the perspective of the recipients.

Conceptually, the objective of the present research is to illuminate how contextual features, such as the difficulty of the task for which help is offered, and social factors, such as the group membership of a person offering assistance, can distinctively affect recipients’ responses related to personal and social identity. Practically, understanding how the dynamics of collective and personal identity shape different reactions to help can help guide the development of social policy and interventions that are designed to benefit people, but that may arouse negative reactions of recipients.

The study of helping relations has traditionally been pursued from an interpersonal perspective, which focuses on the personal motivations that underlie helping between individuals and the responses of recipients to aid (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Schroeder, Penner, Dovidio, & Piliavin, 1995). This line of research focuses mainly on conditions and processes of help-giving behavior, such as characteristics of the helper, situation, and person in need of assistance (Batson, 1998). In addition, work on interpersonal processes in helping indicates that seeking or being offered help may threaten people’s personal self-esteem because it can imply the inferiority of the recipient, relative to the helper (Nadler, 1991, 1998; Nadler & Fisher, 1986; Nadler, Fisher, & Ben-Itzhak, 1983).

Although the role of power relations on helping has been considered at the interpersonal level (Worchel, 1984), this aspect has been examined only recently at the intergroup level. Consistent with this perspective on helping as power relations, Nadler (2002) presented a model of intergroup helping that offers a framework for understanding findings and concepts from social identity research (Brown, 2000; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999) and helping relations (Bierhoff, 2002; Dovidio et al., 2006). This model of intergroup helping relations as power relations proposes that intergroup helping may be a mechanism by which groups maintain, assert, or challenge existing status and power relations.

From the perspective of high-power groups, which have the resources to give assistance, Nadler’s (2002) model suggests that a primary motivation for helping less powerful groups is to maintain power. As a consequence, powerful groups experiencing high threat to social identity will be more likely to give assistance that fosters further dependency of less powerful group than
assistance that is instrumental for the less powerful group to improve its position and become independent (autonomy-oriented help and dependency-oriented help, respectively; Nadler, 1997, 1998). Consistent with the model’s predictions, Jackson and Esses (2000) showed that perceived economic competition between Canadian citizens and immigrants reduced the willingness of Canadian citizens to offer empowering help to immigrants, assistance that would remove barriers faced by immigrants so that they could help themselves.

Nadler’s (2002) model also incorporates the perspective of low-power groups to receiving assistance, which is the focus of the current study. Specifically, Nadler has asserted that offers of assistance can have negative consequences at the collective level for members of low-power groups that parallel the adverse personal consequences of being a recipient on the interpersonal level (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). According to prominent theories of collective identity, such as social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), people derive esteem and meaning from their group membership. At the intergroup level, receiving assistance from an out-group member can threaten recipients’ collective self-esteem, and thus produce negative personal, collective, and intergroup responses that could, as SIT posits, motivate attempts by the recipient to restore group members’ positive identity (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Ellemers & van Rijswijk, 1997).

Similar insights regarding the reactions of low-status groups to receiving help from a member of a high-status out-group can be drawn from a study conducted by Schneider, Major, Luhtanen, and Crocker (1996). These researchers studied assistance that they characterized as assumptive help. Assumptive help involves unsolicited assistance in the absence of any evidence of personal need or inferiority on the part of the recipient. Schneider et al. found that Black participants who had received assumptive help from a White experimenter experienced negative affect and suffered a decrease in self-worth. Within Nadler’s (2002) model, this finding can be interpreted as reflecting Blacks’ experience of threat to their group’s identity as a consequence of receiving assumptive help from a White person.

Additional research designed to test hypotheses directly derived from the intergroup helping relations as power relations model has revealed, consistent with the propositions of the model, that responses of members of low-power groups to help from a high-power group member are systematically affected by social structure, the recipient’s characteristics, and the nature of the help offered (Nadler & Halabi, 2006). Specifically, it was found that the reactions of members of low-power groups to assistance from high-power groups were particularly unfavorable and produced negative affect and bias toward the other group when recipients identified strongly with their group,
status relations were perceived as unstable, and the type of assistance offered was dependency-oriented (i.e., providing the whole solution to a problem). However, when the status relations were unstable and the assistance was autonomy-oriented, members of low-power groups who were highly identified with their group were more likely to seek help from the high-status group. Under these circumstances, aid could be seen as instrumental for enhancing the low-status group’s social position.

Importantly, these patterns characterize reactions and behaviors of experimentally created and real low-status groups (i.e., ad hoc low-status group created with a minimal group paradigm, and Arabs in Israel). The present research extends this line of research by exploring how factors that make collective or personal identity salient can influence group- and self-related reactions to assistance. The group-level responses examined are collective esteem and intergroup attitudes; while the individual-level responses studied are affect and feelings of self-worth.

