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Relationship of Academic Help Seeking to the Use of Learning Strategies and Other Instrumental Achievement Behavior in College Students

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Correlates of help-seeking among college students were examined. In the first study ($N = 612$), college students' help-seeking tendencies, given the prospect of poor performance, were (a) directly related to their rated likelihood of engaging in instrumental achievement activities, (b) directly related to persistent global self-esteem, and (c) inversely related to students' perceptions that seeking help is threatening. In Study 2 ($N = 541$), help seeking was directly related to the use of cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management learning strategies. Study 3 ($N = 386$) replicated the results of Study 2 and also found that correlations between help seeking and learning strategy use were unchanged when controlling for individual differences in the perceived threat to self-esteem posed by help seeking. Evidence from all three studies is consistent with viewing help seeking in an academic context as an achievement-related rather than as a dependent behavior.

It is almost inevitable that learners will occasionally judge themselves inadequate to master the increasingly complex demands placed on them (Rosen, 1983). For example, almost all of the college students in one recent study reported that they could have used assistance with their courses or study skills during a typical term (Knapp & Karabenick, 1988). However, the recognition of inadequacy often fails to translate into remedial behavior; that is, many students never seek the requisite help to overcome what are often surmountable deficiencies (Ames & Lau, 1982; Friedlander, 1980; Karabenick & Knapp, 1988b; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988).

Determining the factors that prevent full use of available aid in a variety of contexts, and the help-seeking process itself, has been the subject of considerable research during the past decade (see DePaulo, Nadler, & Fisher, 1983, for a summary of early work). Much of the research has focused on the negative consequences that decrease the likelihood of seeking help (Fisher, Nadler, & Whitcher-Alagna, 1982; Nadler, 1983; Nadler & Fisher, 1986) and has been valuable in providing insight into the general help-seeking process (e.g., Gross & McMullen, 1983). However, there is reason to question whether these studies are generalizable to academic learning contexts. One reason is that short-term experimental designs differ in important respects from the helping situations most students confront. Specifically, the costs of not seeking help may play a more significant role in long-term academic learning environments than previously recognized (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985).

The consideration of help seeking is substantially aided by a distinction between its traditional characterization as a dependent act (e.g., Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957) and help seeking as a proactive and mastery-oriented activity (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981, 1985, 1987; Nelson-Le Gall, Gumerman, & Scott-Jones, 1983). These two forms of help seeking have been termed executive and instrumental, respectively. *Executive help seeking* is help seeking that is designed to decrease the cost of completing tasks by enlisting the aid of others, for example, soliciting the answer to a problem. By contrast, *instrumental help seeking* is undertaken to gain the minimum assistance sufficient to achieve independently, for example, asking for a hint or an explanation of the principles leading to the problem's solution. The focus of instrumental help-seeking is in learning the process rather than just acquiring the solution, that is, the product. Studies that focus on the costs of help seeking have been characterized as dependency motivated rather than instrumental (Nadler, 1983; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). In fact, Nadler and Fisher (1986), recognizing the distinction, explicitly excluded instrumental help seeking from their comprehensive analysis of recipient reactions to aid.

Far fewer studies have focused specifically on learning environments in which instrumental, rather than executive, help seeking is assumed to predominate (Ames, 1983; Nelson-Le Gall, 1985). Most of these are field studies of students' help seeking (including classroom questioning behavior) at the elementary school level (Good, Slavings, Harel, & Emerson, 1987; Nelson-Le Gall, 1987; Nelson-Le Gall & Glor-Scheib, 1985; Newman, 1990; Newman & Goldin, 1990; van

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der Meij, 1988). Such studies are especially important in demonstrating the developmental changes in the factors that influence help seeking, especially in the early grades. For example, Good et al. (1987) found evidence for a passivity effect, whereby poorer students, in comparison with better students, ask fewer questions as they progress from kindergarten to later grades. The greater reluctance to question by older children is consistent with the findings of Newman (1990), who reported that the costs as well as the benefits of seeking help explained the help-seeking behavior of seventh graders but not of third or fifth graders.

Only a few of these studies were designed to assess the factors that influence college students' typical academic help-seeking behavior (Ames & Lau, 1982; Karabenick & Knapp, 1988b; Knapp & Karabenick, 1988; Sharma & Karabenick, 1989). The present series of three studies was designed to extend the understanding of help-seeking in the college learning environment. Specifically, we examined the way in which seeking help relates to other instrumental learning activities. In the first study, we determined the relationship between help seeking and other behavior likely to occur in a learning environment when students confront poor performance. Conceived as an instrumental rather than a dependent activity in this context, academic help seeking was expected to vary directly with other goal-oriented achievement behavior. In addition, in this study we evaluated a continuing controversy: the relationship between help seeking and relatively stable individual differences in global self-esteem, specifically testing whether they are directly or inversely related.

