

Effects of Felt Adequacy and Opportunity to Reciprocate on Help Seeking¹

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This experiment was prompted by the belief that felt inadequacy and lack of opportunity to reciprocate act as deterrents to help seeking when help is needed. The experiment was conducted on 56 freshmen by modifying Greenberg and Shapiro's physical disability paradigm. Subjects were told that they could not meet the quota on a manual task but had done well (poorly) for persons similarly handicapped (by arm in sling). Later they learned that the electricity would be shut off in 2 hr (15 min), making it possible (impossible) to help the visually handicapped fellow worker later on a visual task. The hypothesis that felt inadequacy inhibits help seeking was fully supported, while the corresponding hypothesis regarding lack of opportunity to reciprocate received only partial support. There were no sex differences. The relevance of these data for embarrassment theory is discussed.

In order for the parties to a social relationship to assure themselves of continued benefits from each other, they must reciprocate for past benefits received. Violation of this *norm of reciprocity*, says Gouldner (1960), leads to sanctions. According to Greenberg (1968), this pressure to help those who have helped us can be recast in psychological terms as an aversive drive state which tends to be reduced if the receiver of help is able to reciprocate, or if he can cognitively reevaluate the magnitude of rewards and costs incurred by both receiver and donor.

This aversive state, which Greenberg labeled "indebtedness," was considered by Greenberg and Shapiro (1971) to be akin to or part of the guilt feeling that arises from an inequitable exchange. In the present

¹This research is based in part on the senior author's Master's thesis submitted to the Department of Psychology, University of Georgia. The authors are grateful for the helpful comments and suggestions made by Abraham Tesser and Stuart Katz. The authors are also appreciative of the services rendered by David Alper and Nancy S. Hudson in taking the role of fellow worker with subjects of own sex, and of messenger with subjects of opposite sex.

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may have induced such embarrassment that it served as a deterrent against help seeking.

While Greenberg and Shapiro don't consider this possible interpretation of their results, they do dismiss a related interpretation of loss of status as a factor accounting for the results, on the grounds that only 15% of their subjects regarded feeling any personal responsibility for being disabled and needing help, whereas 79% attributed their disability to chance. However, when the experimenter, a psychologist, publicly praises or criticizes the subject rather than fate for the subject's performance, by contrasting it with that of peers in a similar circumstance, he implicitly asserts that the causal locus of the subject's failure is internal. This may have inhibited help seeking. According to Heider (1958), a person will try to avoid asking for or accepting help when made to feel incompetent since being receptive to help would expose, or be an open admission of, one's inadequacy and the other's superior status (see also Blau, 1964), and thus a prime source of embarrassment. Mikesell (1971) found minor support for this hypothesis under a condition where the causal locus of inadequacy was internal.

To recapitulate, indebtedness has been advanced by Greenberg and Shapiro as an aversive state that would deter help seeking, unless the potential recipient can anticipate having the opportunity to reciprocate later through helping the donor. The exposure of one's inadequacy suggests itself as a second possible aversive state that would deter help seeking. Both states may have been operative in the Greenberg and Shapiro experiment. This suggests the necessity for manipulating the opportunity to reciprocate independently of felt adequacy. The present experiment attempts to do this in order to study the effects of both factors. It was hypothesized that (a) the more an individual perceives himself to be task competent, the more likely he is to seek and accept help now from another person, and (b) the more an individual anticipates having an objective opportunity to extend help later to another person, the more likely he is to seek and accept help now from that person.

METHOD

Subjects and Design

Sixty subjects were recruited from the introductory psychology course at the University of Georgia. Each subject was randomly assigned to one of four conditions, 15 to a condition, in a 2×2 factorial design in which Felt Adequacy/Inadequacy constituted one independent variable and Objective Opportunity/No

instance, the inequity presumably consists of a more favorable reward/cost ratio (Adams, 1963; Homans, 1961) for the receiver than for the donor. In the view of Greenberg and Shapiro, further sources of the aversiveness of indebtedness may derive from a number of threatening possibilities: By accepting help a recipient may be validating the donor's implicit claim to superior status (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). He may also be providing the donor with power to impose certain demands on him as the price for continued help (Blau, 1964; Heider, 1958). In addition, a favor may be threatening if it appears to reduce the recipient's freedom of action vis-à-vis the donor (Brehm & Cole, 1966).