The research of Schneider et al. (1996) on assumptive help and the previous research on recipients’ reactions to aid at the interpersonal level (Nadler & Fisher, 1986) suggest that a key factor in whether an offer of assistance is viewed as supportive or threatening involves whether it is seen as instrumental in achieving the recipient’s desired goal. Thus, to the extent that assistance is needed, people may view help, even from a high-status out-group member, favorably; when help is not needed, members of a low-status group may respond negatively. Therefore, the present study focuses on the need for help as a potential factor influencing reactions to help. Empirically, the present research introduces an indirect manipulation of experienced need for help (i.e., task difficulty), which, to our knowledge, has not been tested in research on recipient reactions to assistance.

Overview and Hypotheses

We explored our hypotheses in the context of existing intergroup relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel. These are highly salient social identities. Considering the tense, conflictual relationship between Arabs and Jews in Israel and Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) reasoning regarding the relationship between intergroup conflict and group membership salience, we explored how Arab participants might respond to assistance from a Jewish helper in ways that could escalate intergroup tensions.3

3The current experiment focuses on relations between Arabs and Jews who live within Israel and are its citizens. Yet, because these relations are affected by whether open hostilities exist between Israel and the Arab communities outside its borders (e.g., Palestinians in the occupied territories, Hezbollah in Lebanon), it should be noted that during the time when the data were
In the present study, Arab high school participants received or did not receive help from an in-group member (an Arab research assistant) or from an out-group member (a Jewish research assistant) when the task difficulty was either high or low. The study was conducted with high school students and in a high school setting because it is a context in which people in positions of authority (e.g., teachers) commonly give assistance. Thus, although there is generally cultural mistrust of Arabs toward Jews in Israel, this context is one likely to minimize suspicions aroused among Arab students who receive assistance from a Jewish research assistant.

The assistance the Arab or Jewish research assistant offered was dependency-oriented (i.e., the helper provided the person with the answers to the problems) and assumptive (i.e., it was given without the recipient’s solicitation). The inclusion of the no-help condition, in which assistance was not given to participants by potential helpers who were either Arab or Jewish, tested whether the mere presence of the out-group was sufficient to produce negative responses toward the out-group. Our hypothesis, however, is that these negative responses will occur mainly in the condition in which a member of the out-group offers unsolicited help.

To permit a range of interpretations and responses to help and to limit the likelihood that participants would identify the purpose of the experiment, the need for help was manipulated indirectly by describing the experimental task to participants as either as very difficult to complete (i.e., high need for help) or as very easy to complete (i.e., low need for help). We had also a control condition in which no information was given regarding task difficulty. We assessed two different types of reactions: (a) participants’ collective responses (collective esteem, as assessed by Luhtanen & Crocker’s 1992 scales, and by out-group evaluations); and (b) participants’ personal reactions (i.e., affect, self-worth).

Theoretically, the present work is based primarily on self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987). Like SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), SCT focuses on the distinction between personal and collective identity and the implications of collective identity on responses to others. In particular, in the present study, we assumed that social identity would be salient in the presence of an out-group confederate, and personal identity would be salient in the presence of an in-group confederate (Wilder, 1984).

When social identity is salient, unsolicited help from an out-group member is expected to be harmful to collective self-esteem and to produce negative out-group evaluations that would directly threaten the positive identity (i.e., implying the inferiority) of one’s in-group. Thus, for measures collected, there were no open or “hot” conflicts between Israel and the surrounding Arab communities, and relations were relatively positive.
related to collective identity (collective self-esteem and out-group derogation), we predicted a 2 (Help: help vs. no help) × 2 (Ethnicity of Potential Helper: Arab vs. Jewish) interaction. In particular, we predict that Arab participants will respond more negatively to help, as compared to no help, when the confederate is a member of the out-group (Jewish); but we anticipate that the help manipulation will not influence collective-identity responses when the confederate is a member of the in-group and personal identity is activated (also see Nadler & Halabi, 2006).

In terms of measures related to personal identity (i.e., affect, self-worth), we predict that receiving unsolicited help will have generally negative consequences. Because social identity is an important aspect of self-identity, affect and self-worth are also expected to be harmed in the condition in which unsolicited help is received by a member of the out-group. In addition, unsolicited help from an in-group member is personally threatening because it undermines feelings of self-efficacy (Nadler & Fisher, 1986).

We further propose that the manipulation of task difficulty, because of its general relevance to feelings of self-efficacy (see Nadler & Fisher, 1986), will have implications primarily for individual-level reactions to help. At the individual level, we predict that when the task is presented as easy (presumably no help is needed, and the offer of help is not justified by the task), participants will respond with lower feelings of situational self-worth and more negative affect when they receive help than when they do not. When the task is difficult (need for assistance is high, and the task-relevant justification for the offer of help is clearer), we do not expect this threat to self-worth or negative affect to be aroused as a function of receiving help.

