

1

General Introduction

The questions why and when people help or do not help others in need have preoccupied humans since they began carving their thoughts in stone. Religious teachings admonish their adherents to help their fellow human beings, and discussions about human helpfulness and selfishness are pivotal in the writings of Plato, Aristotle (Annas 1977), and Seneca (cf. Griffin 2013), to name a few. The same concern with the reasons and circumstances of helping or failing to help has dominated the writings of more recent philosophers and stimulated the growth of a vibrant field of research in modern social psychology (Dovidio et al. 2006; Keltner et al. 2014). Throughout, these moral teachings, scholarly treatises, and research efforts have centered on the question of generosity, i.e. helping others in need. The present book goes beyond this emphasis on help-giving to consider the recipient's perspective and the broad spectrum of giving, seeking, and receiving help in interpersonal and intergroup situations.

1.1 Helping Relations: Social Belongingness and Social Hierarchy

The departure point for the present understanding of helping relations is that they reflect the workings of two fundamental human needs: to belong and to be independent. The need for belongingness is reflected in the desire to form and maintain significant social relations

(Baumeister and Leary 1995). Helping others in need and relying on their help when we are in need are behavioral expressions of belongingness: they express solidarity, which is the glue that binds people together in relationships and groups. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud (1930) attributed people's general need to feel connected to others to the sex drive and processes within the family. Subsequent psychoanalytic approaches placed an even greater emphasis on people's need for belongingness as a central psychological force in life (e.g. Klein 1984). Humanistic psychological theories also emphasized the need to belong. Abraham Maslow (1982), for example, theorized that only existence-related needs were more primary than people's need for love and belongingness.

Yet alongside the need to belong, people also want to be independent. Independence from significant others such as one's parents is a marker of successful development (Rogoff 2003). People are proud of their achievements when these are individual achievements (McLelland 1967), and self-reliance is a central value in work and organizational settings (Miller et al. 2002). In fact, because helping is associated with having more skills or resources, giving to others in the group promotes the helper's prestige and status, whereas dependency is considered a marker of one's lower prestige or status. Thus, helping relationships represent a combination of belongingness and hierarchical relations in social interactions.

The duality of these needs is reflected throughout the life cycle. We begin life by being dependent on the caregivers with whom we share belongingness; later, during adolescence, we express a strong need to be independent from them; and in adulthood, the need to belong dominates again as we establish intimate relationships and start new families. In old age, the pendulum swings again and in the face of deteriorating mind and body that make us dependent on others' help, our need to maintain self-reliance dominates.

The central role of these two needs is echoed in several current social psychological theories. Self-determination theory posits that people are motivated by three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2000). Although not synonymous with the need for self-reliance, the needs for autonomy and competence are closely related to it, and the motivation for relatedness parallels the need for belongingness. Research on human values cites benevolence and achievement, paralleling belongingness and independence, respectively, as two basic and universal values (Schwartz 1992). Moreover, the Big Two conceptualization of human motivation regards the needs for communion and agency,

corresponding to belongingness and independence, as dominating social life (Abele et al. 2008). Finally, recent research on reconciliation has noted that conflict poses threats to these needs, and that removing these threats increases the prospects of interpersonal and intergroup reconciliation (Nadler and Shnabel 2015; Shnabel and Nadler 2008).

Helping relations are the stage on which the two fundamental needs play out. On the one hand, helping and being helped are the behavioral expressions of belongingness that binds individuals and groups together. On the other hand, being independent in times of need implies that one is strong and competent. Consistent with this, helping others increases the helper's prestige, while depending on others' help is frowned upon (Nadler and Halabi 2015). Thus, while the need for belongingness and communion motivates people to give and receive from others, the need for agency and competence motivates them to remain self-reliant even in times of adversity, thereby maintaining their place in the social hierarchy as able and competent relative to others.

This dual message has been captured in the poem "Ye Wearie Wayfarer," by the Australian poet Adam Lindsay Gordon (1893, p. 28):

Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none;
Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.