Having established the general relationship between instrumental achievement behavior and help seeking, we designed the second study to examine behavior that is more directly tied to the learning process: students' use of learning strategies (e.g., rehearsal and metacognition). Because increased strategy use reflects an active, instrumental approach to learning, we expected that students who use more strategies would be more likely to seek help when necessary. The final study explored the mediating role of threat to self-esteem (e.g., Nadler & Fisher, 1986). If students less likely to use learning strategies are also those who are more threatened by seeking help, then threat may be the link between help seeking and strategy use. The influence of threat was determined by whether relations between strategy use and help seeking would decrease when controlling for individual differences in threat.

Obtaining information about naturally occurring help-seeking behavior in higher education contexts is particularly problematic. Whereas K–12 instructional settings are typically interpersonally rich, permitting direct observation of help seeking between students and between student and teacher (e.g., Nelson-Le Gall & Glor-Scheib, 1985), such interactions are rare in most college classrooms. Relatively more academic-achievement-related and help-seeking behavior occurs in a variety of settings outside of college classrooms, which makes direct observation impractical. Even if direct observations of help-seeking behavior were possible, one would want to consider the students' levels of need, and this would constitute a difficult inference. For these reasons, the present studies relied on students' self-reports of level of need, their likelihood of help seeking given the existence of need, and the incidence of help seeking itself.

Study 1

We begin by posing a standard student dilemma: what to do when faced with the prospect of failure or poor performance. The standard alternatives offered in research on achievement motivation have included persistence, increased effort, shifting to an easier task, and abandoning the activity. Ames (1983) extended these options to include help seeking by defining it as "a proactive problem-solving strategy employed by persons who desire to achieve some goal" (p. 165). This view is supported by evidence that academic help seeking is directly related to students' achievement-related cognitions (Ames & Lau, 1982). In the first study, we evaluated the role of instrumental help seeking by determining its relationship to other achievement-related tendencies in which students engage when faced with poor performance. If, in an academic context, help seeking is instrumental to accomplishing achievement-related goals, we would expect that students more likely to increase their achievement-related efforts would seek more help when necessary.

Despite the instrumentality of help seeking, the costs of seeking help cannot be minimized. Researchers believe that the primary cost is a threat to self-esteem (Fisher et al., 1982; Nadler, 1983; Nadler & Fisher, 1986). Threat can vary as a function of situation (e.g., Karabenick & Knapp, 1988a; Shapiro, 1978, 1983) and person factors. Of particular relevance here is the controversy surrounding the relationships between help seeking and persistent or chronic self-esteem. Two competing principles, vulnerability and consistency, predict different relationships between self-esteem and help seeking. The principle of *vulnerability* assumes that individuals with low self-esteem are more threatened by having to seek help and are therefore less likely to do so than are people with high self-esteem. Consistency predicts the reverse, that information inconsistent with one's existing self-concept is threatening. Because seeking help implies inadequacy, it is more inconsistent, and therefore more threatening, to individuals with high self-esteem than to individuals with low self-esteem. Consistency thus predicts an inverse relationship between help seeking and persistent self-esteem.

Reviews generally support consistency rather than vulnerability (e.g., Fisher et al., 1982; Nadler & Fisher, 1986). Applying consistency to the present context, we would expect an inverse relationship between students' self-esteem and help seeking, that is, those with high self-esteem would seek less help. However, there are several reasons to question whether the evidence for consistency is generalizable to long-term, instrumental learning contexts (see Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, for a critique of consistency). In general, support for consistency has been found in cases in which the tasks used have been novel and atypical, have emphasized threat, and have focused on dependent help seeking. In the highly instrumental academic context, in which the costs of not seeking help may be high, vulnerability rather than consistency may be more likely (see Nadler & Fisher, 1986). That is, help seeking would be more threatening to those low in self-esteem than to those high in self-esteem. Because students who respond to prospective poor performance with more task-directed activities are likely to have higher self-esteem, they are likewise expected to be less threatened by seeking help. This study addressed

the consistency/vulnerability issue by determining the relationships between persistent self-esteem, achievement-related activities, help-seeking tendencies, and individual differences in the threat posed by help seeking.

Method

Assessment of achievement-related and help-seeking tendencies. In the assessment of students' tendencies to engage in achievement-related and help-seeking behaviors, we relied on extensive work that documents the validity of behavioral intention ratings. As shown by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), intentions—how likely it is that individuals would act in a given manner under given conditions—are highly related to those behaviors. We used behavioral intention ratings to determine students' typical responses when performing inadequately (for a recent study in which a similar technique was used see Newman, 1990).

As part of a survey with several parts (see also Knapp & Karabenick, 1988), the following scenario was presented to students: "Suppose you thought you were not performing as well as you wanted to in college. What would you do?" The students were then asked to indicate, on a 7-point rating scale ranging from *not at all likely* (0) to *definitely* (6), the likelihood that they would engage in each of 19 actions indicative of achievement-related and help-seeking tendencies. These behaviors can be classified into five categories: (a) formal help-seeking (e.g., obtaining help from instructors or university-provided instructional support personnel, asking questions in class); (b) informal help-seeking (e.g., asking another student or more knowledgeable friends); (c) instrumental activities designed to help one perform better (e.g., try harder, study more, take better notes); (d) lowering performance aspirations (e.g., take a lighter load next term, select easier courses next term); and (e) altering goals (e.g., transfer to another school, change major or minor).