Because we selected a number of difficult items for inclusion in the problem set, we expect the responses of participants in the no-information control condition to more closely resemble responses in the difficult task condition than responses in the easy task condition. The moderating effect of task difficulty on personal responses is assumed to operate, regardless of the ethnicity of the helper, because it is hypothesized to be rooted in threat to self-esteem at the individual level (Nadler & Fisher, 1986).

Method

Participants

Participants were 164 Arab-Israeli high school students (71 females, 93 males) in an Arab school in Israel. The mean age of participants was 16.9 years (SD = 0.58; range = 16–18 years). Male and female participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions, and the ratio of men to women was similar across the experimental cells.
Design

The study consisted of a 2 (Help: help vs. no help) $\times$ 2 (Ethnicity of Potential Helper: Arab or Jewish) $\times$ 3 (Task Difficulty: difficult, easy, or no information) between-subjects factorial design.

Procedure

Participants entered the laboratory in groups of 4 to 5 persons for each session. They were informed by the experimenter that they were participating in a study of high school students’ general knowledge, as assessed by a standardized Knowledge Test. To increase the relevance of the task, success on the Knowledge Test was described as being associated with high performance in the Psychometric Test, which is the main criterion for admission to Israeli universities.

After this brief description, the experimenter introduced the research assistant (the potential helper) by his name. Across the different conditions, there were two male research assistants: one Arab and one Jewish. To reinforce the manipulation of the ethnicity of the research assistant (who was the potential helper later in the study), the assistant explained in his native tongue (Arabic or Hebrew) to participants the main purpose of the study and the importance of getting test items correct. The assistant further explained the importance of successful individual performance for the image of the whole school, because schools would be ranked on the basis of this test.

After participants were seated in separate places in the room in a way that one did not see the other (i.e., seated facing away from each other), participants were asked to answer 19 questions described as the Knowledge Test by selecting the correct answer out of four possibilities. Of the questions, 5 were made extremely difficult to answer. Participants were told that they had 10 min to complete the whole test.

Approximately one third of the total number of participants ($n = 55$) was told that the test was very easy. To reinforce further that there was no justification for receiving help, the participants were informed that all students who previously took part in this study were able to answer all items in less than 10 min (easy task condition). Another third of the participants ($n = 52$) was told that the test was very difficult. Specifically, they were informed “Based on our experience, there is no chance that you will be able complete all items in 10 minutes” (difficult task condition), which could justify being offered help. Finally, the rest of the participants ($n = 54$) were given no information about task difficulty (no-information control condition).
Because we wanted to assess participants’ spontaneous affective, personal, and social reactions as the main dependent measures, we evaluated the effectiveness of the task difficulty manipulation, which was assumed to affect participants’ perceived need for help, in a separate pilot study, rather than by including a series of questions on this topic for participants in the main study. We assumed that participants’ perceptions of task difficulty and need for assistance would be greatest when they were told that there was “no chance” that they could complete the task in 10 min; would be least when they were informed that all students previously had completed the task in 10 min; and would be at an intermediate level in the no-information condition.

In the pilot study, 61 participants were asked to solve the same experimental task. Mirroring the exact procedure used in the main study, the instructions to the task implied that it was easy (n = 21), difficult (n = 21), or contained no information about task difficulty. After completing the test, the participants completed two items relating to the difficulty of the task: how easy they perceived the experimental task, which was rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (extremely difficult) to 7 (very easy); and an estimate of the number of items they correctly solved (out of 19). In addition, the participants completed two items concerning how much assistance they might need to complete the task successfully: agreement with a statement that they need help in solving a few of the test items, which was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree); and ratings of the extent of help they needed in order to get a good result, which was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (no help) to 7 (big help).

The results for items directly assessing task difficulty and those about help needed show the anticipated pattern. Participants rated the task as the most difficult in the difficult task condition (M = 5.28), next most difficult in the no-information condition (M = 4.31), and least difficult in the easy task condition (M = 3.85), F(2, 58) = 4.45, p < .016. Also, participants in the difficult task condition estimated that they would get the fewest items correct (M = 11.50), those in the no-information condition estimated somewhat more (M = 12.63), and those in the easy task condition predicted that they would get the most correct (M = 14.76), F(2, 58) = 4.83, p < .011.

With respect to participants’ feelings of personal need for help, those in the difficult task condition felt that they needed the most help (M = 4.21), followed by participants in the no-information condition (M = 4.19), with those in the easy task condition indicating the least personal need for assistance (M = 2.95), F(2, 58) = 3.80, p < .028. In addition, in terms of the amount of help needed, participants in the difficult task condition reported that they needed “bigger help” in solving the test items (M = 4.09) than did participants in the no-information condition (M = 3.84). Those in the easy
task condition reported the least substantial need for help ($M = 2.52$), $F(2, 58) = 6.34$, $p < .003$. This overall pattern of results supports our intended manipulation of the need for assistance on the task.

