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The Moderating Influence of Perceived Importance on Rejected Helpers' Reactions

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Building on a model of helpers' reactions to unexpected rejection of their help, we reasoned that if acceptance of the help was perceived by prospective helpers as highly important (rather than unimportant) to their own self-image of social competence or to the recipient's welfare, then rejection would be relatively threatening to that self-image, and their cognitive and valuative reactions following rejection would be relatively strong. An experiment on Macau high school students provided empirical support. As predicted, rejection elicited relatively lower postdiction of acceptance, higher attribution of the rejection to recipient defensiveness, and lower evaluations of the recipient's competence under manipulated conditions of high (compared to low) perceived importance to either party. Contrary to predictions, high importance elicited relatively greater desire for further task-relevant association. The theoretical and practical implications of these results are considered.

Two key provisos for effective helping have been suggested as widely applicable (Mickler & Rosen, 1994): The party needing help must be receptive to being helped, and the help being offered must ultimately meet that person's need for help. Of the two, receptiveness takes precedence, at least in time. Until recently, such receptiveness has been examined from the perspective of the party needing help (e.g., Nadler

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& Fisher, 1986; Rosen, 1983). For instance, Fisher, Nadler, and their associates showed that persons of high self-esteem (compared to those of low self-esteem) react to being helped with negative self-evaluation and negative affect if task performance reflects on important self-attributes and if they are similar to or have a close relationship with the helper. Such individuals also seek to self-help (allegedly to reestablish a sense of control).[1]

The perspective of the rejected helper was overlooked, however, as a problem area deserving investigation in its own right. This led some of us to ask how would-be helpers deal with rejection of their help (e.g., Rosen, Mickler, & Collins, 1987; Rosen, Mickler, & Spiers, 1986). This experiment adds to a series of studies bearing on this general question. It is concerned with the extent to which prior importance attached to acceptance of the offer serves to moderate spurned helpers' reactions.

We were drawn initially to this problem area by studies indicating that client resistance is a major source of job stress for professional caregivers (e.g., Farber, 1983; Kasl, 1975; Kyriacou & Sutcliff, 1978), reduces their attraction to such clients (Wills, 1978), and reflects adversely on the professional's perceived competence (e.g., Harrison, 1983). It was also maintained that such resistance may contribute to "burnout," namely, to a low sense of personal accomplishment, to depersonalization of clients, that is, to caregivers distancing themselves from and caring less about clients, and to emotional exhaustion—especially in caregivers who initially held high humanitarian concerns (Pines, 1982). We were struck, too, by one comment of Maslach and Jackson (1982), made while considering the antecedents of burnout:

> It is frustrating enough when what medicine has to offer may not help a particular patient, but even more frustrating is that when medicine could help, the practitioner's control over the course of treatment . . . may be sabotaged by an uncooperative patient who refuses to follow prescribed treatment. (p. 236)

A pair of experiments by Cialdini and his associates (Cialdini, Braver, & Lewis, 1974; Cialdini & Mirels, 1976), although not concerned with helping, also provided some useful insights. Participants who believed they were unsuccessful in persuading a target to their point of view rated that target as less intelligent and less likable than if their persuasive attempts were successful. In contrast, neutral observers rated

[1]The adverse implications for one's self-image of being a tutee is also evident in an early experiment on peer tutoring (in mathematics). Pairs of sixth- and eighth-grade classmates were formed, with one pair member assigned to the role of tutor, and the other the role of tutee. After 2 weeks of tutoring their roles were suddenly reversed. The tutors who then became tutees evaluated themselves as less useful, proud, important, and powerful ("like the boss") than they had before their roles were switched, whereas the tutees who became tutors evaluated themselves more positively on those dimensions than they had earlier (Rosen, Powell, Schubot, & Rollins, 1978).

the resisting target more favorably than they did the complying target. The other experiment showed that participants with high personal control orientations regarded the resisting target less favorably than they did the compliant target; on the other hand, the opposite pattern of target evaluations was made by participants with low personal control orientations.