Assessment of persistent global self-esteem and help-seeking threat. Individual differences in persistent global self-esteem were measured with the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which has been used in several previous help-seeking studies (Nadler, 1983). Examples of items on this scale are the following: "I certainly feel useless at times" and "I feel I do not have much to be proud of." Internal consistency of the scale based on data from the present study was acceptable ($\alpha = .76$).

We devised a 6-item Likert scale with which to assess individual differences in the more specific threat to self-esteem engendered by help seeking. Evidence indicates that the scale is sufficiently homogeneous ($\alpha = .74$). The items, which are listed below, were designed to measure students' perceptions of threat from both personal and public sources (others, professors):

> Getting help in my academic work would be an admission of my own lack of ability or ignorance.
>
> I would rather fail on my own than succeed in school because I got help.
>
> I would think less of myself if I couldn't do my academic work without help.
>
> People would think less of me if I succeeded in a course only because I got help.
>
> I would feel uneasy about what people would think if they found out I needed help in order to succeed academically.
>
> I would prefer that my professors not find out that I went for tutoring.

Subjects and procedure. The sample consisted of 612 students who were enrolled in one of 12 sections of Introductory Psychology at a large midwestern comprehensive university. Data collection was supervised by one of several graduate assistants during a regularly scheduled class period in the first week of the term. The survey was introduced as a large-scale study designed to provide information that would be valuable to college students having academic difficulties. Students were assured of confidentiality. Although it was made clear that participation was completely voluntary, no student explicitly refused to participate. Note that all significance tests have 610 *df* unless otherwise indicated.

Results and Discussion

Achievement-related and help-seeking intentions. We used a principal-components analysis to determine the structure of the intention ratings. Five factors exceeded the root one criterion and were rotated to simple structure with a Varimax procedure. The salient factor loadings (>.40), shown in Table 1, closely match the a priori behavior-intention categories with the following exceptions: the variable, selecting instructors known to be more helpful, loaded on the informal rather than on the formal help-seeking factor, and the variable, obtaining help from another student who knew more, shared its variance between formal and informal factors. On the basis of rational considerations, the variable, obtaining help from another student, was retained on the informal factor. Another variable, dropping out of school, which had an extremely low mean likelihood (.09) and an extreme skew, was dropped from the analysis.

To further examine these dimensions, composite scores were computed by summing the variables (unweighted) with salient loadings on each factor. Table 2 presents the mean likelihood ratings of these composite scores and the correlations among them. The means of the composite scales indicate that students were most likely to engage in instrumental activities designed to help one perform better, that they were next most likely to seek help from informal sources, followed by the likelihood of seeking help from formal sources, lowering their aspirations, and altering their goals, respectively. The omnibus significance test between means was significant, $F(4, 2444) = 2406.4$, $p < .001$, as were all paired-comparisons (Tukey critical difference = .17 at $p < .01$) except the paired-comparison between seeking help from formal versus informal sources.

The primary question in Study 1 focuses on relations between instrumental achievement activities and help seeking. The data obtained in this study indicate quite clearly that intentions to engage in instrumental achievement activities are linked to help seeking. This was more true of seeking help from formal sources ($r = .44$) than from informal sources ($r = .26$), difference between correlations, $t(610) = 4.50$, $p < .001$. It is also interesting that informal help seeking was related to lowering aspirations ($r = .21$) and marginally to altering the direction of one's goals ($r = .09$), whereas formal help seeking was not (*r*s of .01 and .06, respectively). This suggests that, whereas formal and informal help seeking are related to instrumental achievement activities, they are not equivalent.

Consistency versus vulnerability. Next, we examine the roles of individual differences in persistent, global self-esteem and the specific threat to self-esteem posed by help seeking.

Table 1
Factor Analysis of Behavior Intentions

Behavior	Factor					
	Help-Seeking		Instrumental Activities	Lower Aspirations	Alter Goals	*M*
	Formal	Informal				
Seek help from instructor	−.67					4.7
Seek help from support services	−.68					3.6
Ask more questions in class	−.65					3.5
Go to career placement	−.65					2.6
Seek help from another student	−.53	−.48				3.8
Select helpful instructors		−.60				3.4
Seek help from friends		−.69				3.9
Take better notes			.77			5.1
Try harder			.60			5.3
Study more			.78			5.4
Attend class more regularly			.69			5.3
Lower aspirations				.56		0.9
Select easier courses				.65		1.3
Drop courses this term				.81		1.3
Take lighter load				.78		2.0
Change minor or major					.88	1.0
Change career goals					.91	0.8
Change schools					.43	0.6
Eigenvalue	3.79	1.13	1.25	2.99	1.51	

Note. Only loadings greater than .40 are presented.

