Help-Seeking Helps: Help-Seeking and Group Image

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**Abstract**

Seeking help from an outgroup can be difficult, especially when the outgroup is known to stereotype the ingroup negatively and the potential recipient cares strongly about its social image. However, we ask if even highly-identified ingroup members may seek help from a judgemental outgroup if doing so allows them to disconfirm the outgroup's negative stereotype of the ingroup. We presented participants with one of two negative outgroup stereotypes of their ingroup. One could be disconfirmed through seeking help, the other could not. Study 1 ($N = 43$) showed group members were aware of the strategic implications of seeking help for disconfirming these stereotypes. Study 2 ($N = 43$) showed high identifiers acted on such strategic knowledge by seeking more help from the outgroup when help-seeking could disconfirm a negative stereotype of their group (than when it could not). Implications for the seeking and acceptance of help are discussed.

*Keywords*: help-seeking, stereotypes, strategy, social identity.

Help-Seeking Helps: Help-Seeking and Group Image

Groups provide their members with access to important social resources. When individuals see each other as members of a common social group they are more likely to help each other (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005; Wakefield et al., 2011). Moreover, group members expect social support from their fellows, and this can be empowering (Drury & Reicher, 2005; Pandey, Stevenson, Shankar, Hopkins, & Reicher, in press; Reicher & Haslam, 2010). However, seeking or accepting help can be difficult because it can be seen as implying incapability and dependence (Lee, 2002). In intergroup contexts, the psychological costs of seeking or accepting outgroup help can be particularly painful because ingroup members (especially those who are most invested in their group membership) wish to promote and maintain a positive image of their group (Tajfel, 1978). Indeed, the help-seeking literature shows that group members' concerns about their group's image and reputation can lead them to avoid outgroup help, even if this means missing out on much-needed assistance. This is especially apparent amongst those who are most concerned about their group's public image – high identifiers. For instance, Nadler and colleagues (e.g., Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006) found that highly-identifying ingroup members resisted outgroup help if accepting such help risked confirming the lower status of the ingroup. Similarly, Täuber and van Zomeren (2012) found that highly-identifying ingroup members tended to refuse outgroup help that would, if accepted, risk damaging the ingroup's moral reputation while enhancing the moral reputation of the outgroup.

Our own research is designed to complement and extend the analysis of the degree to which outgroup help is sought. Specifically, we address the novel question of whether there may be intergroup contexts in which ingroup members' tendency to avoid approaching an outgroup for help could be attenuated, such that ingroup members are able to take advantage of an outgroup's help. At first sight this might seem unlikely: seeking help is often assumed

to signal inadequacy of some sort, and admitting such inadequacy to an outgroup is costly (especially for those who identify highly with the group and are concerned about its reputation in the eyes of others). However, seeking or accepting help need not be viewed in such a manner. Rather, the meanings associated with seeking help may be malleable and context-dependent, and we asked if there might be contexts in which group members would conclude that the act of asking for help might be judged more positively by others. Specifically, we asked if ingroup members - especially those most preoccupied with what outgroups think of the ingroup (i.e., high ingroup identifiers) would be less reluctant to seek help from an outgroup if doing so could disconfirm a negative judgement about the ingroup. Before explaining our design, we consider first the diverse meanings of seeking or accepting help, and examine how group members' own behavior can be shaped by their beliefs about how others (especially outgroups) could view their actions.

**Help-Seeking: Diverse Meanings and Understandings**

Anthropologists have long argued that helping transactions (in which help is given or received) have complex meanings for those involved (e.g., Mauss, 1922, reprinted 1990). Moreover, they have shown that unless we attend to such meanings we may not understand individuals' behavior in these transactions. For example, Carr, McAuliffe, and MacLachlan (1998) studied how communities in developing countries reacted to being given aid, and found that the members of some communities asked to be paid for helping to unload the donated supplies from the trucks. At first sight this may appear to be a sign of ingratitude. However, Carr et al. argue that this request should be seen as an attempt to redefine the donor-recipient transaction. It seems that receiving such aid was construed by community members as undermining their group's dignity in the eyes of others, and that they believed that being paid would allow the transaction to be re-defined such that community members were recognised as having moral worth and dignity.

The insight that the meaning of helping transactions may be malleable is important because it allows for constructions of helping that may attenuate group members' reluctance to seek or accept help. This is well-illustrated in some imaginative health promotion campaigns. Take, for example, the well-documented reluctance of men experiencing mental health difficulties to seek or accept help because they believe that doing so would be seen by others as evidence of their weakness and failure to live up to the ideals associated with masculine identity. Recognising the practical significance of such assumptions, the *Real Men, Real Depression* health campaign sought to redefine men's help-seeking as entirely consistent with masculine norms (see Rochlen, Whilde, & Hoyer, 2005). Specifically, this intervention involved defining the act of seeking help as 'taking guts' and as requiring self-confidence. This did not simply involve shaping men's conceptions of the act of help-seeking. Rather it involved shaping men's understandings of how their act of help-seeking would likely be seen by *others*. In the next section we consider in more detail how group members' own behavior is shaped by their beliefs about how others (especially outgroups) view them, and how this may be relevant to attenuating the avoidance of seeking help from an outgroup.

**Ingroup Image Concerns: Meta-Stereotypes and Strategy**

Believing oneself to be judged negatively by others can promote feelings of intense social image threat (Gordijn, 2010), and recent research has begun to address group members' meta-stereotypes (i.e., their beliefs about how their group is judged by others: Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). Often such evaluations are believed to be negative in valence, with ingroup members believing themselves to be unfairly and inaccurately characterised by the outgroup (Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000).

The belief that one's group is unfairly and inaccurately stereotyped by others often motivates ingroup members to respond strategically. For instance, ingroup members who

identify weakly with the ingroup may further decrease their identification so as to reduce the personal applicability of the negative stereotype (e.g., Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011). However, this solution is less viable for those strongly invested in the group (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). More strongly-identifying ingroup members may choose to modify their behavior to avoid confirming the personal applicability of the negative stereotype (Wakefield, Hopkins, & Greenwood, 2012), or attempt to disconfirm the outgroup's image of the ingroup (e.g., Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013; Klein & Azzi, 2001). In turn it follows that ingroup members' behavior can be predicted by the content of their beliefs about how they are seen by the outgroup. Thus when group members believe they are stereotyped as 'mean' and 'ungenerous' they may offer help to others (Hopkins et al., 2007), and when they believe they are stereotyped as 'dependent' they may avoid seeking needed help (Wakefield, Hopkins, & Greenwood, 2013).