The theoretical literature directly relevant to the spurned-helper problem was scant, except for some speculation by sociologists. According to Mauss (1925/1967), there exists a social norm that obligates us to accept benefits. Their refusal, therefore, constitutes a disconfirmation of normative expectations of acceptance. Mauss, also Blau (1964), proposed that rejection of an offer of help may anger the would-be helper, not just because the help may be germane to the recipient's particular problem, but even more importantly because the rejection constitutes a spurning of the overture of friendship that is implicit in the offer of help.

The manner in which the Nadler–Fisher "threat-to-self-esteem" model addresses the issue of expectancy violation is noteworthy, too. It maintains that a failing performance by prospective aid recipients who expected to succeed unaided poses a threat to their self-image only if the violations reflected unfavorably on important self-attributes. It is under such conditions that strong motivational pressures are said to arise to cope with the self-threats. A similar view of expectancy violation is incorporated in our spurned-helper model, as indicated hereafter.

The model we developed (Rosen et al., 1987) proposes that rejection of an offer of help is an expectancy-violating threat to the self-image of the (would-be) helpers, not simply because the help was probably offered with the expectation of its acceptance, but more critically because it threatens the helpers' self-image as one who is sufficiently efficacious and caring to be helpful. By *sufficient efficacy* we meant possession of both the technical resources or nonpersonal competence and the interpersonal resources or social competence (e.g., skills in relating to others and inducing acceptance) for meeting the recipient's perceived needs. By *sufficient caring* we meant empathic concern and motivation for extending help where needed. In turn, this self-image threat will elicit various affective, valuative, cognitive, and behavioral coping reactions. The thrust of this model also bears a resemblance to that of Steele's (1988) self-affirmation model, although Steele did not address this particular problem area. His model holds that self-affirmation processes, such as explanations, rationalizations, or actions, come into play when information threatens a self-view of being "adaptively and morally adequate, that is, as competent, good, . . . capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes" (p. 262). Steele maintains that these processes continue until a global perception of self-adequacy is restored.

Our model holds further that the reactions to rejection are moderated by situational and personal factors. Situational factors include such variables as the nature and quality of the prior relationship with the recipient, whether the helpers

would be held accountable for failure, task difficulty, perceived importance of the help to either party, and so forth. Personal factors include such variables as individual differences in helpers' self-image of being competent at helping and caring. These views were influenced by several exploratory role-play simulations indicating that helpers exposed to a variety of hypothetical helping scenarios generally considered it improper for recipients to refuse their help, regardless of private desires to the contrary (Rosen et al., 1987). They generally predicted acceptance, responded to rejection (vs. acceptance) with greater distress and irritation, and regarded the rejecter as unsociable. Furthermore, if asked to supply reasons for the rejection, their causal attributions cast the rejecter in an unfavorable light, yet did not directly question their own self-worth. Some did, however, suggest that the rejecter may have distrusted their own ability to help, or distrusted the helpers' motives for helping (Rosen et al., 1986).

Building on these findings we conducted a series of experiments involving actual rejection (vs. acceptance) of help under the guise of a peer-tutoring project. Basically, this paradigm paired a prospective tutor/helper (a true participant) with a prospective tutee/recipient (a confederate of the experimenter). After the participant witnessed and recorded the recipient's failure to complete an easy practice task involving word assembly, the experimenter invited the participant to select or to write (or both) some rules[2] that the recipient might find useful in preparing for the test task, and to offer them to the recipient if the participant thought it appropriate to do so. The participants invariably did decide to offer the rules. In almost all these studies the offer was made by memo from the participant to the recipient, ostensibly to "reduce embarrassment," or to test the "efficacy" of a written mode of peer tutoring. As prearranged, the recipient responded by writing "no thanks" (rejection) or "okay" (acceptance) on the memo and slipping it under the participant's door. The participant then completed a questionnaire that addressed his or her reactions to what had occurred thus far, in the mistaken belief that the test task still lay ahead.