The consistency/vulnerability issue rests on the relationship between persistent self-esteem and help seeking. As shown in Table 3, there is no evidence for consistency. Rather, the significant correlation between self-esteem and formal help seeking ($r = .15$, $p < .001$) clearly favors vulnerability: Students with high self-esteem indicated that they were more likely to seek help when it was needed. This is consistent with the direct relationship between self-esteem and students' tendencies to engage in instrumental activities ($r = .14$, $p < .001$) when faced with possible poor performance. Although not shown in Table 3, there was a significant inverse correlation between persistent global self-esteem and specific self-esteem threat ($r = -.27$, $p < .001$), which provides further evidence for vulnerability. Thus, students with lower global self-esteem appear to be more threatened by having to seek help.

Relationships between specific threat to self-esteem and behavior intentions are shown in the second line of Table 3. Specific help-seeking threat was inversely related to both formal help-seeking tendencies ($r = -.28$, $p < .001$) and informal help-seeking tendencies ($r = -.13$, $p < .01$). Interestingly, threat was also inversely related to students' inclination to engage in other instrumental activities ($r = -.14$, $p < .001$) and directly associated with lowering aspiration ($r = .15$, $p < .001$) and, at least to some extent, with altering goals ($r = .12$, $p < .001$). Thus, the more that students are threatened by seeking help, the more avoidant their behavior in general (i.e., less instrumental activity and lowered aspirations). Alternatively stated, students who indicated that they were more likely to lower their aspirations and less likely to engage in constructive instrumental activity when faced with the prospect of poor performance also indicated that they were less likely to obtain needed assistance.

In sum, the data indicate that, in an academic setting, vulnerability rather than consistency describes the relationship between help seeking and persistent self-esteem. In addition, we can conclude from the relationship between the tendencies to engage in instrumental activities and academic help seeking that, in an achievement context, students consider help seeking among the alternative routes to achieving academic goals. That is, students who exert greater task-oriented effort do not refrain from seeking needed help. If seeking help were conceived as a dependent act in this context, we would have expected just the opposite. We now turn to a more comprehensive examination of instrumental activities

Table 2
Pearson Product–Moment Correlations Among Behavior Intention Composite Scores

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	*M*
1. Formal Help-Seeking	—					3.6
2. Informal Help-Seeking	.39**					3.7
3. Instrumental Activities	.44**	.26**				5.3
4. Lower Aspirations	.01	.21**	−.09*			1.4
5. Alter Goals	.06	.09*	−.05	.33**	—	0.8

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Between Global Persistent Self-Esteem, Help-Seeking Threat, and Behavior Intentions

	Behavior intention				
	Help-Seeking				
Variable	Formal	Informal	Instrumental Activities	Lower Aspirations	Alter Goals
Self-esteem	.15***	.05	.14***	.04	−.10*
Help-seeking threat	−.28***	−.13**	−.14***	.15***	.12**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

that are designed to improve student performance and the ways in which these relate to seeking assistance.

Study 2

The instrumental achievement activities included in Study 1 (e.g., take better notes, attend classes) were quite general and by no means exhaustive. The purpose of the second study was to examine the relationships between help seeking and a more extensive and well-defined set of learning activities. Research on, and programs which teach, learning strategies provide the taxonomy and the means for assessing these activities, which include cognitive and metacognitive skills such as elaboration, organization and monitoring, and resource management (Chipman, Segal, & Glaser, 1985; McKeachie, Pintrich, & Lin, 1985; Nickerson, Perkins, & Smith, 1985; Pintrich, 1989; Pintrich, Cross, Kozma, & McKeachie, 1986; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). In general, the use of various learning strategies is one manifestation of motivated achievement behavior. Given that help seeking is another adaptive behavior strategy (Study 1 in this article; Ames, 1983), seeking help when necessary should be more likely among students who use other strategies as well.

We must take into consideration, however, that help seeking is distinct from other strategies insofar as its use is contingent on perceptions of inadequacy (Rosen, 1983). Thus, the more that other strategies are effective, the less the need to seek help and the lower the likelihood help will be sought. Testing the relationships between help seeking and other strategies requires either determining students' tendencies to seek help that is contingent on need (as in Study 1) or assessing need and partialling out its effect from the relationships between students' use of learning strategies and help seeking. We used both of these techniques.

Method

Subjects and procedure. Participants were students in biology, English literature, and social science (sociology and psychology) classes at a comprehensive state university, a small liberal arts college, and a community college in the southeastern Michigan area. The students were enrolled in one of seven classes involving six instructors: biology (3), English (2), and psychology (2).

We used a pretest–posttest design, in which data collection occurred at the beginning and at the end of an academic term. There were 541 students in the pretest sample. Of those, 396 completed an end-of-term posttest. Although participation was voluntary, few students refused to complete either survey. Although we cannot preclude the possibility of systematic bias in the posttest sample, those students who completed the posttest gave results on the pretest that were congruent with the pretest results based on the total sample. Data analysis included the maximum number of subjects possible, 541 for analyses involving only the pretest and 396 for all posttest analyses.