To overcome people's selfish tendencies, society tells them that they should "help every feeble neighbor," but to encourage active coping people are told that they should "seek help from none" when they are "feeble." Therefore, to preserve others' view of them as competent, people often prefer to pay the price of continued hardships rather than receive the help they need to overcome them (Nadler 1986). A new employee may reject an offer of assistance from a colleague in solving a problem he or she cannot solve alone (e.g. Geller and Bamberger 2012); and a student struggling with difficult course material may avoid requesting help from peers or teachers (Karabenick and Gonida 2018), even if this increases the likelihood of failure. Thus, our *social* nature propels us to help and be helped, while our *individual* nature leads us to prefer self-reliance in our time of need.

This theme of helping relationships as reflecting the interplay between people's need to belong and their need to be independent is a powerful

undercurrent in social psychological studies of helping. Much of past theory and research has been devoted to the question of generosity, and the first part of the book is accordingly devoted to variables and processes that explain giving help to others in need. Subsequent sections will consider the consequences of giving and receiving help, and the final section will be devoted to research on intergroup helping.

1.2 “Helping” in Social Psychology: Definitions and Concepts

Helping comes in all shapes and sizes. Risking oneself to save a stranger who has fallen on the tracks of an approaching train, spending time to instruct a new employee about organizational politics, and volunteering in soup kitchens for the poor are all examples of helping. These three examples vary, among other things, in the degree of *risk* involved, the *duration* of helping, and the *decision processes* leading to it. Saving another individual from an approaching train is risky, while spending time with a new employee or volunteering to feed the hungry involve little risk, if any. Regarding duration, pulling the fallen person off the tracks may take a few seconds, talking to the new employee might last minutes or hours, and volunteering may represent a commitment of months or even years. Finally, the decision processes involved in each of these three examples are different. Saving a person from the advancing train represents a split-second decision. If one were to ask the rescuer to describe how he or she had decided to put their life on the line and help, one would likely be told something like “I don’t know – I just acted.” The other two examples represent lengthier and more elaborate decision processes. The decision to tell the new employee who should be avoided in the workplace is likely to have come about after some thought, and the decision to volunteer for an extended period is the outcome of an even more complex decision process.

The wide variety of human social behavior that falls under the concept of helping calls for a definition. The need to define “helping” goes beyond what is required by academic conventions. The definition is important because it informs us what is within and what is outside the boundaries of the phenomenon under study. One way of dealing with the complexity of a concept such as helping is to define it broadly. Defining helping as “doing good to others” is an example. This definitional strategy runs the risk of conceptual ambiguity regarding what is *not* helping (i.e. the danger of “conceptual stretching”; Meierhenrich

2008). In fact, “doing good to others” would include a successful business transaction with another person – after all, by facilitating such a transaction, we “did good” to another. Yet although benevolent intentions may be an important ingredient of successful business deals it is clear that we do not aim to analyze successful business transactions when we consider helping.

The opposite definitional strategy would be to limit the definition to a relatively small set of behaviors. Defining helping as “volunteering in the community” represents such a strategy. Here we run the opposite risk: in the effort to clearly demarcate the phenomenon, we restrict it. Although it is an important topic, the social psychology of helping contains more than research on volunteering. In sum, a definition of helping needs to navigate between the Scylla of conceptual stretching and the Charybdis of conceptual restrictiveness if it is to steer research about helping successfully.

In the present book, we define helping as *volitional behavior directed at another person that benefits a person in need without expectation for a contingent or tangible return*. This definition is not ideal, but it helps minimize the twin dangers of conceptual stretching and restrictiveness. On the one hand, it excludes giving that is contingent on the expectation of tangible return, e.g. an economic transaction; on the other hand, it allows consideration of a wide variety of behaviors that benefit others in need (e.g. rescue, donation, or support). While the emphasis on the tangibility of a contingent reward excludes economic transactions, it includes helping interactions where people expect and receive *intangible* rewards. As discussed more fully in a subsequent section that centers on the motivations for help-giving, one reason people help is their wish to gain prestige as generous group members, or to feel good about themselves. The definition’s emphasis on helping as a volitional behavior excludes benevolence that is not based on volition. Thus, it excludes in-role helping, but includes helping that is beyond role demands (e.g. a social worker comforting her client during office hours vs. doing so outside office hours).