In the main experiment, after participants worked 4 to 6 min privately on the task, the help manipulation was introduced. While the experimenter was out of the room, the research assistant gave (in the help condition) or did not give (in the no-help condition) the participant the solution to three of the most difficult questions on the test by pointing with his finger to the correct answer for these questions. Help was given to each participant in a way that other participants did not see that other students received help. Given the study context and the authority of the help giver in this situation, we assumed that participants would see this act as within the prerogative of the research assistant; thus, perceptions of the honesty of the act would not vary as a function of the act and ethnicity of the helper. Although not a direct measure of attributions to the specific helper, we did not find any evidence of differences in the perceived honesty of Jews in general as a function of the actions of a Jewish versus an Arab helper ($p > .43$). The giving of full solutions without being asked to do so represents receiving assumptive help.

After 10 min, the experimenter collected the test forms. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire packet, ostensibly to assess their reactions to the test that they had just taken. These questionnaires included the dependent measures and the manipulation checks. In this questionnaire, we assessed recipients’ reactions to receiving help in terms of personal responses (i.e., affect, self-worth), their collective self-esteem (the four subscales of Luhtanen & Crocker’s, 1992, Collective Self-Esteem measure), and their attitudes toward the out-group.

For the affect measure, participants were asked to rate how they felt “right now” on six 7-point bipolar adjective scales. The six affect items (happy–sad, positive–negative, strong–weak, pleasant–unpleasant, calm–nervous, and high self-confidence–low self-confidence) were taken from a feeling scale that has been used previously as a self-report measure of affect in research on recipients’ reactions to aid (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). In the present study, internal consistency was high (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$). These items were averaged to form an affect measure, with higher scores representing more positive affect.

Based on their performance in the Knowledge Test, the participants were asked to rate their situational self-worth. We used five 7-point bipolar adjective scales that are identical to those used in previous research on reactions to aid (Nadler et al., 1983). The items asked participants to rate themselves on the dimensions of intelligent–not intelligent, clever–not clever, talented–normal, wanted–not wanted, and happy with myself–want to be somebody else.
Cronbach’s alpha was .71, and the items were averaged, with higher scores reflecting greater feelings of self-worth.

Participants’ collective self-esteem related to being an Arab (or belonging to the Arab group) was measured with Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale. This scale consists of four subscales, which measure perception of one’s contribution to the group (membership CSE; e.g., “I’m a cooperative participant in the Arab group”); personal evaluations of the in-group (private CSE; e.g., “Usually I feel that the Arab group is not worthy”); perceptions of others’ views of the in-group (public CSE; e.g., “Others usually respect the Arab group”); and importance of the group in one’s identity (identity CSE; e.g., “Being an Arab is an important part of my self-image”). Cronbach’s alphas were .62, .72, .65, and .69, respectively.

For the measure of evaluation of the out-group, participants were asked to rate the out-group (Jews) on five 7-point bipolar adjective scales. The five items were similar to items used previously to measure in-group bias (Brewer, 1979): good–bad, fair–unfair, wise–stupid, selfish–unselfish, and materialistic–not materialistic. This measure was described as one that was not related to the study in which participants were just involved. The research assistant, after thanking participants for completing the Knowledge Test, mentioned that “A friend of mine who is conducting a study on attitudes toward the majority group asked me if you could say what you think about the statements on this form.” Cronbach’s alpha was .66, and the items were averaged, with higher scores reflecting more positive evaluations of the out-group.

After completing the main measures for the study, the participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire that asked for age, name of school, nationality, and their perceptions of aspects of the experiment. Afterward, the participants were debriefed in their classes.

Results

In general, the participants understood the manipulations as intended. All participants in the help condition correctly reported that they had received help. Those in the no-help condition reported that they had no interaction during the task with the research assistant conducting the session. Participants also uniformly reported correctly whether the research assistant was Arab or Jewish. A preliminary analysis shows no significant effect for participant gender; thus, this factor is not considered in subsequent analyses. As revealed in Table 1, the correlations among the different measures ranged from .006 to .583.