Assessment of learning strategies. Data were obtained with the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ; McKeachie et al., 1985; Pintrich, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1989). The version of the MSLQ used in this study (see Pintrich, 1989) has 110 items and provides information about motivational tendencies as well as strategy use. The MSLQ learning strategy scales, which vary in length from 3 to 11 items, are as follows (alphas given in parentheses): cognitive strategies of rehearsal (.65), elaboration (.80), and organization (.67); metacognitive strategies (.81), which include planning, monitoring, and regulating; and resource management of one's time and studying (.69), study environment (.65), and self, also termed effort management, (.68). Students indicated their agreement with statements that described behavior indicative of each strategy on a 7-point response scale ranging from *not at all true of me* (1) to *very true of me* (7). A sample item from the scale that was used to measure elaboration is the following: "When I study I translate difficult material into my own words." In addition to the individual dimensions, we computed an overall index of strategy use (total strategy index) by averaging across the set of scales.

Need and help seeking. Help seeking was measured on both pretest and posttest as part of the MSLQ. On the pretest, the assessment of help seeking was similar to that in Study 1 in that statements were posed contingently. That is, students reported what they would do given the need for assistance (e.g., "When I can't understand the material in a course, I ask another student for help" and "I try to get help with my study skills when I'm having difficulty in my courses"; $\alpha = .76$). Students' need for assistance and their rates of help seeking during the term were assessed on the posttest. The two items that assessed students' need for help during the term were the following: "I needed help with my work for this class during the term" and "I needed help with my general study skills during the term"; $\alpha = .74$. Validity is indicated by the scale's inverse relation to students' grades in the course in which they completed the questionnaire, $r = -.33$, $df = 394$, $p < .001$. The extent of students' help seeking during the term was determined by a 3-item MSLQ scale: "I asked other students for help with the work for this class during the term," "I went to my instructor for help with my course work this term," and "I got help with my general study skills this term" ($\alpha = .72$). Note that in contrast to Study 1, there was no differentiation between help obtained from formal sources and help obtained from informal sources.

Results and Discussion

Relationships between learning strategies and help seeking (Pearson product–moment correlations) are shown in Table 4. Although our primary interest is in overall strategy use, the

Table 4
Correlations Between the Use of Learning Strategies, Perceived Academic Need, and Help Seeking

Strategy	Help-seeking index			
	Contingent help seeking (pretest; $N = 541$)	Reported help seeking (posttest; $N = 396$)	Perceived academic need	Help seeking with need controlled[a]
Cognitive				
Rehearsal	−.03	−.29***	−.44***	−.07
Elaboration	.36***	.29***	.05	.31***
Organization	.10*	−.14**	−.36***	.07
Metacognition	.26***	−.03	−.21***	.18**
Resource Management				
Time	.19***	.12*	−.21***	.28***
Study environment	.13**	.11*	−.08	.18**
Self (effort)	.21***	.10*	−.22***	.27***
Total	.27***	−.02	−.27***	.29***

[a] These are first-order partial correlations.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

scales are listed separately to reveal different ways in which the strategies relate to need and help seeking. The first column lists the zero-order correlations between students' strategy use and help seeking, contingent on need, that were obtained on the pretest. With the exception of rehearsal, these correlations are quite consistent and of moderate size (see Cohen, 1977, p. 80), suggesting that students who typically use more cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management strategies are more likely to seek help when it is needed. The total strategy index reflects this general tendency ($r = .27$, $p < .001$).

The remaining correlations in Table 4 are from the posttest. The zero-order correlations between strategy use and reported help seeking during the term when not controlling for the degree of need are shown in the second column. These correlations show no consistent pattern, varying in both magnitude and direction. This was expected because the actual amount of help that students seek depends on how successful these strategies were in reducing their levels of need, as well as students' inclinations to seek help. These offsetting trends are reflected in the total strategy index's lack of association with reported help seeking ($r = -.02$).

Relations between need and strategy use are shown in the third column of Table 4. Because virtually all of the separate scales, as well as the total strategy index ($r = -.27$, $p < .001$), were inversely related to need, we can conclude that students who use more strategies had less need for academic assistance. However, there are differences among the scales, with rehearsal, organization, metacognition, and time and self (effort) resource management significantly related at the .01 level or better; the remaining scales are either not significant or are greater than .01.

Associations between the use of strategies and reports of help sought during the term, taking into account individual differences in need, are given by the first-order partial correlations in the last column of the table. Once again, there is clear evidence that students who report greater strategy use are more likely to seek help when it is needed (total strategy index $r = .29$, $p < .001$). The two exceptions are the cognitive strategies of rehearsal and organization. Thus, we can draw the same general conclusion on the basis of students' reports of their help-seeking tendencies from both the pretest and posttest measures. Students' ratings of the help they would seek if necessary, which were obtained at the beginning of the term, are very similar in magnitude to reports of the actual help they reported having sought during the term, controlling for the degree to which help was needed (compare the first and fourth columns of Table 4). As in Study 1, this suggests that students' intentions are good indicators of their actual behavior, although we recognize the limitations of self-reported help seeking as noted above.