In the research reported here we complement and extend such work by asking if there may be contexts in which group members' reluctance to seek or accept help from an outgroup could be reduced. Specifically, we asked if believing that one's group was stereotyped negatively for failing to seek needed help could reduce ingroup members' reluctance to seek help from the judgemental outgroup. Moreover, we investigated if such an effect would be most pronounced amongst those ingroup members who are most concerned about their group's image – high identifiers.

**The Present Research**

Our research entailed presenting participants with one of two stereotypes of their group. Both were negative and both implied that group members failed to live up to an identity-relevant ideal (that the group making the judgement succeeded in enacting). However, the contents of this evaluative stereotype varied according to condition. The stereotype in one condition was designed in such a way that it could be disconfirmed by

seeking outgroup help (the help-relevant condition). The other was designed in such a way that it could not be disconfirmed by such behavior (the help irrelevant condition)

Using these stereotypes, we report two studies. Study 1 investigated participants' understandings of how they could disconfirm these stereotypes. Our purpose here was simple: we sought to show that the social significance of help-seeking could be shaped by varying ingroup members' beliefs about how their group was judged by others. Specifically, we predicted ingroup members would perceive help-seeking as an effective stereotype-disconfirming strategy in the help relevant condition but not in the help irrelevant condition (Hypothesis 1).

Study 2 built upon Study 1 and investigated if, when faced with an actual need for help and an opportunity to seek help from the very group that apparently stereotyped them so negatively, ingroup members would actually be motivated to approach, engage with, and admit a need for assistance to this outgroup. In this second study, we were particularly interested in the behavior of those most invested in their group membership. As explained above, high identifiers are those most concerned about their group's social image, and this typically results in high identifiers avoiding seeking or accepting outgroup help because seeking such help displays ingroup members' inabilities to an outgroup audience (Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Täuber & van Zomeren, 2012). Accordingly, in the help irrelevant condition (where seeking help could do nothing to challenge the outgroup's image of the ingroup, and would only convey ingroup members' inabilities) we expected a negative correlation between ingroup identification and help-seeking. However, we reasoned that precisely because high identifiers are concerned about their group's image in the eyes of others, they would be most affected by our manipulation of stereotype content. Specifically, we predicted that in the help relevant condition (where seeking help was a vehicle to disconfirm an image-threatening stereotype), high identifiers would be particularly motivated

to seek such help. Accordingly, we made two inter-related predictions. We predicted that the negative correlation between ingroup identification and help-seeking would be moderated by condition (Hypothesis 2a). Moreover, with regard to the level of help-seeking we predicted that the effect of condition would be moderated by ingroup identification. Specifically, we predicted an effect of condition for high identifiers (such that they would seek more help when the stereotype could be disconfirmed by seeking help) and that this effect would be absent for low identifiers (who are less concerned about their group's image) (Hypothesis 2b).

**Pilot Work**

As we were interested in the differential responses of high and low identifiers, we elected to work with a real rather than minimal group, and we chose to use participants' university membership as the ingroup identity (Dundee University – DU). As we wished to keep the identity of the outgroup judging the ingroup constant (and manipulate only the stereotype's content), we created a cover-story in which those attending an outgroup university judged students attending the participants' own university in different ways. According to condition, student participants received one of two stereotypes of their university student ingroup. Both stereotypes were negative and both implied a failing of the ingroup to live up to the values and ideals associated with being a student. In one condition, this entailed failing to take responsibility for their and their fellow students' learning. In the other, it entailed failing to be involved in student welfare activities. We designed our materials such that participants would perceive both stereotypes as (equally) inaccurate and negative depictions of the ingroup, and be (equally) motivated to disconfirm the stereotypes. Accordingly, our experimental materials had much in common. In both conditions it was explained that the outgroup stereotyping the ingroup was surprised by the ingroup's failure to live up to these student-related ideals. To give this negative judgement emotional power, the

stereotypes implied the outgroup believed these failures exemplified the ingroup's 'selfishness'. This design does not require participants to believe that they do indeed fail to live up to these ideals or that they are indeed 'selfish'. Rather it requires participants to believe that others hold such views.

The contents of the outgroup stereotypes of the ingroup differed according to condition. As already mentioned, in one condition the stereotype of the ingroup was such that it could be disconfirmed through seeking help. However, in the other condition the stereotype could not be disconfirmed through seeking help. This meant the conditions were such that seeking help was either relevant to disconfirming the outgroup's stereotype of the ingroup (help relevant) or was irrelevant to disconfirming it (help irrelevant, for further details of these contents, see Study 1).To ensure an appropriate and realistic experimental scenario we piloted our experiment's cover story. In the UK higher education system there are various small colleges which gain university status each year, and we presented participants with fabricated information about one such institution. Our cover story explained that this institution (University College Edinburgh: UCE) was involved with DU in a collaborative teaching project, and we asked DU students about how they thought they were seen by UCE students.  First, DU student participants ($N = 39$) were asked about their ingroup identification (six items adapted from Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995, e.g., *I see myself as a DU student*; 1 = *disagree* and 7 = *agree, M = 5.82, SD = 0.61, Cronbach's* α = .67). Second, they rated the extent to which they thought UCE students were likely to describe DU students in terms of eight traits (e.g., *hard-working* and *aggressive*, 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much*). This was to create an intergroup context in which DU students reflected on how they were judged. Third, participants rated the extent to which they cared about their group's image in the eyes of others, using four items designed specifically for the study (*If I thought the image of DU students was under threat, I would be motivated to protect it*; *I care about*

*what other people think about DU students; I'm willing to help ensure that DU students have a good reputation in the eyes of others; It is important that DU students have a good reputation*; 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much*), which formed a scale (*M* = 5.08, *SD* = 1.07, *Cronbach's* α = .90).