Empirical support was obtained for various aspects of our model. For instance, helpers regarded rejection more than acceptance as an expectancy violation (i.e., expressed more surprise; Rosen et al., 1987). This difference was even more extreme in the case of helpers who had previously rated themselves as highly efficacious at helping and as caring (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993).[3] The posited mediational role of expectancy violation was supported in that reactions to rejection or

[2]The rationale for having them select or write rules, or both, was to promote a feeling of involvement in the helping process, also in the decision-making as to the form of help, and to induce the belief that the help was coming at least as much from them as from past tutors who had contributed rules.

[3]This was determined through administration of an individual-difference measure. Its 18 items were adapted mainly from the Personal Efficacy and Interpersonal Control scales of Paulhus's (1983) Spheres of Control battery and from the Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking scales of Davis's (1983) Interpersonal Reactivity Index—an empathic orientations battery. (See also Rosen et al., 1987; Rosen et al., in press.)

acceptance were weaker when its influence was statistically controlled. As to the reactions, rejected (compared to accepted) helpers expressed negative affect (e.g., felt sad, hurt, insulted, offended; Cheuk & Rosen, 1993; Rosen et al., 1987). They also evaluated the recipient as less competent, sociable, grateful (Rosen et al., 1987; see also Cheuk & Rosen, 1993; Rosen et al., in press). Such unfavorable evaluation even occurred when the rejecter (compared to the accepter) was actually a close friend, although to a lesser extent than when the recipient was a stranger (Cheuk & Rosen, 1992). There was also a relatively adverse effect of rejection on self-evaluation, but this was confined entirely to those helpers who had previously rated themselves as relatively low in "efficacious caring" (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993; Rosen et al., in press).

Several cognitive strategies also came into play, presumably in the service of self-image protection or repair. Rejected helpers' causal attributions cast the rejecter in an unfavorable light (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993; Rosen et al., 1987; Rosen et al., in press). They also postdicted relatively lower acceptance (a form of hindsight bias), namely, they maintained after the fact that they had considered it relatively unlikely before making their offer that the recipient would accept it (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993; Rosen et al., in press). They also claimed after the fact that they had had relatively less freedom in the decision to offer help (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993; Rosen et al., in press), despite having being told in advance that the decision to offer help was theirs to make; we considered this an attempt to escape or diffuse accountability by implying that the situation was outside their exclusive domain of decision control (see also Schlenker, Weigold, & Doherty, 1991). They were relatively pessimistic regarding the recipient's chances of completing the test task unaided (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993), and they tended to reveal a self-serving bias by agreeing less that they themselves were responsible for the rejection than responsible for acceptance (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993). All these forms of cognitive reaction, however, largely came from helpers who initially held strong prior self-perceptions of "efficacious caring" (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993). At the same time, in contrast to their low counterparts, they still expressed a desire for further association with the recipient despite the rejection (Cheuk & Rosen, 1993). We took all this as evidence that they had a relatively greater self-investment in the outcome of their offer and that they considered further association as providing an opportunity to see whether they could overcome the recipient's resistance.

We turn now to our primary concern—the influence of perceived importance of acceptance. We regarded such importance as involving at least two conceptually distinct factors, namely (a) the extent to which helpers regard acceptance of the offer as having a significant bearing on central aspects of their own self-image, and (b) the extent to which they consider the help critical for the recipient's future welfare. It seemed plausible, for instance, that if the situation makes salient the likelihood that acceptance of the offer would be an important diagnostic of their own social competence, then rejection of the offer would directly threaten their