Reported help seeking was strongly associated with need, as indicated by self-ratings ($r = .72$, $p < .001$). The patterns of relationships between reported help seeking and strategy use reinforces the problem of behavioral observations of help seeking that do not take need into account. For example, if we had observed the incidence of rehearsal and help seeking, we might have concluded that they are inversely related (i.e., $r = -.29$, $p < .001$). The data suggest, however, that this is due to lower perceived levels of academic need by students more likely to use that strategy ($r = -.44$, $p < .001$). With level of need taken into account, we draw a different conclusion: that help seeking is independent of rehearsal. The strategy of organization displayed a similar pattern.

Revealing quite a different pattern is the finding that reported help seeking was only marginally related to students' use of time management ($r = .12$, $p < .05$). This was apparently influenced by the relationship between time management and need ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$). With need taken into account, we can conclude that students who manage their time would be more likely to seek required academic assistance ($r = .19$ and $r = .28$ for pretest contingent help seeking and posttest reported help seeking controlling for need, respectively). A similar pattern is shown for the other resource management strategies, those of environment and effort. The total strategy index was similar to that of metacognition in that strategy use was unrelated to reported help seeking ($r = -.02$) until the inverse relationship between strategy use and need ($r = -.27$, $p < .001$) was taken into consideration ($r = .29$, $p < .001$).

We also examined students' performance, as measured by course grades (standardized within classes). As noted above, self-rated need was inversely related to grades, and grades were inversely related to reported help seeking ($r = -.19$, $p < .01$). We explored possible nonlinearity in view of previous reports of an inverted U-shaped relationship between need and help seeking (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988b). Polynomial regression of help seeking on need revealed a significant quadratic trend, $t(393) = 2.63$, $p < .01$. However, the trend was very small compared with its linear counterpart, and there was no evidence of decreased help seeking with very high levels of need. The quadratic trend for help seeking regressed on grades was not significant. We also checked for possible nonlinear trends in the associations between strategy use and reported help seeking. The only significant quadratic trends were detected when regressing reported help seeking on time and self resource management scales and on the total strategy index. However, these were marginally significant ($p < .05$) and extremely small, 1/10 to 1/20 the magnitude of the more pronounced linear trends, and there was no evidence of inverted U-shaped functions.

In general, the results are quite consistent with those in Study 1 in showing that students who engage in a variety of achievement-oriented activities (in this study, learning strategies) are also more likely, rather than less likely to seek help when it is necessary. Viewed from another perspective, students who use fewer strategies report a greater need for academic assistance, coupled with a lower tendency to seek needed help. The following study was designed to replicate the results of Study 2, to examine with greater specificity the relationship between help seeking and learning strategies, and to determine the influence of help-seeking threat on those relationships.

Study 3

The results of Study 1 indicate that students who perceive themselves as less threatened by help are more likely to seek it. If students who use more learning strategies are also less threatened, then the relationship between strategy use and help seeking found in Study 2 could be attributable to threat's simultaneous influence on both strategy use and help seeking. In this study we tested this possibility by examining the strategy/help-seeking relationships when individual differences in threat are controlled. In addition, in this study we attempted to examine the distinction between executive/dependent and instrumental/mastery goals by asking students to report separately on help-seeking activity that typifies these goals (see Nelson-Le Gall, 1981, 1985). If the use of learning strategies represents an active approach to learning, it follows that strategy use should be more closely associated with instrumental help seeking, which is directed at mastery goals, than with executive help seeking.

Study 3 also reintroduces from Study 1 the distinction between help sought from institutionally provided, formal sources (e.g., teachers, tutors, study skills personnel) and help obtained informally (e.g., from other students). As suggested by the results of Study 1 and other findings (Knapp & Karabenick, 1988), whereas the tendencies to seek help from these sources are related, they are not equivalent (Clark, 1983; Shapiro, 1980). Because the relationship between instrumental achievement activities and formal help seeking is greater than the relationship between instrumental achievement activities and informal help seeking (see Study 1, Table 2), we expected the same order of magnitude for learning strategies.

Method

Subjects and procedure. Participants in this study were drawn from the same schools sampled in Study 2, in the following year. The third study involved 23 classes and 13 instructors, with the following subject-matter distribution: English (3); sociology (1); psychology (6); and biology (3). As in Study 2, data were obtained at the beginning and at the end of an academic term by surveys distributed either by instructors or project personnel. Only students who completed both assessments were included in the data analysis ($N = 386$). Unless otherwise indicated, all significance tests have 384 *df*.