No participant questioned the cover story and all expressed surprise when debriefed. Results confirmed that the more participants identified as DU students, the more concerned they were about the group's image in the eyes of UCE students (*r* = .40, *N* = 39, *p* = .01; for information- help relevant *r* = .61, help irrelevant *r* = .43). We therefore concluded that our cover story was appropriate: highly-identifying DU students cared enough about the ingroup's image to report a concern to protect it from negative UCE judgement.

## Study 1

Study 1 was designed to show that the social significance of help-seeking could be modified such that group members would look upon the act of help-seeking as a vehicle to disconfirm an outgroup's image of the ingroup in one condition, but not in the other. Accordingly, our design involved manipulating the contents of participants' meta-stereotypes concerning their university group identity and then investigating participants' understandings of how best to disconfirm such a stereotype. In one condition the stereotype was defined in such a way that it could be disconfirmed by seeking outgroup help (help relevant) and in the other it was defined in such a way that it could not (help irrelevant). In the help relevant condition DU students were judged as failing to contribute to a productive learning environment through remaining silent and failing to ask for help when they did not understand academic material. In the help irrelevant condition, DU students were judged as failing to contribute to student charity events (such as 'Rag Week'). In both conditions the UCE students apparently labeled such failures as reflecting DU students' selfishness. However, in the help relevant condition it followed that help-seeking had a distinctive (and

positive) meaning (i.e., as challenging the negative stereotype of the group).

In the light of previous research (confirmed in our pilot work), we predicted high identifiers would report greater concern to disconfirm these negative evaluations of the ingroup. As both stereotypes were negative, we expected this relationship to obtain regardless of which specific stereotype was invoked. With regards to participants' understandings of the efficacy of various behaviors in disconfirming such stereotypes, we expected help-seeking to be judged as more effective in disconfirming the outgroup's image of the ingroup when the stereotype referred to DU students as failing to take responsibility for their and their fellow students' learning (the help relevant condition), compared to when the stereotype referred to DU students as failing to be actively involved in welfare activities (the help irrelevant condition). All group members (regardless of identification strength) were expected to discern the social significance of seeking help in the help relevant condition, and accordingly we did not expect the effect of condition on participants' understandings of the strategic significance of help-seeking to be moderated by participants' level of group identification.

## Method

### Participants and Design

DU undergraduates ($N = 43$) were assigned randomly to two between-group conditions (help relevant $n = 21$ vs. help irrelevant $n = 22$; $M_{age} = 22.58$ years, $SD = 4.33$, age range = 18-39 years). To reduce complexities surrounding gender roles and help-seeking, only females were recruited.

### Procedure

The experimenter explained she was a DU postgraduate student carrying out research at both DU and UCE. She also explained she was investigating how DU and UCE students perceive each other, and how both groups of students respond to how they are perceived.

Participants were presented with a questionnaire entitled "How Are Dundee University Students Perceived by Students from Other Universities?" All measures involved 1-7-point rating scales. The stages to the study and how these varied according to condition are summarised in Table 1 below.

(Table 1 about here)

**Manipulations**

Participants received questions on their course choices followed by four ingroup identification items (adapted from Hopkins et al., 2007, e.g., *Being a Dundee University student is very important to me*; 1 = *disagree* and 7 = *agree*), which formed a scale (*M* = 5.41, *SD* = 1.13, *Cronbach's* α = .85). Participants then read comments from four ostensible students at UCE about DU students. Each was hand-written in a different style (matched across conditions). Each comment was presented as one UCE student's response to one page of a questionnaire entitled *"What do UCE students think about Dundee University students?"* While one response remained the same across conditions (*I have heard that Dundee University students have a great students' union and have a really good time. But I do know that some people in my class think that Dundee University students are maybe not that dynamic*), the other three responses differed by condition (but were matched as closely as possible, via pilot-testing, for length, tone and phrasing).

In the help relevant condition the stereotype was designed so that it could be disconfirmed by help-seeking. Accordingly, the responses depicted DU students as failing to seek help and to take responsibility for their learning. Moreover this failure to live up to the ideals of the student identity was underlined through labelling this behavior as 'selfish' and as disadvantaging others (e.g., *I once came over to a seminar at Dundee University, and none of us understood the topic at all. The Dundee University students sat in silence for ages, rather than admit that they were stuck. I thought it was a pretty selfish thing for the Dundee*

*University students to do, as it disadvantaged everyone in the seminar*"). In the help

irrelevant condition, the stereotype was designed so that is could not be disconfirmed by

help-seeking. Accordingly, the responses depicted DU students as failing to live up to the

ideals of addressing justice and welfare concerns. Again, the 'selfish' nature of this failure

was emphasised (e.g., *I visited some friends who go to Dundee University recently, and it*

*happened to be Rag Week, where students are meant to help raise funds for charity. I was*

*really struck by the lack of interest that the students showed for the event- nobody was really*

*getting involved at all. I thought that was a pretty selfish thing for the Dundee University*

*students to do, as it disadvantages everyone*).

### Dependent Measures

DU participants completed six items indicating how *fair, legitimate, insulting,*

*annoying*, *hurtful* and *damaging to the ingroup's reputation* they found  the comments that

UCE students had apparently written about DU students  (1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much*).

The *fair* and *legitimate* items were reversed and combined with the others to form a scale

measuring negative reactions to the stereotype, ($M$ = 4.98, $SD$ = 1.26, *Cronbach's* α = .88).

Using a single item, participants rated how *judgemental* they perceived the students who

voiced the comments to be ($M$ = 5.79, $SD$ = 1.37).

Subsequent items asked participants to rate how motivated they were to disconfirm

the comments (1 = *not at all motivated* and 7 = *very motivated*; $M$ = 5.40, $SD$ = 1.64), and to

rate four activities in terms of their efficacy in disconfirming UCE students' stereotype of DU

students (1 = *not at all effective* and 7 = *very effective*). Two concerned help-seeking (*Asking*

*questions at public presentations held at Dundee University, to make sure that you have*

*understood the speaker properly*; *Emailing lecturers straight away when you do not*

*understand something*) and two concerned charity activity (*Donating some money to a*

*national charity set up to help students across the UK who experience difficulties during their*

*studies*; *Donating some money to a local charity set up to help Dundee University students who experience difficulties during their studies*). Factor analysis revealed a clear two-factor structure, with the help-seeking items loading onto one factor and the charity items loading onto the other factor. All factor loadings were above .86, and no cross-factor loading was above .09. We obtained the same patterning of results with both orthogonal and oblique rotation. As the two help-seeking items correlated ($r = .65$, $N = 43$, $p < .001$) they were combined ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.79$). So too, as the charity items correlated ($r = .43$, $N = 43$, $p = .004$), they were combined ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.39$).