In our main analyses, we examined the effects of help (received vs. not received), ethnicity of potential helper (Arab vs. Jewish), and task difficulty...
Table 1

*Correlation Matrix of Participants' Responses (Dependent Variables)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Affect</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-worth</td>
<td></td>
<td>.514** (164)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Out-group evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td>—0.034 (164)</td>
<td>.086 (163)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Private self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>.110 (162)</td>
<td>.197* (164)</td>
<td>.150 (163)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Membership self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>.314** (164)</td>
<td>.132 (164)</td>
<td>.230** (163)</td>
<td>.481** (164)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Identity self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>—0.060 (164)</td>
<td>—0.062 (164)</td>
<td>.019 (163)</td>
<td>.035 (164)</td>
<td>.091 (164)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Public self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td>.152 (164)</td>
<td>.290** (164)</td>
<td>.033 (163)</td>
<td>.547** (164)</td>
<td>.405** (164)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. ns for each pair appear in parentheses.
*p < .05. **p < .01.*
(difficult, easy, or no-information control) measures associated with collective identity and personal identity. We hypothesized that the ethnicity of the potential helper would primarily moderate the impact of receiving help on both collective (i.e., collective self-esteem, out-group attitudes) and personal responses (i.e., affect, self-worth), whereas task difficulty would moderate the effect of receiving help only on personal responses. The means of the dependent variables as a function of help received, task difficulty, and ethnicity of the potential helper are reported in Table 2.

Collective Responses: Collective Self-Esteem and Out-Group Attitudes

For the collective measures, the four components of Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale were analyzed with a MANOVA. Out-group evaluations were analyzed with a univariate ANOVA.

Collective self-esteem. The 2 (Help: help vs. no help) × 2 (Ethnicity of Potential Helper: Arab vs. Jewish) × 3 (Task Difficulty: difficult, easy, or no-information control) MANOVA performed on the four components of collective self-esteem measure reveals only a significant Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper interaction, $F(4, 149) = 3.72, p < .006$. The Task Difficulty × Help interaction was not significant ($p = .29$). Also, the Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper × Task Difficulty interaction was not significant for this multivariate analysis or for subsequent univariate analyses.

The Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper interaction that was obtained in the MANOVA was a result of the effect of the membership esteem component. The univariate analyses conducted separately on the four components of collective self-esteem reveal significant results only for membership esteem.

Membership collective self-esteem. The 2 × 2 × 3 ANOVA demonstrates a significant Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper interaction, $F(1, 152) = 9.48, p < .003$. To test the hypothesis that receiving assumptive help elicits negative reactions primarily when it comes from an out-group member, we tested the effects of receiving help versus receiving no help first when the potential helper was Jewish (i.e., an out-group member) and then when the potential helper was Arab (i.e., an in-group member). As predicted, when the potential helper was Jewish, Arab participants who received help experienced a lower level of membership esteem than did those who did not receive help ($M_{s} = 4.52$ vs. $5.16$), $t(158) = 2.01, p < .05$. The comparable difference in the Arab (in-group) helper condition was not significant ($M_{s} = 5.15$ vs. $4.80$.

$^4$Degrees of freedom range from 152 to 160 because of missing values that were not included in the analysis.
Table 2

Means for Affect, Self-Worth, Out-Group Evaluations, and Collective Self-Esteem Scores as a Function of Task Difficulty, Help, and Ethnicity of the Potential Helper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Help</th>
<th>No help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>5.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>5.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>4.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-group evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>6.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>5.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>5.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-worth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab RA (in-group)</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish RA (out-group)</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>5.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. RA = research assistant.
No other significant effects were obtained in the ANOVA, including the Help × Ethnicity of the Potential Helper × Task Difficulty interaction (\( p = .38 \)).

**Evaluation of the out-group.** The \( 2 \times 2 \times 3 \) ANOVA performed on the average score of the evaluation of the out-group scale reveals a significant main effect for help, \( F(1, 151) = 5.76, p < .018 \). Overall, participants evaluated the out-group less positively when they received help (\( M = 3.70 \)) than when they did not (\( M = 4.10 \)). Although the Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper interaction only approached significance, \( F(1, 151) = 2.68, p < .104 \), a priori comparisons were again performed within the Jewish helper and the Arab helper conditions separately to examine the effect of help versus no help. As predicted, Arab participants had lower evaluations of the out-group (Jews) when the Jewish research assistant helped them than when he did not (\( Ms = 3.37 \) vs. \( 4.06 \)), \( t(80) = 3.61, p < .001 \). The comparable difference in the in-group helper condition (Arab) was not significant (\( Ms = 4.03 \) vs. \( 4.14, p > .68 \)).

**Personal Responses: Affect and Self-Worth**

The two measures of personal responses (i.e., affect, self-worth) were analyzed separately using \( 2 (\text{Help Condition: help vs. no help}) \times 2 (\text{Ethnicity of Potential Helper: Arab or Jewish}) \times 3 (\text{Task Difficulty: difficult, easy, or control}) \) ANOVAs. We hypothesized that ethnicity of the potential helper and task difficulty would both moderate the personal responses of affect and self-worth.

**Affect.** In the \( 2 \times 2 \times 3 \) ANOVA on the mean affect score, the main effect of help was not significant, \( F(1, 152) < 1, p > .75 \). But as expected, the Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper interaction was obtained, \( F(1, 152) = 5.74, p < .018 \). As anticipated, Arab participants tended to experience less positive affect when they received assistance from the Jewish research assistant than when they did not receive help from him, \( t(160) = 1.65 (Ms = 5.29 \) vs. \( 5.67, p = .10 \). The comparable difference in the Arab helper condition was not significant (\( Ms = 5.75 \) vs. \( 5.43, p = .15 \)) and was in the opposite direction.