Assessment. The design of this study is similar to that of Study 2. All variables were measured with a revised version of the MSLQ, as described in Study 2 (Pintrich et al., 1988). In this version, cognitive strategies included rehearsal, organization, elaboration, and critical and original thinking. As in Study 2, monitoring, planning, and regulating were combined in a single metacognition scale. Resource management scales included the following: time and study, study environment, and effort. Alphas for the MSLQ scales ranged from .65 to .88. Having described the different patterns of relationships between strategy use, need, and help seeking in Study 2, we considered similar information redundant in this study. Therefore, the individual scales are not treated separately. Instead, the total strategy index, obtained by averaging the individual scales, provided an indication of students' generalized use of strategies. Note that there are two total strategy indexes, one based on the beginning-of-term pretest, the other based on posttest data.

Help-seeking tendencies were measured both at the beginning and at the end of the term. The beginning-of-term (pretest) measure of contingent help-seeking tendencies was identical to that used in Study 2; the end-of-term (posttest) measure, however, was constructed to differentiate sources of assistance (formal vs. informal) and help-seeking goals (executive vs. instrumental). With respect to source differences, formal help seeking was determined with a 2-item scale: "I went to my instructor for help with my course work during this term" and "I got help with my general study skills this term" ($\alpha = .45$). Informal help seeking items were the following: "I asked another student for help with the work for this class during the term" and "I asked friends or family members for help with the work for this class during the term" ($\alpha = .74$). These two scales were also combined to provide an estimate of total help-seeking behavior during the term ($\alpha = .85$). Single-item scales assessed executive and instrumental help-seeking goals. The executive item asked students to rate the degree to which they sought help to ease their burden, in terms of time or effort. The item read: "I got help this term primarily to make it easier for me to finish my course work." A longer-term perspective, one suggesting mastery rather than ease or immediate reward, constituted the instrumental item: "I sought help so that I could understand the general concepts in the course, not just to get the answers."

Help-seeking threat was measured at the beginning of the term with a subset of the items used in Study 1. The following items were included: "I believe that getting help with my course work would be admitting my lack of ability." "I believe that people would think less of me if I got help in order to succeed in this course," and "I would think less of myself if I couldn't do my course work without help." Finally, the same two items used on the posttest in Study 2 assessed students' need for help during the term ($\alpha = .65$).

Results and Discussion

Strategy use and type of help seeking. Associations between help seeking and the use of learning strategies were analyzed as in Study 2. Correlations between measures of students' strategy use and help seeking are shown in the first row of Table 5. The data are consistent with the results of Study 2, demonstrating again the general tendency for students who use more strategies to seek help when it is required. Specifically, strategy use was significantly related to the measure of contingent help seeking obtained at the beginning of the term ($r = .37$, $p < .001$), as well as the total strategy index from the posttest with need controlled ($r = .36$, $p < .001$).

The remaining correlations examine each type of help seeking separately. The relationship between total strategy use and formal help seeking ($r = .31$, $p < .001$) was very similar to the relationship between total strategy use and informal help seeking ($r = .28$, $p < .001$), contrary to prediction. Consistent with expectation, however, correlations between strategy use and help seeking were significantly higher for instrumental help seeking ($r = .40$, $p < .001$) than for executive help seeking ($r = .18$, $p < .001$), $t(383) = 4.56$, $p < .001$. In other words, instrumental help-seeking goals differentiate students who use more as opposed to fewer learning strategies more than do executive help-seeking goals. Some caution is suggested with regard to the interpretation of these results, given the potential for differences in reliability and validity of the 1-item scales used in this study.

As in Study 2, we also examined relationships with grades and tested for the presence of nonlinear trends. The association between course grades and need was significant ($r = -.40$, $p < .001$). In addition, consistent with Study 2, help seeking was significantly correlated with course grades ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$), and with self-rated need ($r = .62$, $p < .001$). No significant nonlinear trends were detected when regressing total help seeking on either grades or need. Although some significant quadratic trends were detected for the different types of help seeking, particularly for formal help seeking, they were extremely small compared with the linear trends. In general, the functional relationships between help seeking and both need and grades were logarithmic, not inverted U-shaped; the increase in help seeking was more rapid from low to moderate needs (or high to moderate grades) than from moderate to high needs (moderate to low grades).

Role of help-seeking threat. The influence of help-seeking threat was analyzed by examining its relationships with strategy use and by assessing its influence on the correlations between strategy use and help seeking. Correlations between threat and the use of strategies were significant for the total strategy indexes measured at the beginning of the term ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$) and at the end of the term ($r = -.16$, $p < .001$). Thus, consistent with the finding that students who use more strategies also seek more help when necessary, students who use more strategies are also less concerned about the negative consequence of help seeking.

Associations between threat and help seeking are shown in the second row of Table 5. Although all were in the expected direction, they were relatively low in magnitude, with the exception of contingent and instrumental help seeking (both rs $= -.19$, $p < .001$). Therefore, threat was inversely related to both strategy use and help seeking, but the associations are not strong. And, as shown in the last row of Table 5, partialling out threat had virtually no impact on the correlations between strategy use and help seeking. Therefore, the relations between strategy use and help seeking are not attributable to their simultaneous relation to help-seeking threat. In other words, help seeking and strategy use covary as a function of students' general approach to accomplishing academic tasks, independent of threat.