These considerations led Greenberg and Shapiro to predict that if a potential recipient of help sees little chance of being able to reciprocate in the near future, he may hesitate to ask for and receive the help he needs. To test this prediction, Greenberg and Shapiro led subjects to believe that the objective was to study the typical performance of physically disabled workers. Each subject and fellow worker (a confederate of the experimenter) were given identical motor and visual tasks to perform. The subject was assigned a motor "handicap" (arm placed in sling) and the fellow worker a visual handicap (patch over eye and sunglasses). They were told that they had to meet the quota set for both tasks in order to obtain a reward, and that they would receive a bonus if they exceeded the quota. Soliciting help to meet task quotas was permitted. During a practice session, the subject was given the impression that the only way he could meet the quota on the first or motor task was to obtain help from the other worker, since the latter appeared to meet the quota with ease. Subjects in an "anticipated-reciprocity" condition were given the impression that the confederate would not be able to meet the quota on the second or visual task without their aid, whereas subjects in a "no-anticipated-reciprocity" condition were given the impression that the confederate, despite his visual handicap, would be able to meet the quota without their help. The prediction that subjects would avoid seeking help more in the "no-anticipated-reciprocity" than in the "anticipated-reciprocity" condition was supported.

The difficulty with their procedure is that it may have confounded the lack of opportunity for subjects to reciprocate with induced feelings of shame or inadequacy. In their no-anticipated-reciprocity condition, the fellow worker is adequate both on the motor and the visual task, whereas the subject is made to appear adequate only on the visual task. Inadequacy is made even more salient through public criticism of the subject's performance in front of a co-worker who in other respects is a peer. By drawing this attention to the subject's relative inadequacy, they

The experimenter then informed them that the quotas and time limits for the two test tasks would be the same as for the practice tasks. They would be playing for chewing gum, but were to consider each slice as equivalent to 20 cents. To be eligible for any money, specifically 10 slices, a worker had to meet the quota on both tasks. If a worker has time to continue beyond the quotas he could earn a bonus of one slice for each additional box completed or additional error circled. It was emphasized that they were not in competition, that the experimenter was concerned with obtaining a finished product, not in how many workers were involved in completing it. Consequently, to meet their individual quotas each person should feel free to request help from the other. Each person was also free to refuse help, and no help should be offered unless requested.

At this point subjects were asked to complete a "first impressions" questionnaire in order to obtain evaluative ratings of the confederate and some validation information. The questionnaire was then collected and a new confederate arrived on cue to begin the Opportunity manipulation.

Objective-opportunity-to-help manipulation. In the *Opportunity* condition this confederate announced that because of a malfunctioning generator the power in the generator would be turned off in about 2 hr. In the *No Opportunity* condition the time estimate was reduced to 15 min. The experimenter then reinforced this manipulation by remarking either that there would be time for them to work on both test tasks (*Opportunity* condition), or that there would only be time for the first task. To sustain the motivations of those in the *No Opportunity* conditions, all subjects were invited to remain afterward for the ostensible purpose of giving their views on another "study" that the experimenter was considering.

Work then commenced on Task One (the manual test task). On reaching his quota the confederate tapped his bell, waited for a request for help, then resumed work if no request came. If asked for assistance, he walked over to the subject's desk, started making boxes with the subject's material, tapped the subject's bell when the subject's quota was reached, then continued making boxes unless requested to stop or until time ran out. A second questionnaire was then distributed, containing additional validation items, and items bearing on alternative interpretations. Subjects in the *Opportunity* condition were led to believe that the second task would begin shortly, which of course was not true. All subjects were then asked some filler questions and requested to complete a final questionnaire containing probes for suspicion and further validation questions. Finally, subjects were debriefed and awarded their "earnings."