DU participants indicated their similarity to the outgroup university students who made the comments with three items (e.g., *How similar are you to the students who made the comments?*; 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much*), which formed a scale ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.18$, *Cronbach's* α = .82).

As a manipulation check, participants rated their agreement with two statements (*UCE students think that DU students are reluctant to seek help*; *UCE students think that DU students are reluctant to help others*; 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much*). Finally, following probes for suspicion (none expressed any), participants were debriefed.

**Results**

**Manipulation Checks**

Participants believed UCE students perceive DU students as more unwilling to seek help in the help relevant ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.53$) than the help irrelevant condition ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.75$), $t(41) = 5.42$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.65$. They also believed UCE students perceived DU students as more reluctant to engage in charity activities in the help irrelevant ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.62$) than help relevant condition ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.94$), $t(41) = -3.01$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.91$. This confirms the manipulation affected DU students' understandings of how they were perceived by UCE students.

Participants perceived the two stereotypes equally negatively (help relevant $M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.37$; help irrelevant $M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(41) = 0.24$, $p = .81$, $d = 0.07$, and were equally motivated to disconfirm them (help relevant $M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.57$; help irrelevant $M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(41) = 0.82$, $p = .42$, $d = 0.25$. Participants also perceived the outgroup students who wrote the comments in the two conditions as equally judgemental (help relevant $M = 6.30$, $SD = 0.68$; help irrelevant $M = 5.70$, $SD = 1.42$), $t(12.88) = 1.21$, $p = .24$, $d = 0.54$, and as equally similar to themselves (help relevant $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.24$; help irrelevant $M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.14$), $t(41) = -0.33$, $p = .74$, $d = -0.10$.

**Identification**

As predicted, the more participants identified with the ingroup, the more they were motivated to disconfirm the outgroup's stereotype of the ingroup ($r = .52$, $N = 43$, $p < .001$). Again, as predicted, this was not moderated by condition.

**Strategy**

Participants deemed help-seeking to be more effective at disconfirming the stereotype in the help relevant ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.27$) than help irrelevant condition ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.83$), $t(41) = 3.59$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.09$. Meanwhile, participants deemed charity activity to be more effective at disconfirming the stereotype in the help irrelevant ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.12$) than help relevant condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(41) = -3.68$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.12$. Participants also rated the extent to which *avoiding* seeking help would be an effective strategy ($M = 1.26$, $SD = 0.54$). As expected, this behavior was deemed equally ineffective in both the help relevant ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 0.44$) and help irrelevant conditions ($M = 1.27$, $SD = 0.63$), $t(41) = -0.21$, $p = .84$, $d = -0.06$.

As already explained, we did not predict participants' strength of DU identification would affect (i.e., moderate) their understandings of the stereotype-disconfirming efficacy of the different behaviors presented to them, and no such effects were found.

**Discussion**

Study 1 tested the prediction that ingroup members would perceive help-seeking as an effective stereotype-disconfirming strategy in the help relevant condition but not in the help irrelevant condition (Hypothesis 1). With regard to participants' understandings of how to disconfirm the UCE students' stereotype of DU students, we confirmed that help-seeking was judged more effective in the help relevant condition than help irrelevant condition. Our results showed that, in this specific context, group members concluded that admitting one's lack of competence and approaching others for help may actually be a meaningful way to achieve the goal of changing others' perceptions of the group. That is, this study shows that the social significance of help-seeking can be shaped by manipulating people's meta-stereotypical beliefs.

In interpreting these data it is appropriate to note that the manipulation checks showed participants' understandings of how UCE students perceived DU students were affected as predicted and that participants perceived the stereotypes to be comparable in terms of negativity, and were equally motivated to disconfirm both. Moreover, it is noteworthy that our data show a positive correlation between DU identification and motivation to disconfirm the outgroup's stereotype of the ingroup. This corroborates our pilot data which showed that higher DU identification was associated with increased concern for the ingroup's image.

Inevitably, the conclusions that can be drawn from this study are limited. First, participants were invited to reflect on the efficacy of different stereotype disconfirming behaviors. We cannot therefore assume that people would undertake such reflections spontaneously when faced with a stereotype of their group. Second, since the study simply addressed participants' judgements of behavioral efficacy in relation to disconfirming a stereotype, we cannot assume that participants would actually *use* these efficacy-related conclusions to guide their behavior: it is one thing to conceive of help-seeking as being a tool

which one could employ to disconfirm an image of one's group. However, it is another to actually pursue this strategy and actually admit one's need to a judgemental other.

Accordingly, Study 2 explored whether, when faced with a negative stereotype, participants actually modified their help-seeking behavior spontaneously. Moreover, whereas Study 1 showed the social significance of help-seeking was shaped by manipulating people's meta-stereotypical beliefs, Study 2 investigated whether this would impact upon seeking help from the judgemental outgroup itself, and whether this effect would be most strongly exhibited by those with a higher DU identification (and hence a greater concern for the ingroup's image).

**Study 2**

Study 2 employed the same design (including the same two stereotypes) as Study 1. However, it also included a task: solving difficult anagrams (jumbled-up words), upon which participants could seek help from UCE students (i.e., members of the outgroup university who stereotyped the ingroup). This allowed us to test the prediction that in the condition in which seeking help was relevant to disconfirming the outgroup's stereotype of the ingroup (i.e., the help relevant condition), ingroup members would be willing to actually seek help from the group that judged them so negatively. This design also allowed us to test the prediction that the effect of condition (i.e., the type of meta-stereotype presented to participants) on help-seeking would be moderated by participants' level of group identification. Thus far, our data show that high DU identifiers cared more about the ingroup's image than low identifiers (Pilot work) and reported greater motivation to disconfirm negative stereotypes of their group (Study 1). Drawing on these data and on a body of work which shows the moderating influence of identification level on group members' behavior (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999), we predicted that low ingroup

identifiers would prioritise their own need for help over the group's image, and would therefore seek help regardless of condition. In contrast, we expected the help-seeking behavior of high ingroup identifiers to be affected by condition. Specifically, we expected high identifiers to seek relatively low levels of outgroup help-seeking in the help irrelevant condition because the negative stereotype in this condition cannot be disconfirmed effectively by help-seeking, and there is therefore little reason to expect high identifiers to seek help from an outgroup that judges their group so negatively. However, in the help relevant condition (where help-seeking was understood as having the potential to disconfirm a negative stereotype), we expected high identifiers to increase their help-seeking. Accordingly we expected the correlation between ingroup identification and help-seeking to be moderated by condition (Hypothesis 2a) and the effect of condition on help-seeking to be moderated by ingroup identification (Hypothesis 2b).