The analysis also reveals a significant Help × Task Difficulty interaction, \( F(2, 152) = 4.90, p < .009 \). As expected, participants who received help in the easy task (i.e., low need for help) condition showed less positive affect than did those who did not receive help (\( Ms = 5.10 \) vs. \( 5.61, t(158) = 1.90, p < .05 \)) but the pattern of differences for evaluations of the out-group was not straightforwardly interpretable (see Table 2 for means). This effect was independent of the ethnicity of the ethnicity of the helper. The Help × Task Difficulty × Ethnicity of the Potential Helper interaction did not approach significance (\( p = .36 \)).
The difference between the help and no-help conditions was not significant in the difficult task (i.e., high need for help) condition (Ms = 5.61 vs. 5.76, p = .58). Unexpectedly, the difference as a function of receiving or not receiving help in the control (i.e., no information) condition was found to be significant, t(158) = 2.28, p < .024. Specifically, participants who received help in this condition experienced more positive affect than those who did not (Ms = 5.86 vs. 5.24). Overall, as predicted, the only condition associated with the task difficulty manipulation in which receiving help produced more negative affect than not receiving help was when the task was described as easy. The moderating effects of ethnicity of the potential helper and task difficulty were independent. The Help × Ethnicity of the Potential Helper × Task Difficulty interaction did not approach significance (p = .78).

Situational self-worth. Results from the $2 \times 2 \times 3$ ANOVA reveal a main effect for help, $F(1, 152) = 5.53, p < .02$. Overall, participants had lower levels of situational self-worth when they received help ($M = 5.45$) than when they did not ($M = 5.76$). The analysis also reveals the anticipated Help × Ethnicity of Potential Helper interaction effect, $F(2, 152) = 12.11, p < .001$. Relative to those who did not receive help, Arab participants who had received help from a Jewish out-group helper had lower ratings of situational self-worth than did participants who did not receive help (Ms = 5.20 vs. 6.00), $t(160) = 3.93, p < .001$. The comparable difference in the Arab helper condition was not significant (Ms = 5.65 vs. 5.50, p = .44).

The Help × Task Difficulty interaction was not significant in the analysis of self-worth ($p = .11$). Nevertheless, to test the a priori hypothesis on the role of task difficulty, as with the affect measure, we compared the help and no-help conditions for the easy task (i.e., low need for help), difficult task (i.e., high need for help), and the no-information conditions separately. When the task was easy, participants had lower levels of self-worth than those who were not given assistance (Ms = 5.16 vs. 5.68), $t(158) = 2.12, p < .03$. The comparable differences were not significant in the difficult task condition (Ms = 5.50 vs. 5.95, p > .25) or in the no-information condition (Ms = 5.72 vs. 5.65, p > .75).

In general, these results indicate support for the hypotheses that ethnicity of potential helper and task difficulty moderate the effect of receiving assistance on the personally oriented effects of affect and self-worth. Again, the Help × Ethnicity of the Potential Helper × Task Difficulty interaction was not significant ($p = .40$).

Discussion

Research on helping has traditionally focused on the contextual features that lead individuals to assist other individuals: “meso-level” helping. Many
of the most recent developments in this area have drawn attention to helping processes at the macro level, including their role in intergroup relations (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). Nadler and Halabi (2006), for instance, found that Israeli Arabs, particularly those who were more identified with their group, resisted overtures of assistance from Israeli Jews because accepting help could reinforce the higher status of Israeli Jews in their intergroup relations (Nadler, 2002).

The present research extended this line of work, as well as previous research on recipient reactions to aid that has focused on interpersonal factors (Nadler & Fisher, 1986; Nadler et al., 1983) by investigating simultaneously how people’s responses to receiving assistance relates to both hypothesized interpersonal and intergroup processes. The manipulation of experienced need for help involved a variable—task difficulty—that is of conceptual and practical relevance, but not one (to our knowledge) that has been studied directly in recipient reactions to aid. Guided by self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), which proposes that either collective or personal identity can be activated in a given context, we investigated the impact of threats to collective identity (aroused by help from an out-group member) or threats to personal identity (produced by help on an easy task) on collective and personal responses.

With respect to collective identity, the present investigation provides a conceptual replication of the research of Nadler and Halabi (2006) in the context of relations between two groups—Arabs and Jews in Israel—that have a history of tension and conflict. We note, however, that the present research was conducted not during a period of military conflict, but during a period when relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel were relatively positive. Nevertheless, even under these conditions, intergroup processes exerted a significant effect.