self-image by casting doubt on the belief that they possessed such important self-attributes. The rejection may also threaten their public self-image—the image they would like to portray to others of being socially competent. For instance, having their offer rejected may constitute unfavorable valuative feedback, namely, that rejection occurred because of the recipient's disbelief that they were competent at helping (e.g., Rosen et al., 1987). Added to this is the possibility that should the rejection become public knowledge, interested third parties might hold the helpers accountable for adverse consequences to the recipient (cf. Adelberg & Batson, 1978). Suppose, now, that the recipient were to refuse help that could well be critical for his or her future, such as in the choice of future academic studies. It could be that the recipient has simply given up trying, believes that the situation is hopeless, and that she or he is beyond help. Another possibility is that the recipient does not really care about, or has stopped caring about, an academic future. In either event it could strike spurned helpers as a regrettable waste of resources in behalf of the recipient.

Importance-to-self and importance-to-recipient were treated as the two independent variables in this rejection-only experiment. To manipulate importance-to-self we pointedly told prospective helpers that acceptance of help by a learner (recipient) in a peer-tutoring context is (or is not) indicative of the tutor's (i.e., helper's) social competence. Importance-to-recipient was manipulated by emphasizing that the learner's performance would (or would not) be made public to school and governmental officials and would (or would not) have significant consequences for the learner's academic future. The reactions addressed consisted of the postdicted likelihood of acceptance, attributed defensiveness, evaluation of the recipient's competence and sociability, and desire for further association with the recipient. The study was conducted within a high school of Asian students on the Macau Peninsula, which lies off mainland China. (Macau is a Portuguese overseas province that, like neighboring Hong Kong, will soon come under the control of mainland China.)

We predicted that the two factors would have similar main effects. Namely, if acceptance was perceived to be important, rather than unimportant, to their own self-image or to the recipient's future, then rejected helpers would postdict less acceptance, attribute more recipient defensiveness by way of explanation, evaluate the recipient's traits less positively, and express less desire for further association. Previous spurned-helper experiments yielded significant effects of rejection (as against acceptance) on devaluation both of the recipient's competence and sociability, with the effects on sociability being somewhat stronger. Inasmuch, however, as the importance-to-self manipulation makes their own competence particularly salient under high importance, it seemed plausible that this would lead them to question recipient competence instead and thus would have greater impact on rejected helpers' evaluation of recipient competence than on rejected helpers' evaluation of recipient sociability. Rejection under high importance-to-recipient despite the dire consequences it would bring the recipients should also make helpers more prone to question rejecters' competence than their sociability (cf. Swann, 1987).

Previous research had also yielded a similar pattern of effects of rejection (vs. acceptance) on desire for further task-relevant association and desire for informal association, with weaker effects on the former (e.g., Rosen et al., 1987). We reasoned, however, that the strong emphasis being placed in our context on the diagnosticity of acceptance for the helpers' competence (under high importance-to-self) and the criticality of recipient performance for the recipient's future welfare (under high importance-to-recipient) would lead to stronger effects of each importance factor on desire for further task-relevant association than on informal association.

METHOD

Participants

Two classes of Grade 12 Asian high school students in Macau, each containing 42 students, were asked to participate in a study of peer tutoring. Ages ranged from 17 to 21 years. There were 50 male students and 34 female students in all.

Procedure

The students of one class were first briefed on the true purpose of the study. Each was asked to serve as a confederate by playing the role of "learner." The role entailed a sequence of planned behaviors calling for below-average performance on two word-assembly practice tasks, then rejection of the offer of help that would probably come from their "tutor." In short, the confederates were coached in how to behave as prospective rejecters of help. The students from the other class were asked to serve as the tutors (i.e., prospective helpers), but were not told the true purpose of the experiment.