Study 2 was actually presented to participants as two separate studies. The 'first' was a vehicle for the presentation of the stereotype of the ingroup (DU) held by the judgemental outgroup (UCE). The 'second' was presented as a problem-solving task in which participants were faced with a difficult problem on which they could seek help from students associated with UCE. This meant that seeking outgroup help in the help relevant condition could disconfirm the outgroup's negative and moralistic evaluation of the ingroup. In contrast, seeking outgroup help in the help irrelevant condition was inconsequential for the outgroup's stereotype of the ingroup.

**Method**

**Participants and Design**

Female DU undergraduates ($N = 43$) were assigned randomly to two between-group conditions. A two-study cover-story was used to achieve the manipulation (help relevant $n = 22$ vs. help irrelevant $n = 21$; $M_{age} = 19.56$ years, $SD = 2.54$, age range = 17-32 years). Probes

for suspicion confirmed none of the participants penetrated the cover story.

**Procedure and Measures**

Participants were tested individually. After arrival in the testing room, participants completed two short studies. Both studies were connected: the 'first' (described as the experimenter's own) contained manipulations, while the 'second' (described as being conducted by UCE students) contained dependent measures. All items were rated on 1-7-point scales. To reduce suspicions regarding the nature of the cover story, the experimenter explained that researchers at DU were collaborating with researchers at UCE, and that the two research groups had decided to increase their participant numbers by including participants from both universities in their respective studies. The stages to the study and how they varied according to condition are summarised in Table 2 below.

(Table 2 about here)

### Manipulations

The 'first' study was a paper-and-pencil questionnaire entitled "How are Dundee University Students Perceived by Students from Other Universities?" The experimenter explained she was interested in how students from other universities perceive DU students, and how DU students felt about such perceptions. To this end, she explained she had conducted research asking UCE (outgroup) students about their impressions of DU (ingroup) students. She told participants they would read some typical UCE responses before answering some questions. In reality, the purpose of this 'first' study was to make one of the two stereotypes used in Study 1 salient.

Participants first completed questions on their course choices (to maintain the cover story). They also completed the six identification items from the pilot study ($M = 5.69$, $SD = 0.89$, *Cronbach's* $\alpha = .87$) before reading the UCE students' comments about DU students used in Study 1. As before, these varied according to condition (help relevant vs. help

irrelevant condition), and participants rated their agreement with two statements regarding the

extent to which UCE students perceived DU students as unwilling to request assistance in

order to improve their learning, and as unwilling to engage in charity activity (1 = *not at all*

and 7 = *very much*). This concluded the 'first' study.

### Dependent Measures

The experimenter then introduced the 'second' study (which contained the dependent

measures). She told participants that a UCE student research team had designed the study,

and was collecting data from various universities remotely, via computer. Participants would

apparently use the computer to enter their answers (which the off-campus researchers could

observe and respond to directly). In reality, there was no such team (the computer being pre-

programmed using MediaLab software).

Participants sat at a desktop computer. The study was introduced as an investigation

into strategies for solving anagrams. Participants were presented with an on-screen anagram

task, and attempted 10 anagrams in 90 seconds (e.g., *sestaodrakb – skateboards*).

Participants typed in the answers for the anagrams they were able to solve, and typed 'XXX'

for those they could not. To prevent participants feeling overly helpless, three of the

anagrams were easier (*black, honey* and *puppy*). However, the other seven were harder

(*glockenspiel, nightingale, carnation, skateboards, zirconium, raspberries* and *restaurant*).

This meant that all participants were expected to be unable to answer most of the anagrams,

thereby resulting in a need for help.

After 90 seconds, participants received an on-screen help-seeking request form

(apparently sent by the UCE research team), where they could seek help on each anagram,

selecting from one of four 'levels' (*none, a small hint, a large hint* and *a full answer*). It was

made clear that participants could request as much or as little help as they wished. The UCE

research team would apparently be able to see these requests, and provide any requested help.

No help was actually given: the study ended after participants completed the form and were debriefed.

      **Creating a help-seeking scale.** When converting these data into a scale, it is clear that as participants had no need to ask for help on anagrams they answered correctly, the calculation of help-seeking should focus on those anagrams the participant failed to answer (i.e., those to which they responded by typing 'XXX'). Accordingly, we only examined help-seeking requests for these latter anagrams. We coded requests for *no help* as zero, requests for *small hints* as one, requests for *large hints* as two and requests for *full answers* as three. These were summed to create a help-seeking measure. In order to take into account the number of anagrams the participant could answer without needing help, we then calculated the participant's maximum potential help-seeing score (i.e., the score obtained if they had asked for *full answers* on every anagram they responded to with 'XXX'). Finally, we divided the participant's actual help-seeking score by their maximum help-seeking score and converted the resultant figure into a percentage. On this scale zero would indicate the participant sought *no help* for any of the anagrams they could not answer, and 100 would indicate that the participant sought *full answers* for every anagram they could not answer (see also Wakefield, Hopkins, & Greenwood, 2012, 2013). In developing this scoring procedure we paid attention to the variability in individuals' need for help. If there were large disparities in individuals' needs for help it might have been possible for a participant who only failed to answer a few anagrams but sought high levels of help on those anagrams to have a similar help-seeking score to a participant who failed to answer many anagrams but sought low levels of help on them. Fortunately, these data show there was very little variability in the number of anagrams participants were able to answer (88.40% of participants could only answer either one, two or three anagrams out of the ten, and no participant answered more than four). This high level of need across participants means that participants' help-seeking

scores can be compared easily. Moreover, the skew and kurtosis of the scale were acceptable (Field, 2009).