In addition, whereas Nadler and Halabi (2006) directly emphasized status differences between the groups and manipulated the stability of status between the groups (Study 2) or emphasized the accomplishments of Arabs (Study 3), the current research examined the response of Arab participants to unsolicited assistance from an Arab or a Jewish helper without additional intervention or embellishment. Our interest was in the effect of naturalistic in-group/out-group membership per se. Of course, because social groups tend to be organized hierarchically (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and members of groups are motivated to seek the positive distinctiveness of their own group in intergroup comparisons (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), status differences are implied in such naturalistic group distinctions.

In addition, beyond the simple in-group/out-group element of Arab participants receiving help from an Arab or a Jewish research assistant, the particular nature of the power dynamics between Jews and Arabs in Israel
must be considered. The Jewish majority in Israel controls most of the resources, holds most of the central power positions, and both symbolically and materially asserts its superiority and higher status over the Arab minority group in Israel to limit Arabs’ opportunity to alter power relations between the groups directly (Halabi, 2005).

Within the present context, help offered by the Jewish research assistant can represent a subtle means of asserting existing power relations, and Arabs’ receptivity to such help can be a behavioral affirmation of the receiving party’s lower status. In particular, for the Arab disadvantaged group, refusing help from the advantaged group may signify a challenge to the existing unequal status quo, while accepting that help may signify accepting the present social inequality, which can reinforce existing social structure used by the dominant group (i.e., Jews in Israel) to exploit the disadvantaged group. Future research might consider further how the nature of specific acts of assumptive help might influence responses to receiving help.

In the present study, the helping act involved providing participants with a specific answer to a problem. Perhaps because of this particular period of intergroup relations during which the study was conducted, the fact that the study was conducted in a context (i.e., at a high school with high school students) in which help is commonly given, and the fact that the help provider was an authority figure, the assistance given by the Jewish research assistant was not, as evidenced by their ratings of his honesty, met with particular suspicion by Arab students. Specifically, it did not impact the perceived honesty of Jews, as it did for general evaluations of Jews. Nevertheless, under unusually benign circumstances, unsolicited help offered by the Jewish research assistant produced a range of negative reactions among Arab participants.

Given the historical relationship between Jews and Arabs, as well as Arabs’ stereotypes of Jews as deceptive, additional research might directly vary the degree to which people perceive the assumptive help by the out-group as strategically motivated, and investigate the potential influence of attributions underlying the offer of help. For instance, the extent to which the offer of assistance is interpreted primarily as an intentional discriminatory manipulation might have different effects on collective and personal responses to Jewish assistance. Attributions to purposeful manipulation might exacerbate negative responses to the out-group, while the stronger attribution to discrimination might reduce the negative impact of receiving assumptive help on collective self-esteem and personal self-worth (Crocker & Major, 1989). Thus, future research might consider more directly how the specific nature of Arab–Jewish relations, their intergroup stereotypes, and the nature of immediate political context can moderate the attributions that Israeli Arabs make for acts of helping by Israeli Jews; and how these
attributions shape the emotional, personal, and collective reactions of Israeli Arabs.

Theoretically, we acknowledge that it may be valuable to further disentangle status effects from mere categorization effects in future research. Nevertheless, we note that it is also important to recognize the practical implications of studying enduring groups in naturalistic settings as well. In particular, we found that whereas Arab participants showed no negative responses to assistance from an in-group member, they responded with more negative affect, lower personal self-worth, lower membership collective self-esteem, and more negative attitudes toward Jewish Israelis when they were given help from a Jewish research assistant than when the Jewish assistant did not give them help. This finding indicates that receiving help from the out-group—over and above the mere presence of the out-group (as in the no help/Jewish research assistant condition)—accounted for negative collective responses. This effect occurred whether the need for help was high (i.e., the task was difficult) or low (i.e., the task was described as easy). No such difference in response was observed when that helper was an in-group member: an Arab research assistant.

The current research also goes beyond previous work, not only on intergroup processes, but also on interpersonal processes (Nadler & Fisher, 1986; Nadler et al., 1983) in reactions to unsolicited help by exploring the impact of perceived task difficulty. This factor has not been considered in previous research on this topic. The manipulation of task difficulty was in the description of the task as easy (suggesting no need for help) or difficult (suggesting a need for help). A no-information control group was also included. A number of items in the problem set were selected because they were unusually challenging, and, relying on the results of the pilot study, we expected the responses of participants in the no-information control condition to be more similar to responses in the difficult task condition than in the easy task condition.

We chose to manipulate task difficulty because we expected it to relate to perceived need for help and to allow a range of interpretations to assumptive assistance. We acknowledge that this manipulation could also have several other potential effects on participants. For example, it could be argued that including the challenging items could induce feelings of low esteem in participants, particularly when the task was labeled as easy. However, the fact that no significant effects were obtained for task difficulty on situational and private self-esteem suggests that the effects that were obtained are more likely a result of the intended manipulation (i.e., perceived need for help).