Measures of the Dependent Variables

One measure was based on the frequency of help seeking. A second measure was response latency, i.e., how long the subject waited until asking for help. Since the deadline was set at 2 min, the maximum possible score was 120 sec. The third measure of the dependent variable, refusals of further help beyond the quota by those who had solicited help, was based on a frequency count.

RESULTS

The Problem of Suspicion

Of 60 subjects (31 males and 29 females), four were discarded on grounds of suspicion concerning the manipulation: two were in the

Objective Opportunity (to help on a subsequent task) constituted the other independent variable.³

Procedure

The present study differed from Greenberg and Shapiro's in that *Opportunity* and *Adequacy* were manipulated separately, the manipulations of *Adequacy* occurred in the absence of the fellow worker, and sticks of gum, rather than nominal amounts of money, were used as the incentive.

The confederate arrived after the subject. Both were seated at adjacent desks and briefed about the purpose of the experiment which allegedly was to study the typical work performance of physically disabled workers. One person would play the role of a person with a serious motor handicap, the other the role of a person with a serious visual handicap. The disabilities would be simulated by having one person put his preferred arm in a sling and by having the other person wear an eye patch and a pair of sunglasses. Both would be assigned identical tasks to perform but the particular disability which they would assume would be determined by drawing lots. The drawing was arranged so that the subject always received the motor handicap and the confederate the visual handicap.

After putting on their handicaps, they were given instructions for the first task which consisted of constructing paper boxes from sheets of paper. Each person had before him paper, scissors, scotch tape, and a bell to announce attainment of the quota. After being shown how to make boxes, both individuals were given a 2-min practice period, with instructions to keep making boxes until the period expired or until they surpassed the quota of five boxes. A timer was placed before them so that both could keep track of the time remaining. The situation was such that no subject was able to meet the quota, whereas the confederate exceeded the quota by one box. The experimenter praised the confederate for his "superior performance" in the presence of the subject. Then the confederate asked for and received "permission to go to the bathroom," so that the *Adequacy/Inadequacy* manipulation could be performed in his absence.

Adequacy manipulation. To subjects in the *Adequacy* condition, the experimenter remarked "Even though you did not meet the quota of five boxes on this task, your performance was quite superior for an individual with a motor handicap such as yours." Those in the *Inadequacy* condition were told "Your performance on the motor task was quite inadequate. Most subjects, even when they have a motor handicap such as yours, are able to come closer to meeting the quota than you did."

Then the co-worker returned and the experimenter explained the second or visual task. Both were given an identical sheet containing 30 typographical errors, and instructed to circle as many errors as possible in the 2-min period. The quota was set at ten errors circled, an amount that all subjects could, and in fact did, surpass. When the subject completed the practice visual task, the experimenter told him (in the co-worker's presence) that his performance was superior and that he had definitely exceeded the quota. After the "handicapped" confederate completed this task he was told that his performance "was about average for someone with this visual handicap but below the quota set for this task."

³ A third factor, sex, was also included. Male subjects were paired with a male fellow worker and female subjects with a female worker. No differences in help seeking were found due to sex. In this regard, the present experiment also replicates the failure of Greenberg and Shapiro to find differences due to sex.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS ASKING FOR HELP, BY EXPERIMENTAL CONDITION

Opportunity condition	Felt adequacy condition				Total	
	Adequacy		Inadequacy		Ask	Don't ask
	Ask	Don't ask	Ask	Don't ask		
Opportunity	11	2	6	8	17	11
No opportunity	9	5	2	12	11	17
Total	20	8	8	20		

quates did ask for help [$F(1,52) = 12.48, p < .001$].⁵ A second procedure involving a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ partitioning of χ^2 , produced comparable results. Namely, the adequacy \times help seeking χ^2 component was clearly significant [$\chi^2(1) = 10.29, p < .005$].⁶

The second test of this hypothesis was in terms of response latency. A square-root transformation was performed on the latency scores (the nontransformed means are shown in Table 2), and a two-way ANOVA

TABLE 2
MEAN LATENCIES, IN SECONDS, OF ASKING FOR HELP, BY EXPERIMENTAL CONDITION

Opportunity condition	Felt adequacy condition		\bar{X}
	Adequacy	Inadequacy	
Opportunity	59.79	94.93	77.36
No opportunity	77.50	113.64	95.57
\bar{X}	68.65	104.29	86.47