The following conclusions appear justified from the data in Study 3: (a) In general, the use of various cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management strategies is directly related to the tendency to seek help when needed; (b) summed across strategies, learning strategy use has similar relations to formal and informal help-seeking behavior; (c) strategy use is more strongly related to instrumental than to executive help seeking; and (d) whereas help-seeking threat is inversely related to both help seeking and strategy use, its contribution to their association is negligible.

General Discussion

Taken together, these studies provide evidence that active learners are more likely, rather than less likely to seek help when it is needed. This is true whether we measure active learning in terms of students' likely instrumental responses to lower-than-desired performance (Study 1) or by the extent to

Table 5
Correlations Between the Use of Strategies and Help Seeking and the Influence of Controlling for Help-Seeking Threat

	Help-seeking index					
			Source		Goal	
Variable	Contingent[a]	Total	Informal	Formal	Executive	Instrumental
Total strategy use	.37***	.36***	.28***	.31***	.19***	.37***
Help-seeking threat	−.19***	−.11*	−.13**	−.04	−.07	−.19***
Total strategy use with help-seeking threat controlled[b]	.36***	.36***	.27***	.30***	.18***	.37***

[a] Contingent help seeking was obtained on the beginning-of-term pretest. All other help-seeking measures were obtained on the posttest and control for level of need. [b] These are first-order partial correlations.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

which students use learning strategies (Studies 2 and 3). The results are more consistent with help seeking conceived as an instrumental rather than a dependent activity (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985) and with previous data on achievement-related, help-seeking cognitions (Ames, 1983; Ames & Lau, 1982). We must emphasize however, that active learners will not necessarily seek more help. Rather, the relationships shown here indicate what students would do once recognizing inadequacy. They may even seek less help because their increased effort, task persistence, and use of learning strategies decreases the necessity for it, as shown by the inverse relationships between learning strategy use and perceived need (see Table 4).

The data also support vulnerability rather than consistency as the relationship between help seeking and self-esteem: Students with lower self-esteem regard seeking help as more threatening. This evidence is contrary to most experimental short-term studies. It is in agreement with previous analyses, however, that propose that vulnerability is more likely in long-term achievement contexts (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985) and in contexts in which the cost of not seeking help is high (Nadler & Fisher, 1986). We may now add to the burden of students with low self-esteem a reluctance to secure resources that, by increasing the likelihood of academic success, could elevate their sense of self-worth.

We would be remiss, however, to conclude without addressing the sources of reporting bias that are possible in self-report data. The case might be, for example, that less active students, who reported a lower likelihood of instrumental activities given prospective failure and who used fewer learning strategies, for self-presentational reasons would not want to admit having sought help. Self-presentation bias is unlikely, however, given the relative anonymity and confidentiality of data collection. Another possibility is that students differentially recall the actual incidence of their help-seeking activities, with less active students remembering fewer of such incidents. Although this latter possibility could account for correlations between recalled events and strategy use, it would not as easily apply to relations between strategy use and the beginning-of-term pretest ratings of contingent help seeking. As noted above, the help seeking in which the students reportedly engaged during the term (with need controlled) is consistent with their ratings of contingent help seeking, that is, help seeking in which they would engage, given the need to seek help (at the beginning of a term). In other words, an index involving recall is consistent with another in which recall is less involved. Future studies should consider alternative methodologies (e.g., diaries, behavioral observations) by which help seeking can be assessed.

Evidence that more active learners tend to seek help suggests that learning strategy programs (e.g., learning to learn courses: see McKeachie et al., 1985; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986) include help seeking among the strategies offered to students as ways to improve their performance. This is not to suggest that students should be encouraged to engage in unnecessary help seeking; rather, students should be alerted to circumstances in which help seeking is appropriate, to the factors that inhibit its effective use, and to the fact that appropriate help-seeking skills can facilitate accomplishing their academic objectives. Furthermore, learning climates that disinhibit help seeking should be encouraged. Among these are cooperative and student-centered environments (e.g., Ames, 1983; Greeson, 1988), and those which emphasize task and mastery rather than ego-involved and social comparative goals (Nicholls, 1984).

Help seeking is generally a long-term process, rather than an isolated single decision (see Nadler, in press). This appears to be especially true in an academic context in which, on a regular basis, students receive feedback that forms the basis for self-judgments of adequacy (Rosen, 1983). These assessments may alter the students' instrumental activities, including their use of various learning strategies and their frequency of help seeking. In the present studies, we determined the relationships between these activities on the basis of students' summary judgments of their experiences and their behavioral intentions under a specific set of circumstances. The results illustrate the importance of taking into consideration students' need for help. Need appears to be a key element in understanding the role of help seeking in the learning process, as in other contexts (Gross & McMullen, 1983, Nadler, in press). Subsequent research should consider tracking students' levels of need, help seeking, and use of other learning strategies, for a more complete understanding of the help-seeking process.

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