It may be productive for future research, however, to include measures of the potential impact of a manipulation of task difficulty, such as perceptions
of appropriateness of help, direct attributions of the motives of the helper, perceptions of whether assistance is justified by the difficulty of the task, as well as perceptions of the need for help. In addition, future researchers might consider a manipulation of task difficulty that is more impactful than the current one (e.g., by increasing the personal or collective consequences for success on the task). The restricted range of differences in means, which were generally clustered on the positive sides of the scales (see Table 2), suggests that the impact of our manipulation was limited.

Even while recognizing the value of further research into potential underlying mechanisms and acknowledging the limits of our particular manipulations of task difficulty and help (assistance from the experimenter that may appear to be counternormative), our findings have applied relevance. In intergroup contexts in general, and in Jewish-Arab relations in particular, Jewish assistance to Arabs may be perceived as counternormative by some, and the context is complex, permitting the operation of several mediating mechanisms.

According to Nadler and Fisher’s (1986) threat to self-esteem model, receiving assistance is threatening to the extent that it is perceived as challenging one’s sense of efficacy. It is seen as supportive to the extent that it is valuable in maintaining one’s goals. Help that is seen as threatening elicits a cluster of negative reactions, including negative affect, lowered self-worth, and more negative evaluations of the helper. In contrast, help that is viewed as supportive produces positive, nondefensive reactions, including positive affect, enhanced self-image, and favorable evaluations of the helper (Fisher et al., 1982). Our results for task difficulty are generally consistent with Nadler and Fisher’s model. Responses to receiving unsolicited help were more negative overall when the task was described as easy (i.e., low need for help), rather than when it was described as difficult (i.e., high need for help), or when participants were not given information about the difficulty of the task.

Beyond this new empirical support for the basic tenets of Nadler and Fisher’s (1986) model, the present experiment, in its design and measures, suggests ways of understanding and differentiating interpersonal and intergroup processes in recipient reactions to assistance. In particular, we propose that the task difficulty manipulation operated more through interpersonal processes than through intergroup processes for two main reasons. First, although participants experienced more negative personal reactions, more negative affect, and lower feelings of personal self-worth when they received help on the easy task than when they did not, there were no significant effects for task difficulty for measures of collective self-esteem. The pattern of effects for out-group evaluation was not consistent with expectations based on collective identity threat.
Second, the effect of task difficulty was independent of the effect of the manipulation of the ethnicity of the helper. There were no three-way Task Difficulty × Ethnicity of Helper × Help interactions obtained for any of the dependent variables. Theoretically, though, we note that although SCT views the activation of personal and collective identity as antagonistic (Onorato & Turner, 2004), SIT proposes that both identities may be simultaneously activated, to varying degrees (e.g., Postmes, Baray, Haslam, Morton, & Swaab, 2006). Empirically, we also acknowledge that the three-factor design with fewer than 14 participants per cell, coupled with a potentially weak manipulation of task difficulty, may have limited statistical power, contributing to the null effects. However, the effect sizes ($\eta^2$) were generally low, ranging from .004 to .01 for the three-way interactions examined. Power analysis (Cohen, 1988) reveals that level of statistical power (> .30) was within the norm of research in social psychology, albeit sufficiently sensitive to reliably detect moderately large effect sizes (Cohen, 1962, 1988). Nevertheless, future research might further consider the different relationships between personal and collective identity posited by SCT and SIT and the possibility of their joint impact on responses to unsolicited assistance.

To summarize, the results of the present study suggest that different sources of threat induce different clusters of responses. We found that receiving unneeded assistance (i.e., help on a task described as easy) produced negative personal reactions (i.e., relatively negative affect, low feelings of self-worth), but not negative collective responses (i.e., no effects on collective self-esteem and no corresponding effects on out-group evaluations). This pattern of findings implies that the effects of recipients’ need for help on their reactions to assumptive help are primarily an individual-level process.

In contrast, when Arab participants received help from an out-group member (i.e., a Jewish helper), they displayed more group-based responses. Specifically, compared to the condition in which they did not receive help, they exhibited lower levels of membership collective self-esteem and devalued the out-group. Further, consistent with the hypothesis that self-identity is derived from social identity, receiving unsolicited assistance from an out-group member also adversely affected personal responses, specifically arousing negative affect and reducing feelings of self-worth.

Although more research is needed to clarify the mechanisms underlying the individual- and group-based responses as a result of threat, our results provide further evidence highlighting the importance of the distinction between personal and social identity to understanding the nature of the consequences of receiving unsolicited assistance. Practically, the present results further illustrate the way that members of dominant and nondominant groups may develop divergent views of the same intergroup behavior—
helping as prosocial versus helping as disempowering—and contribute to intergroup miscommunication and tension.

References


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