Forty-two pairs were formed, with one student from each of the two classes per pairing. Within-pair members were same-sex strangers. Each pair was told that the investigator was from the School of Education of the University of Macau (the first-named author was actually on the Education faculty of Macau University at the time) and had been working in collaboration with the Government Education Department to develop effective peer-tutoring procedures. Our study was described as an examination of how effectively the tutoring could proceed if communication between tutor and learner was limited to a written format. One of them would be the tutor, the other the learner (tutee). The learner would go through two word-assembly practice tasks before beginning the test task. The tutor's responsibility would be to observe the learner during the practice tasks, then to decide whether to offer help to the learner before the latter undertook the test task. Because the focus of the study was on written communication, no talking between tutor and learner

would be permitted during the session, although the tutor could observe the tutee through a one-way screen.

The experimenter then "randomly" assigned the confederate to be the learner and the other participant to be the tutor. As prearranged, the learner "failed" both practice tasks, as indicated by bogus performance norms available to the tutor. While the learner then pretended to fill out a questionnaire, the tutor completed an evaluation form that addressed the learner's performance on the practice tasks. The tutor was then asked if he or she would like to offer some suggestions to the learner to help the learner prepare for the test task. If the tutor agreed to offer help (all tutors did), the tutor was given a set of 10 written suggestions, and told to select 5 for offering. It was explained that the tutor was free to write additional or substitute suggestions. After 5 were assembled, the tutor was shown a note that constituted the manipulation of the two independent variables.

The note stated that, based on past research, acceptance of an offer of help by a recipient in a peer-tutoring context indicates that the tutor is competent in relating to others and in being able to influence others (high importance-to-self), or that acceptance of an offer of help has nothing to do with the tutor's social competence (low importance-to-self). The note added that the Education Department was interested in students' linguistic abilities and had requested that each learner's test task performance be forwarded via the school principal and that the performance would have significant consequences for the learner's choice of academic studies (high importance-to-recipient). Or the note added that because the study was still in its experimental stages the Department did not need the test results; instead, the results would be kept and used confidentially by the university investigator for research purposes only and would have no bearing on the learner's future choice of studies (low importance-to-recipient).

After reading the note, the tutor signed a memo addressed to the learner stating that he or she had some helpful suggestions that the learner could use as preparation for the test task, and asking if the learner wished to see the suggestions. On receiving the memo, the learner wrote on it that he or she did not wish to see the suggestions (i.e., was rejecting the offer). After receiving this reply the tutor filled out another questionnaire, in the mistaken belief that the test task would follow shortly. This questionnaire addressed the dependent variables. The tutor was then probed for suspicions, debriefed, and thanked for participating in the study.

Manipulation Checks

To check on the manipulations, tutors (helpers) were asked to specify (via dichotomous response format) whether or not the acceptance of their offer would indicate that they were socially competent, whether or not the learner's (recipient's) performance on the test would be sent to the Education Department or just be kept in confidence by the investigator for research purposes, and whether the learner rejected or accepted the offer. It was felt that such questions would impose fewer demand characteristics than asking about "perceived importance" to the respective parties.

Dependent Variables

Postdicted acceptance was assessed via an 11-point rating scale on how likely they had thought it was before making their offer that their offer would be accepted (0 = *0 in 10 chances,* 10 = *10 in 10 chances,* that learner would accept). Attributed defensiveness was assessed by averaging each helper's extent of agreement (via seven 11-point rating scales) that the learner's response to the offer was due to the recipient's being distrustful of helper's ability to help, too proud for own good, stubborn, easily embarrassed, shy, concerned about appearing inferior, and unaware of how much help was really needed ($\alpha = .62$).[4]

Trait evaluation was based on helpers' responses to two sets of six trait dimensions, each dimension represented by an 11-point bipolar rating scale. An index of perceived competence was formed (as in other studies, e.g., Rosen et al., 1987) by averaging each helper's extent of agreement that the recipient was: incapable/capable, unskilled/skilled, weak/strong, unsophisticated/sophisticated, incompetent/competent, and awkward/poised ($\alpha = .69$). Similarly, an index of perceived sociability was formed (as in other studies) by averaging each helper's extent of agreement that the recipient was: egotistic/altruistic, vain/modest, unsympathetic/sympathetic, insensitive/sensitive, cruel/kind, and unlikable/likable ($\alpha = .59$). The association between the two indexes was nonsignificant ($r = .18$).