⁵Concerning the remaining effects, the opportunity effect is considered in the section on Opportunity. Also, the adequacy \times opportunity interaction was not significant. With regard to the propriety of using ANOVA on raw dichotomous scores, Lumney (1970) has shown that with fixed effects models and sample sizes the same in each cell, the use of ANOVA and the F table are appropriate for a dichotomous dependent variable, given the following conditions: There are at least 20 df for error and the proportion of responses in the smaller response category is at least .20, or there are at least 40 df for error in the event the proportion is less than .20.

⁶A mixed models analysis was employed here in which the parameters were estimated from the data (Sutcliffe, 1957; Winer, 1962, p. 632). The two fixed factors were Adequacy/Inadequacy and Opportunity/No Opportunity, while the random factor consisted of the dependent variable (asks/doesn't ask for help). The total χ^2 was significant [$\chi^2(3) = 13.14, p < .005$]. The adequacy \times opportunity \times help seeking interaction χ^2 was not [$\chi^2(1) = .28$]. The remaining component, the opportunity \times help seeking χ^2 , is discussed in the section on the effects of Opportunity.

Adequacy-No Opportunity condition, one was in the Adequacy-Opportunity condition, and one was in the Inadequacy-Opportunity condition. No suspicious subjects asked for help and none were able to verbalize the hypotheses.

Validation of Adequacy Manipulation

It was expected that subjects would rate their chances of meeting the quota by working alone on the first (or box construction) task as poor. This was the case, since the overall mean on a scale ranging from 1 ("excellent") to 7 ("poor") was 6.75. It is noteworthy that the Inadequates saw their chances as even poorer than did the Adequates [$\bar{X} = 6.93$ vs $6.57, F(1,52) = 5.60, p < .025$]. Also as expected, subjects, using 7-point scales, rated the first task as more difficult for them than for the co-worker [$\bar{X}s = 6.68$ vs $1.45, t(55) = 49.52, p < .001$, one tail], but the second (or visual) task as relatively less difficult for them than for the co-worker [$\bar{X}s = 1.04$ vs $6.14, t(55) = 47.67, p < .001$, one tail]. Finally, subjects rated themselves on several 7-point evaluative scales (proud/ashamed; competent/incompetent; superior/inferior). Ratings were averaged across these scales.⁴ As expected, Adequates evaluated themselves more positively than did Inadequates [$\bar{X}s = 2.35$ vs $5.67, F(1,52) = 239.32, p < .001$], no other effects being found.

Validation of Opportunity Manipulation

Shortly after working on the first *test* task, subjects were asked to rate whether they expected that task to be the last, on a scale ranging from 1 ("definitely yes") to 7 ("definitely no"). As anticipated, those in the No Opportunity condition clearly expected this more than did those in the Opportunity condition [$\bar{X}s = 1.25$ vs $6.75, F(1,52) = 2117.50, p < .001$], no other effects being found.

The Effects of Felt Adequacy

The first hypothesis calls for greater help seeking under Adequacy than Inadequacy. The frequency data shown in Table 1 were analyzed in two ways. The first procedure entailed a 2×2 ANOVA with the frequencies considered as dichotomous scores (0 for doesn't ask, 1 for asks). According to this analysis significantly more Adequates than Inade-

⁴These items were considered, *a priori*, to warrant combination into a single, more stable score, on the assumption that they were interchangeable facets of self-evaluation. Subsequent examination of the separate treatment means on each individual item revealed that the assumption of interchangeability was correct, since in each case the treatment means obeyed the same systematic order. Also, the average interitem r was .85.