Before concluding this section, note that scholars working in the helping area have also used the concepts of prosocial behavior and altruism to guide their theorizing and research. The first concept represents a broader perspective than that of helping. Thus, Dovidio et al. (2006) titled their review of the field as *The Social Psychology of Prosocial Behavior* and viewed any behavior that benefits another as prosocial (e.g. cooperation between individuals and groups). Similarly, in their volume titled *Prosocial Motives, Emotions, and Behavior*, Mikulincer and Shaver (2010) included chapters on reconciliation

processes between individuals and groups. Finally, Sturmer and Snyder (2009) included chapters on the political aspects of social solidarity in *The Psychology of Prosocial Behavior*.

Altruism is a third concept often used by researchers in this field. It serves to identify two relatively independent phenomena. The first is related to evolutionary analyses of self-sacrificial behaviors, mostly but not only in the animal world. Altruism is used by evolutionary theorists who seek to explain the seemingly irrational behavior where an individual organism sacrifices itself to save others in the pack or nest (e.g. dolphins who put themselves in danger by carrying a wounded individual to safe waters). This “evolutionary altruism” is distinguished from “psychological altruism” (Sober and Wilson 1998) that does not describe a particular behavior (i.e. self-sacrifice) but the *intention* that propels it. Helping driven by the helper’s motivation to increase the other’s well-being as opposed to the desire to gain psychological or social rewards is defined as altruistic (Batson 2011). Because the present volume does not confine itself to the topics implied by the concept of altruism nor addresses the broader array of topics implied by the concept of prosocial behavior, the concept of helping is more appropriate.

1.3 Perspective on Helping Relations and Outline

1.3.1 *Present Perspective on Helping Relations*

The title of the present book includes the phrase “helping relations” and not the more commonly used phrases “helping behavior,” “prosocial behavior,” or “altruism.” This change in language reflects the present book’s move of going beyond the past focus on the question of generosity to consider the fuller spectrum of relationships between helper and recipient. This perspective reminds us that a helping interaction involves a transaction involving material or non-material resources between a person in need and a resourceful, helpful other. This broader perspective on research on helping is evidenced here in the *scope*, *temporal dimension*, and multiple *levels of analysis* on which helping relations are considered.

The extended scope is reflected in that the book goes beyond (i) the study of help-giving to consider the seeking and receiving of help, and (ii) beyond the dichotomous distinction between “help” and “no-help” to the consideration of different kinds of help (e.g. autonomy-/dependency-oriented help). The first section centers on help-giving.

It begins with answers provided in the past to the question of generosity as evidenced in philosophical discourses and early psychological theories. In the main, these philosophical and early psychological theories centered on the nature of human beings: are people helpful because they are innately good, innately selfish and “forced” to be good, or do they learn to be selfish or caring?

This broad outlook is followed by an overview of the evolutionary origins of generosity, after which the book turns to consider social psychological research on giving help. This research highlighted the multi-causal and complex nature of who, when and why people help. Subsequently, the book considers the other side of helping, i.e. seeking and receiving help. This section addresses processes and variables that explain and predict people’s decision to seek outside help to cope with difficulties, and the positive and negative consequences of being dependent on others’ help.

The second aspect of the greater breadth of the present coverage is help itself. Most of past research in this field has centered on the dichotomy between help and no-help. Thus, research on help-giving assessed whether or not help had been given. Here, however, we go beyond this dichotomy to consider different kinds of help. A key distinction is between dependency-oriented and autonomy-oriented help, i.e. solving the problem for the needy or giving them the tools to solve it. This and other distinctions (e.g. assumptive vs. requested help) play out in the present coverage of helping relations.

Regarding the *temporal dimension*, unlike most other reviews of the field this book does not stop at the point in which help had or had not been given or received. Rather, we consider the short- and long-term consequences of giving (e.g., helper’s affect and physical well-being) and receiving help (e.g. gratitude and higher or lower social status).