Desired association was measured (as in earlier studies) via helpers' responses to two 11-point rating scales: (a) how much the helper would like to work in the future with this recipient on tasks similar to word assembly (desire for task-relevant association), and (b) how much the helper would like to associate informally with the recipient (desire for informal association). The correlation between the two scales was nonsignificant ($r = .12$).

RESULTS

Three (of 42) helpers did not respond correctly to the manipulation checks. They were not included in the analyses. Two-way (importance-to-self × importance-to-recipient) unweighted means analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to test the hypotheses. Cell means are shown in Table 1.

[4] Although the reliabilities obtained on these measures were regarded as of sufficient magnitude for our purposes, it must be acknowledged that they were smaller than those obtained in studies involving American undergraduates. Why this was the case is not clear. Perhaps something was lost in the translation (into Chinese). Differences in culture, research setting, and cohort may have contributed, too.

Postdicted Acceptance

The ANOVA on postdicted likelihood of acceptance revealed a significant main effect of importance-to-self, $F(1, 35) = 9.74$, $p < .005$, a significant main effect of importance-to-recipient, $F(1, 35) = 4.26$, $p < .05$, and a nonsignificant interaction effect, $F(1, 35) = 1.54$, ns. As hypothesized, rejected helpers postdicted lower likelihood of acceptance under high ($M = 9.02$) than under low ($M = 10.60$) importance-to-self, and under high ($M = 9.31$) than low ($M = 10.31$) importance-to-recipient.

Attributed Defensiveness

The ANOVA on attributed defensiveness, likewise, showed a significant main effect of importance-to-self, $F(1, 35) = 5.81$, $p < .025$, and of importance-to-recipient, $F(1, 35) = 9.21$, $p < .005$. The interaction, again, was nonsignificant ($F < 1.00$). As hypothesized, helpers attributed greater defensiveness to the rejecter under high ($M = 6.18$) than low ($M = 5.06$) importance-to-self, and under high ($M = 6.36$) than low ($M = 4.89$) importance-to-recipient. Examination of the item involving attribution of the rejection to the recipient's distrust in the helper's ability to help revealed a significant main effect of importance-to-recipient in the appropriate direction, $F(1, 35) = 13.48$, $p < .001$; this effect was particularly strong under high importance-to-self, even though the main effect of importance-to-self fell short of significance ($F = 2.07$).

TABLE 1
Mean Effects of Perceived Importance of Acceptance to Self and Recipient on Reactions of Rejected Helpers

	Importance to Self			
	Low		*High*	
Reaction	*LIR*	*HIR*	*LIR*	*HIR*
Postdicted acceptance	10.80	10.40	9.82	8.22
Attributed defensiveness	4.56	5.57	5.21	7.15
Recipient evaluation on:				
Competence	6.65	5.89	5.86	3.97
Sociability	6.40	5.76	5.90	6.24
Desired association:				
Task-relevant	7.91	7.56	8.12	10.10
Informal	9.09	9.00	8.50	9.50

Note. Higher mean scores denote greater postdicted acceptance, greater defensiveness attributed to recipient (to explain why recipient rejected the offer), more positive evaluations of recipient's traits of competence and sociability, and greater desire for task-relevant and informal association. LIR and HIR denote low and high importance of acceptance, respectively, to recipient.

Evaluation of Recipient's Traits

Perceived competence. The ANOVA on the recipient's competence yielded a highly significant main effect of importance-to-self, $F(1, 35) = 17.98$, $p < .0001$, and of importance-to-recipient, $F(1, 35) = 16.40$, $p < .0003$. The interaction effect was marginally significant, $F(1, 35) = 3.33$, $p < .10$. Consistent with predictions, the recipient was perceived as less competent under high ($M = 4.92$) than low ($M = 6.27$) importance-to-self, and under high ($M = 4.93$) than low ($M = 6.26$) importance-to-recipient.