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

Participants believed UCE students perceived DU students as more unwilling to seek help in the help relevant ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.50$) than help irrelevant condition ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.56$), $t(41) = -5.60$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.71$. Furthermore, they believed UCE students perceived DU students as more reluctant to donate to charity in the help irrelevant ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.41$) than help relevant condition ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.29$), $t(41) = 8.59$, $p < .01$, $d = 2.62$.

### Number of Anagrams Unanswered

The number of anagrams unanswered did not differ by condition, (help relevant $M = 7.23$, $SD = 0.75$, help irrelevant $M = 7.38$, $SD = 0.74$), $t(41) = 0.68$, $p = .50$, $d = -0.20$, and the means confirm the task was difficult in both conditions. This indicates participants in both conditions experienced similar levels of material need for help.

### Help-Seeking

Given the centrality of our predictions concerning participants' level of identification, we began by inspecting the correlations between identification and help-seeking. High identifiers are particularly concerned about how their group is regarded, and in the help irrelevant condition we predicted that high identifiers would be particularly unwilling to seek help: to do so would communicate inability and would have no relevance in terms of disconfirming the outgroup's stereotype of the ingroup. Accordingly, in this help irrelevant condition we predicted a negative correlation between identification and help-seeking. This was confirmed ($r = -.48$, $N = 21$, $p = .03$). In contrast, we predicted this relationship would be attenuated in the help relevant condition, with both high and low identifiers being equally willing to seek help. This was also confirmed ($r = .29$, $N = 22$, $p = .20$) and the difference

between the two correlations was significant ($z = -2.47$, $p = .01$). This confirms Hypothesis 2a.

We then investigated the effect of experimental condition on help-seeking. Analysis revealed similar levels of help-seeking across conditions (help relevant $M = 60.38$, $SD = 15.95$; help irrelevant $M = 56.16$, $SD = 15.61$), $t(41) = -0.88$, $p = .39$, $d = -.10$. However, as predicted (Hypothesis 2b), strength of identification moderated the effect of condition, $R^2 = 0.17$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.15$, $F(1, 39) = 6.77$, $p = .013$. This interaction was investigated via simple slopes analysis. Plotting at one standard deviation above and below the moderator mean (see Figure 1) showed that, as expected, low ingroup identifiers sought high levels of help in both conditions (*simple slope* $= -3.83$, $SE = 3.29$, $t = -1.17$, $p = .25$). Yet, entirely as predicted high identifiers' help-seeking varied across condition: it was higher in the help relevant than help irrelevant condition (*simple slope* $= 8.58$, $SE = 3.37$, $t = 2.55$, $p = .015$). Moreover, whilst high identifiers sought significantly more help than low identifiers in the help irrelevant condition (*simple slope* $= -8.06$, $SE = 3.63$, $t = -2.22$, $p = .03$), they sought the same amount as low identifiers in the help relevant condition (*simple slope* $= 4.21$, $SE = 3.02$, $t = 1.40$, $p = .17$).[1]

(Figure 1 about here)

## Discussion

Participants experienced equally high levels of need for help in both conditions. However, actual levels of help-seeking differed across-conditions as a function of participants' level of ingroup identification. Whereas low identifiers sought equal (and relatively high) levels of help in both conditions, high identifiers sought more help in the help relevant than help irrelevant condition. Thus while high identifiers were reluctant to seek help in the help irrelevant condition, they were less reluctant to do so in the help relevant condition. This patterning is exactly as expected, and suggests that those most concerned with

their group's image (high identifiers) used help-seeking strategically as a vehicle to attempt to disconfirm the help relevant stereotype.

In evaluating these findings, it is also important to note that these data are behavioral and were obtained in a 'real-world' problem-solving task (for a discussion of the importance of such data, see Hopkins et al., 2007; Wakefield et al., 2011).

## General Discussion

Research shows that seeking needed help from an outgroup carries many social costs. These costs can make group members reluctant to ask for help, particularly when they identify highly with the ingroup and are therefore particularly concerned about the group's social image (Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Täuber & van Zomeren, 2012). We attempted to investigate whether there may be contexts in which group members' reluctance to seek help from an outgroup could be reduced. Specifically, we asked if ingroup members would be less reluctant to seek help from an outgroup if doing so could disconfirm a negative stereotype held by the outgroup about the ingroup. Our experimental findings supported our predictions: our pilot study confirmed that high identifiers were more concerned than low identifiers about their group's social image, and Study 1 showed that ingroup members perceived help-seeking as an effective stereotype-disconfirming strategy when the salient stereotype could be disconfirmed by seeking help (Hypothesis 1). Study 2 showed that, when presented with the opportunity to seek outgroup help, the negative correlation between identification and help-seeking was moderated by condition  (Hypothesis 2a). Moreover high ingroup identifiers (but not low identifiers) sought more help when the stereotype could be disconfirmed by seeking help than when it could not (Hypothesis 2b).  It therefore seems that high identifiers' concerns about the group's image led them to translate a general understanding that help-seeking can disconfirm a particular judgemental stereotype of the ingroup (Study 1), into seeking help from the very group that stereotyped them negatively (Study 2).

Our research extends and complements a growing body of work that highlights the relevance of group identities for help-giving and help-seeking (e.g., Hopkins et al., 2007; Levine et al., 2005; Täuber & van Zomeren, 2012; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2011; Wakefield et al., 2011, 2012, 2013). It has long been known that decisions in relation to the giving and seeking of help involve a balancing of costs and benefits (e.g., Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1978) and recognising the significance of social identities in structuring people's evaluation of these costs and benefits is important. While help-seeking can provide the benefit of having one's problem solved, the act of seeking help can be judged costly for one's social identity. It may imply inferiority (Nadler & Halabi, 2006) or confirm a negative stereotype of one's group as 'dependent' (Wakefield et al., 2013). This can make ingroup members (particularly those who identify strongly with the ingroup) unwilling to seek help from an outgroup. However, as the meanings associated with any behavior are malleable and context-dependent, seeking help can come to take on other meanings. By altering what it means to seek help, the act can be transformed from a behavior that signifies dependence and incompetence into a behavior that signifies courage and selflessness (see Carr et al., 1998). Our research complements and extends these insights into the situated and context-specific meanings of help-seeking. Most obviously, our meta-stereotype manipulations were designed so as to shape the meaning of help-seeking such that in the help relevant condition it came to be seen as a vehicle with the potential to manage one's group image in the eyes of an outgroup. Indeed, we believe that it was this transformation in the wider meaning of help-seeking that underlies our finding (Study 2) that high identifiers sought more help in the help-relevant condition.