Finally, the book also extends the *level of analysis* of helping relations. For the most part, past research on help-giving has assessed generosity in interpersonal relations. The common research paradigm has focused on an individual who had or had not helped another person. Building on empirical and conceptual developments in the social psychology of intergroup relations, the present book goes beyond the interpersonal to the intergroup level of analysis by describing research on willingness to give and receive help across group boundaries. Generally, while the level of analysis changes and the specific variables on both levels are different (e.g. ingroup commitment and interpersonal proximity in intergroup and intra-group contexts, respectively), the basic processes are the same on both levels, with helping relations viewed as affected by people’s needs for belongingness and independence.

1.3.2 *Outline of Book Contents*

After an introductory chapter that centers on the definition of helping, early philosophical analyses, and the evolution of human generosity, the book will move to address social-psychological research on help-giving. This research has addressed *situations* in which people are more likely to respond to others' predicament by helping them, *personal characteristics* of those who are more helpful than others, and the different *motivations* for generosity (i.e. When, Who and Why people give help, respectively: Dovidio et al. 2006). We will conclude this review of the literature on help-giving by attending to research on the effects of help-giving on the helper's psychological and physical well-being.

The emphasis of past research on help-giving has led to viewing the recipient of help as a passive receptacle of the helper's benevolence. The next part of the book will shift the focus onto the recipient and consider readiness to seek and receive help. Here again, we begin with the belongingness aspects of receiving help by reviewing research on the antecedents and consequences of recipients' gratitude and move on to the other side of the helping equation: the self-threatening aspects inherent in dependency that lead people to not be willing to seek or receive help from others.

The third part of the book moves from the interpersonal to the intergroup level of analysis. Whereas previous parts centered on seeking, giving, and receiving help between two individuals, this part considers helping relations across group boundaries. It reviews research showing that while giving across group boundaries can reflect shared belongingness with an out-group, it can also be a mechanism through which groups create, maintain, and challenge hierarchical relations. Thus, for example, the habitual dependence of one group on an out-group may constitute the behavioral expression of structural inequality. The implications of intergroup helping relations for social change in structurally unequal contexts will also be addressed. A final section addresses the conceptual implications of research on interpersonal and intergroup helping relations, points at future research directions, and considers the practical implications of this body of knowledge.

To help the reader navigate through the different aspects of helping relations covered in this book, a map of its contents is provided in Figure 1.1. The map also reflects a chronological development of research and theory on helping. Much of the material covered in the first part of the book (i.e. broad philosophical and early psychological answers) predates social psychological research. The next part that

- **Introduction:** The move from help-giving to helping relations
 - Social belongingness and social hierarchy in helping relations
 - What is “helping”? Definitions and concepts
- “In the beginning”: **Philosophy, early psychological theory** and **evolutionary analyses** of help-giving
- Social Psychological Research on Help-Giving
 - **When:** Bystander intervention, norms and cultural differences
 - **Who** helps: Development, demographics and personality
 - **Why** help: Empathy, prestige and attributions
- From Giving Help to Helping Relations: **Effects of giving and receiving** help
 - Short- and long-term consequences of *giving* help for the *helper*
 - Positive and negative consequences of *receiving for the recipient*: Gratitude and threat to self-esteem
 - Kind of help, recipient characteristics and culture affect reactions to receiving
- From Interpersonal to **Intergroup Helping Relations**
 - Giving in the group
 - Discriminatory helping
 - Helping relations between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.
- Summary and Conclusions

Figure 1.1 Map of the contents of the book.

considers social psychological research on help-giving covers the period that began with research on bystander intervention in the second half of the twentieth century. The third part that addresses the consequences of helping for the helper and the recipient focuses on research pursued at the turn of the twenty-first century. Finally, most of the research described in the last part, on intergroup helping relations, has been conducted in the last two decades.

The boundaries of this proposed chronology are flexible (e.g. research on recipient reactions has already been conducted in the 1970s). Yet it serves to demonstrate how research developments have been affected by sociocultural changes outside the realm of social psychology. Thus, for example, the cultural changes in the Western world in the 1960s are responsible, partly at least, for the attempts to understand and overcome human apathy in the face of others’ sufferings (i.e. bystander intervention research). Within the field of social psychology, developments in research and theory on intergroup relations (i.e. the social identity perspective on intergroup relations: Turner and Reynolds 2001) constitute an important reason for the growing interest in intergroup helping relations in the early twenty-first century.