Inadequates, admitted to a relative lack of concern about being embarrassed by asking ($z = 2.44, p < .02$, two tails), as one might expect. Also, Adequates, more than Inadequates, thought that it would be advantageous later for the other worker if they were to solicit help from him now ($z = 2.02, p < .05$, two tails); greatest endorsement of this reason was in the Adequacy-Opportunity condition. The subjects also wrote out their chief reason for soliciting help. Since the frequencies involved were quite small, tests of significance were inappropriate. The answers suggested that the adequacy manipulation did make the Adequates feel more competent than the Inadequates and relatively more inclined to regard the task quota as a challenge. The "indebtedness" argument underlying the opportunity manipulation was shown to be plausible in that only subjects in the Opportunity condition alluded to the possibility of reciprocating later as their reason for seeking help now.

Surprisingly, there were no systematic differences among those who had not solicited help in acknowledging that they did so to avoid public admission of inadequacy, or to avoid feeling indebted, or for lack of opportunity to reciprocate. Adequates volunteered that they avoided asking for help mainly because they wished to master the task. Inadequates, particularly in the No Opportunity condition, said they did this mainly because they felt ashamed and incompetent.

DISCUSSION

This experiment came into being because of a belief that Greenberg and Shapiro (1971), in testing whether people avoid seeking help if they are likely to remain indebted to the helper, may have confounded lack of opportunity to reciprocate with feelings of inadequacy. Partial support was found for the prediction that anticipation of an objective opportunity to reciprocate is conducive to help seeking. Since the basic features of Greenberg and Shapiro were retained in the present experiment, the results pertaining to this hypothesis may be considered as adding some substance to their underlying theory. On the other hand, clear support was obtained for the further hypothesis that people who view themselves as task competent are more likely to seek and accept help on such a task than those who view themselves as task incompetent.

It was intimated at the outset that Greenberg and Shapiro were probably correct in positing that the intervening variable in the case of lack of an objective opportunity to help is the aversive state of "indebtedness." The questionnaire data on the whole were disappointing insofar as direct allusion to indebtedness was concerned. While the only subjects who explicitly drew attention to the implications of reciprocation were in

computed. As predicted, Adequates asked for help much sooner than did Inadequates [$\bar{X}s = 68.65$ vs $104.29, F(1,52) = 16.72, p < .001$].

A third measure of help seeking was based on whether subjects who had accepted help continued to do so after meeting the quota. Since no subjects in the Inadequacy-No Opportunity condition were able to meet the quota, this measure was useful only for comparing Adequates with Inadequates in the Opportunity condition. Fisher's exact test indicated an Adequacy effect ($p < .05$, one tail): All nine Adequates who had asked for help continued to do so, while only three of the seven Inadequates did so.

The Effects of Opportunity

The second hypothesis calls for greater help seeking by those in the Opportunity than in the No Opportunity condition. When the frequency data were analyzed via the 2×2 ANOVA described earlier, a non-significant tendency in this direction [$F(1,52) = 3.12, p < .10$] was obtained. Likewise, the $2 \times 2 \times 2$ partitioning of χ^2 mentioned in the previous section showed the opportunity \times help seeking χ^2 to be non-significant [$\chi^2(1) = 2.57, p < .20$]. By way of contrast, where response latency was concerned, subjects in the No Opportunity condition clearly waited longer (see Table 2) before asking for help² than did those in the Opportunity condition [$\bar{X}s = 95.97$ vs $77.36, F(1,52) = 5.08, p < .05$]. No test was possible on the third measure.

Other Observations Based on Questionnaire Data

One rival hypothesis (suggested and discarded by Greenberg and Shapiro) is that subjects in the Opportunity condition solicit relatively more help than subjects in the No Opportunity condition because of increased attraction to someone whom "chance" has placed in similar circumstances. An ANOVA performed on evaluative ratings of the fellow worker produced nonsignificant results in the direction of *more* positive evaluations in the No Opportunity (and Inadequacy) condition than in the Opportunity (and Adequacy) condition.