Perceived sociability. The ANOVA on the recipient's sociability yielded no significant effects whatsoever. This difference from the case of recipient competence is consistent with the hypothesis that the effects of the importance variables on recipient competence would be stronger than on recipient sociability.

Desire for Further Association With Recipient

Desire for task-relevant association. An ANOVA on the item concerning task-relevant association revealed a main effect of importance-to-self approaching significance, $F(1, 35) = 3.90$, $p < .06$. But counter to the predicted direction, helpers expressed greater desire for task-relevant association under high ($M = 9.11$) than low ($M = 7.74$) importance-to-self. The main effect of importance-to-recipient was nonsignificant, $F < 1.00$, though the direction of means for high (8.83) and low (8.03) importance-to-recipient was also opposite to that predicted. The interaction effect was nonsignificant ($F = 2.41$).

Desire for informal association. An ANOVA on the item concerning informal association yielded no significant effects whatsoever. This departure from the effect obtained on task-relevant association is at least consistent with the hypothesis that the impact of perceived importance would be greater in the case of task-relevant association.

DISCUSSION

It was reasoned that rejection of their offers of help would be more threatening for would-be helpers, and would therefore elicit stronger reactions from them, if they had perceived the acceptance of their offer as an important diagnostic of their own

social competence, or as important for the recipient's future welfare.[5] As hypothesized, rejected helpers reacted under conditions of high, compared to low, importance to either party by making lower postdictions of the likelihood of acceptance and by attributing the rejection more strongly to the recipient's defensiveness, including the inference that the recipient questioned their ability to help. We had also hypothesized that rejected helpers would evaluate the recipient's traits of competence and sociability relatively more negatively under conditions of high importance to either party, but that this differential impact would especially apply to the recipient's competence. Empirical support was forthcoming in that the effect of each importance variable on recipient competence was significant whereas the effects on recipient sociability were not.

We had predicted, too, that rejected helpers would express relatively less desire for further association with the recipient under conditions of high importance to either party, but that this would especially apply to the desire for further task-relevant association. Contrary to expectations, although the effect of importance-to-self on desire for task-relevant association approached significance whereas the comparable effect on desire for informal association did not, helpers expressed relatively greater, rather than less, desire for task-relevant association under conditions of high importance to their self-image of social competence.

Why had our rejected helpers opted for relatively greater rather than less task-relevant association under conditions of high importance-to-self? According to Wortman and Brehm (1975), people may react initially to an episode involving an adverse outcome by efforts to regain control rather than to give up, and even more vigorously so the more importantly these people valued the outcome. It seems plausible that in this context further task-relevant association was seen as providing an opportunity for overcoming the rejecter's resistance to being helped, and it is those helpers in the high-importance-to-self condition who were more motivated to seize such an opportunity. In the process of doing so they might succeed in re-affirming their social competence. Still, such speculation as to why perceived importance to the self increased the desire for further task-relevant association should be examined directly in future research.[6]

It is an empirical question as to whether the effects of the importance factors would be opposite under acceptance if an acceptance condition were to be included as a third factor. The most parsimonious approach would be to predict symmetrical effects. On the other hand, it should be noted that because in our previous studies acceptance was found to be significantly less of an expectancy violation than was rejection, a plausible alternative would be to predict that the effects of the importance factors under acceptance, would be less, in absolute terms, than their effects under rejection.

[5] This interpretation was influenced by our earlier findings suggestive of greater self-investment in the outcome of their helping effort on the part of those rejected helpers who had initially harbored high self-perceptions of efficacy at helping and caring. (See also footnote 3.)