**Implications**

Our work highlights the need for researchers to consider the context-specific meanings of help-seeking behavior, and how such meanings can be shaped by group

members' beliefs about how they are judged by others. Specifically, with different meta-stereotypes the same act can be imbued with different strategic significance.

More generally, our work encourages researchers to move beyond conceptualising help-seeking as being motivated by a need for assistance. Of course, it is unlikely that engagement in intergroup helping transactions will always be born out of strategic motivations. Nonetheless, our work has shown that strategic concerns can play a role in help-seeking behavior, and that a full appreciation of this idea involves analysis of group members' understandings of the inter-group context. We know that there are a number of considerations that shape the calculation of the costs and benefits associated with the decision to give or accept help, and these include reference to individuals' reputational concerns (Fisher et al., 1978). However, when examining how such concerns impact upon help-seeking, the focus is typically on the benefits of being seen to give help and on the costs of being seen to seek or accept help. Given our data, it is clear that researchers need to be more attuned to the contexts in which help-seeking may be judged to have fewer reputational costs and increased reputational benefits. Indeed, our work cautions against the tendency to assume that group members (especially high identifiers) will always be reluctant to accept help from outgroup members: we show much depends on the situated meaning of seeking help in specific intergroup contexts.

A final implication of our work relates to how help-seekers themselves are conceptualized. Help-seekers are generally given little attention in the social psychological literature: they have (implicitly) been labeled as the less interesting party in the helping transaction, since they lack the skills and knowledge they currently require (unlike help-givers, who already possess such qualities, e.g. DePaulo, Nadler, & Fisher 1983). However, our work suggests that in some scenarios help-seekers may be usefully seen as engaged in interesting strategic work, with their help-seeking reflecting sophisticated understandings of

how they are judged by others. This also has a 'real world' relevance: through understanding more about the image concerns of those requiring assistance, agencies can learn how to present their aid in ways that are less likely to be refused. Indeed, if the act of help-receiving can be re-framed in more positive terms (as it was in the help relevant conditions in our studies) and needful groups are provided with opportunities to strengthen their image and reputation, the stage is set for more effective future helping transactions.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

In our study we deliberately selected an identity (student) that could be linked to help-seeking in a positive manner (such that ingroup members could be criticised for not seeking advice and help). Other social identities (especially those that value independence and autonomy) are unlikely to motivate help-seeking in the same way as we found here. Indeed, if the ingroup's norms celebrate autonomy and independence, high identifiers may assimilate to an outgroup stereotype of the ingroup as unwilling to seek help. However, it is important to remember that help-seeking can be presented in various ways and that this means that the act of help-seeking may be viewed as consistent with a range of identities. Evidence of this is apparent in the *Real Men, Real Depression* campaign referred to earlier in which help-seeking was defined as congruent with stereotypically male qualities associated with autonomy and independence (see Rochlen et al., 2005). Future research should examine such identities in more detail and explore how manipulating group members' meta-stereotypes could be used to encourage those identifying with such groups to seek help.

It is also appropriate to note that although our work shows that highly-identifying group members may seek help in order to disconfirm a stereotype, the precise mechanisms involved require further investigation. For instance, do group members actually believe such behavior will improve the image of their group as a whole, or are they simply motivated to improve their own image as a group representative (Klein & Snyder, 2003)? Teasing apart

the role of such rather different reputational concerns would reveal more regarding the specific motives behind strategic stereotype disconfirmation.

Future research could also employ different manipulations. In our research we manipulated participants' beliefs about the meanings of help-seeking in an indirect way. Specifically, we manipulated participants' beliefs concerning how they were viewed by an outgroup and we did so in such a manner as to change the meaning and significance of seeking help. This design has the merit of subtlety. However, future research could also manipulate the meaning that others ascribe to help-seeking in a more direct way. For instance, it might be possible to design studies in which the meta-stereotype content could be held constant and the meaning of help-seeking manipulated directly. Such studies would have the advantage of ensuring the negative valence of the meta-stereotype was constant across conditions. Moreover future work could also include measures of participants' strategic understandings of help-seeking and measures of their actual help-seeking in the same design. In our own research we addressed these issues across two studies because we wished to avoid designs which encouraged suspicion about our hypotheses. However, a study that gathers data on both helping behavior and mediator variables (e.g., beliefs about the strategic significance of particular behaviors) in a single design would have the obvious merit of allowing richer analyses of mediating processes. Future research could also investigate how seeking help from a judgemental outgroup is affected by the status hierarchy between the groups. If the outgroup's status is high, ingroup members may be particularly concerned about what that group thinks of their own group and such concerns may motivate stereotype disconfirming behavior (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008). However, group members may also be concerned about revealing their needs before a high status outgroup (Nadler & Halabi, 2006), and how these potentially competing strategic concerns are balanced remains an empirical question.

Whilst such issues warrant future attention, it is important not to lose sight of the implications of our results. We provide behavioral data showing ingroup members do not inevitably avoid asking for help from a judgemental outgroup. Indeed, where help-seeking disconfirms a negative stereotype, high identifiers actively seek such help when otherwise they would not.

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Footnotes

[1] For completeness, we also analysed these data in categorical (rather than continuous) terms. First, we investigated the frequency of requests for the four levels of help in percentage form. Overall, requests for *full answers* and for *no help* were rare (mean percentage of help-seeking requests per participant for *full answers* = 8.67%, SD = 23.29; mean percentage of help-seeking requests per participant for *no help* = 1.40%, SD = 4.61). Accordingly, any categorical analysis of the data requires a dichotomisation of participants' responses, with requests for *large hints* and *full answers* being summed to indicate a request for more help. Such a categorisation prevented both ceiling and floor effects (mean percentage of help-seeking requests per participant for *large hints* plus *full answers* = 67.69%, *SD* = 33.17) and produced standardized skew and kurtosis values that were better than any of the alternative ways of categorising these responses ($Z_{skew}$ = -2.75, $Z_{kurtosis}$ = -0.36). Scores on this scale were subjected to a square-root transformation ($Z_{skew}$ = -0.14, *p* > .05; $Z_{kurtosis}$ = -1.40, *p* > .05) and then analysed in manner which paralleled that reported in the main text. The pattern of results was the same, including a significant interaction between condition and identification (*p* < .01). Plotting this interaction allowed for a replication of the two key significant results reported in the paper: high identifiers sought significantly more help in the help relevant than help irrelevant condition (*p* < .01), and high identifiers sought significantly less help than low identifiers in the help irrelevant condition (*p* < .01).