Subjects who did ask for help rated how much they agreed with certain hypothetical reasons for asking. In view of the small and unequal N 's, Mann-Whitney U tests were performed. Adequates, in contrast to

²If one were to exclude all subjects who had not asked for help and therefore contributed maximum latency scores, the treatment means for the remaining subjects, although based on widely differing N 's, would still order themselves as in Table 2: 75.48 (Inadequate-No Opportunity), 61.50 (Inadequate-Opportunity), 53.89 (Adequate-No Opportunity), and 43.37 (Adequate-Opportunity).

been reported in which self-esteem and embarrassment are viewed as possible mediators of help seeking.⁹ Tessler and Schwartz (1972) included a situational manipulation of self-esteem involving an external versus internal attribution of locus of responsibility for failing a task. They found, using an impersonal source of help, that the higher the situational self-esteem the higher the incidence of help seeking. Since the present manipulation of Adequacy may be considered also as a situational manipulation of self-esteem, and since greater help seeking was shown by Adequates than by Inadequates, these results may be regarded as consistent with those of Tessler and Schwartz.

In a related study, Wallston (1972) proposed an interesting four-component model of help seeking in which two forms of embarrassment are differentiated: the embarrassment of continued failure at a task, a theme Wallston relates to achievement motivation, and the embarrassment of seeking help. The stronger the first form of embarrassment and the greater the expectation of success through help seeking, the more likely it is that the individual would seek help. Conversely, the greater the aversiveness of embarrassment through help seeking and the greater the expectation of being so embarrassed, the less likely the individual is to seek help. Judging from present subject reports, Inadequates were principally preoccupied with the embarrassment of asking for help, while Adequates were preoccupied with the task-related form of embarrassment. Most Adequates did ask for help, some saying they did so out of a desire to meet the quota. Adequates who did not ask for help gave as their general reason that they considered the task to be a challenge, and wanted very much to see if they could reach the quota through their own efforts, despite the handicap. They seemed, in short, to resemble high achievement-motivated, success-oriented individuals, an inference which is consistent with a finding by Tessler and Schwartz that need achievement is negatively correlated with help seeking.

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⁹ These studies by Tessler and Schwartz (1972) and by Wallston (1972) did not come to the authors' attention until after the present experiment was completed.

the Opportunity condition, these were few in number. This fact alone does not rule out the relevance of "indebtedness" as the prime intervening variable induced by the opportunity manipulation. It does, however, suggest that the connection may not have been made sufficiently salient or powerful to elicit systematic comment.

A further initial suggestion was that exposure of one's inadequacy is an aversive state in its own right: In Tessler and Schwartz's (1972) terms, it constitutes a threat to one's "public esteem." Here, the evidence is clear. Adequates in contrast to Inadequates indicated a lesser concern with embarrassment in asking for help. Moreover, they were much more of the view than Inadequates that if they were to solicit help this would benefit the fellow worker later. Since this occurred especially in the Adequacy-Opportunity condition, there seems to be *indirect* support here for the indebtedness issue. Whether or not help was sought, the Inadequates tended to reflect feelings of incompetence and shame, while the Adequates seemed principally concerned with mastering the task. It was rather interesting to note that some of the Adequates who asked for help explained their action in the rather magnanimous if not patronizing terms of accepting help so as not to hurt the fellow worker's feelings. In contrast, some of the Inadequates who avoided asking for help said, in rather self-demeaning terms, that they were afraid that the other fellow might refuse to extend help.⁸

Inadequates were generally more pessimistic of their chances of success, working alone, than were the Adequates, despite the fact that both had failed on the practice task. A possible rival interpretation of the effects of Adequacy might then be that the Inadequates simply became convinced that even with help they wouldn't succeed. This hardly seems likely, however, since the fellow worker easily finished his quota on the manual practice task with time to spare and was judged as having far less difficulty with it than they. A second possible interpretation is that since the experimenter derogated the performance of the Inadequates, then encouraged them to ask for help, he was in effect trying to pressure them into a noxious dependency relation with the fellow worker, which they felt prompted to resist. While there were no data to refute this, neither were there any allusions in the protocols to support it.

Two studies, employing a "clinical judgment" paradigm, have recently

⁸ It seems highly unlikely, however, that this was a major factor underlying the failure to ask for help. Greenberg and Shapiro's treatment groups expressed equally high confidence (overall mean of 6.19 on a 7-point scale) that the confederate would extend help if asked. This was established through a pretest questionnaire administered after the manipulation.

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(Received November 8, 1972)