[6] More direct evidence is also needed that the importance of acceptance imputed by the experimental instructions was indeed perceived as such. Still, it should be noted that Macau seniors who qualify for acceptance at the university receive generous governmental subsidies for attending the university and that upon graduating from the university they would qualify for well-paying government jobs. The fact, too, that the study took place in the high school complex provided a substantial dose of "mundane realism" that probably added to the impact of the importance manipulations.

Some might wonder why our paradigm involved outright rejection of help, given that resistance to being helped is often a matter of degree (e.g., token acceptance, public compliance but private rejection, or vice versa). We wished at this stage of our research to ensure that the rejection be seen as categorical or unequivocal, hence more threatening. A further consideration is suggested by the distinction of DiNicola and DiMatteo (1982) between a patient's rejection of both the caregiver (source) and the caregiver's advice (message), versus acceptance of the caregiver but not the advice. They regarded the former as more serious because it implies that the patient's commitment to treatment is in doubt. We felt that our paradigm had more of the flavor of the first type of resistance (also, see again Blau, 1964; Mauss, 1925/1967) and presumably would be relatively more threatening to the helper. In the interest of generalizability, of course, it would be desirable to explore other rejection/resistance paradigms, too.

It is intriguing to consider that an encounter where a successful outcome (acceptance of help) is self-enhancing to the would-be helper is often one where that outcome would be self-threatening to the recipient, and vice versa in the case of rejection. This seems particularly likely where acceptance or rejection is important for the self-image of each party, even though the facets of self-image that are salient for one party differ from those that are salient for the other. Given such conflicting goals, it seems probable that the reactions of the two parties to such conflict would also differ. We might imagine that some rejected helpers would persist in the effort to overcome the recipient's resistance and that such persistence, in turn, would increase the reactance of the recipient to being helped, hence escalate the conflict. It suggests, at any rate, that a helping attempt may often be a multitrial affair whose resolution is unclear. Our study's paradigm does not yet address this long-term issue other than to offer the rejected party the opportunity for further task-relevant association.

This consideration led us back to some applied contexts where the long-term issue is quite germane. We alluded at the outset to studies indicating that client resistance is a prime form of perceived job stress for professional caregivers and has been said to contribute ultimately to burnout, particularly among the more dedicated of caregivers. To pursue this matter systematically, a sample of physicians and of nurses in upper New York State was asked to rate the extent to which patients and colleagues reject their offers of help. As predicted, our (12-item) measure of perceived spurning was positively associated with burnout, more specifically with a low sense of personal accomplishment and with depersonaliza-

tion. Spurning was also positively associated with expectancy violation and job disillusionment. However, those medical practitioners reporting that their formal training had included the advance expectation that patients often resist being helped, and what to do on encountering the resistance, experienced less burnout. It was reasoned that such expectancy training would legitimize their making situational rather than self-attributions of blame when encountering resistance. That training also tended to buffer the impact of spurning on burnout (Mickler & Rosen, 1994). The measure of perceived support was subsequently adapted for use in two studies of Asian school teachers in Macau. As predicted, perceived spurning was again positively associated with burnout, in each study. One study also showed that spurning was positively associated with other forms of job stress and with job dissatisfaction (Cheuk & Rosen, 1994). The other study also showed that supervisor support was negatively associated with burnout and appeared to buffer the effect of spurning on burnout (Cheuk, Wong, & Rosen, 1994).

Inasmuch as the measures in the three spurning–burnout studies were administered concurrently, the direction of causality linking spurning to burnout has yet to be established empirically. Moreover, the retrospective accounts of expectancy training in the first study and of supervisor support in the third study provided insufficient details concerning the respective processes. Still, both issues are worth exploring more fully both in the laboratory and the field. They may lead us to insights as to which possible combinations of helpers' help-giving orientations and recipients' help-receiving orientations will be found (or could be made) compatible enough to minimize self-overinvolvement and threat to both parties and would eventuate in successful helping relationships (e.g., Kidda & Rosen, 1994).

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