Table 1

*Summary of Study 1's Procedure*

| | Condition | |
|---|---|---|
| | **help relevant (n = 21)** | **help irrelevant (n = 22)** |
| Step 1: | Completed four ingroup identification items | |
| Step 2: | Read comments about AU students from four ostensible AU students | |
| | Comments designed to make help-seeking a *relevant* vehicle for disconfirming how the ingroup was judged by the outgroup. Comments depicted AU students as failing to seek help and to take responsibility for their learning. | Comments designed to make help-seeking an *irrelevant* vehicle for disconfirming how the ingroup was judged by the outgroup. Comments depicted AU students as failing to live up to the ideals of addressing justice and welfare concerns. |
| Step 3: | Completed six items indicating how *fair, legitimate, insulting, annoying*, *hurtful* and *damaging to the ingroup's reputation* they found the comments that UCE students had apparently written about AU students, and how judgemental they perceived the UCE students to be. | |
| Step 4: | Rated how motivated they were to disconfirm the comments and rated four activities in terms of their efficacy in disconfirming UCE students' stereotype of AU students. Also rated their similarity to the UCE students. | |
| | Completed a manipulation check. | |

Table 2

*Summary of Study 2's Procedure*

|  | Condition | |
|---|---|---|
|  | **help relevant (n = 22)** | **help irrelevant (n = 21)** |
| Step 1: | 'First' study: participant completes six ingroup identification items and reads comments about AU students from four ostensible AU students (before completing a manipulation check). | |
|  | Comments designed to make help-seeking a relevant tool for disconfirming how the ingroup was judged by the outgroup. Comments depicted AU students as failing to seek help and to take responsibility for their learning. | Comments designed to make help-seeking an irrelevant tool for disconfirming how the ingroup was judged by the outgroup. Comments depicted AU students as failing to live up to the ideals of addressing justice and welfare concerns. |
| Step 2: | 'Second' study, involving the anagram task and opportunities to seek help. | |

*Figure 1.* The moderating effect of identification on the relationship between condition and help-seeking in Study 2.
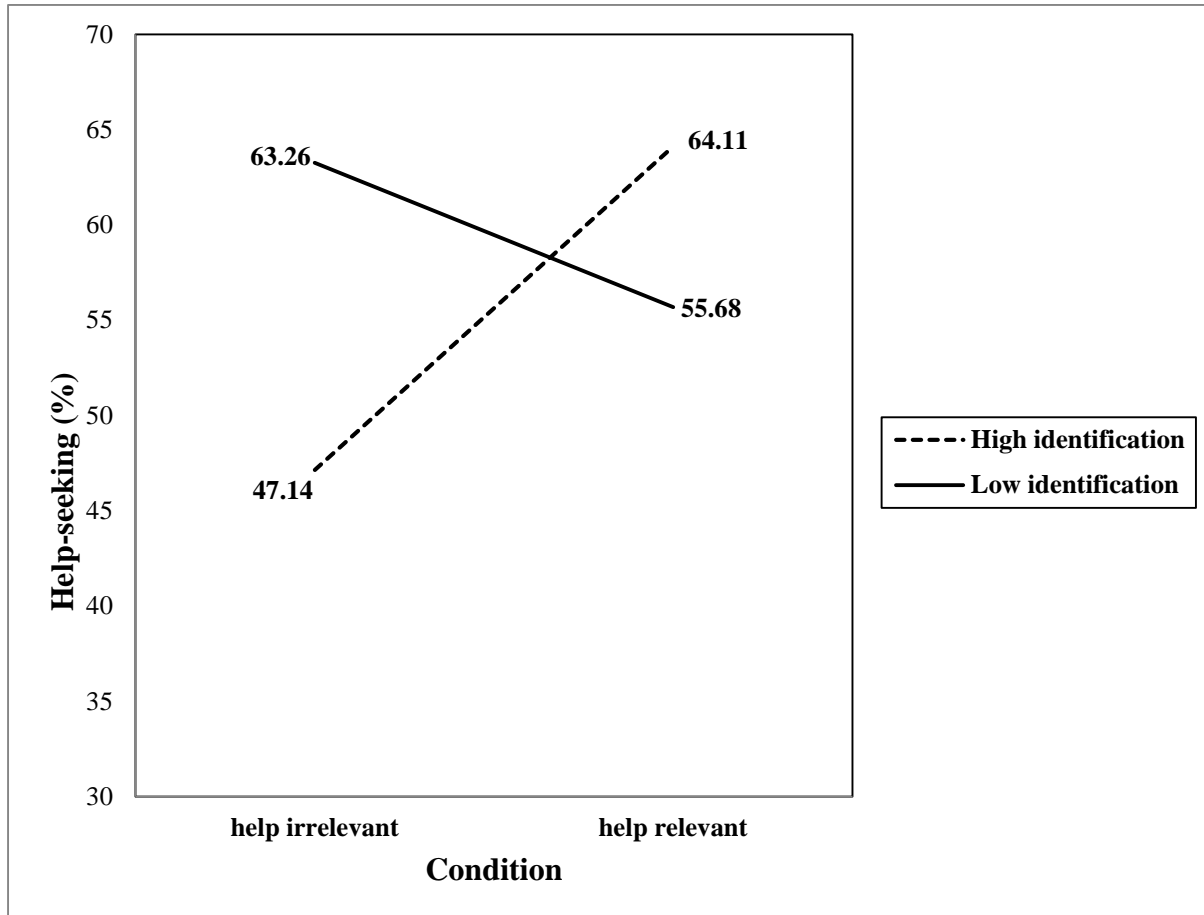
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