

---

# It's the Thought That Counts: On Perceiving How Helpers Decide to Lend a Hand

Daniel R. Ames  
Francis J. Flynn  
Elke U. Weber  
*Columbia University*

---

*How do people react to those who have helped them? The authors propose that a recipient's evaluation of a helper's intentions and the recipient's own attitudes about future interactions with the helper depend partly on the recipient's perceptions of how the helper decided to assist: on the basis of affect, of role, or of cost-benefit calculation. When a recipient perceives that the decision was based on affect (i.e., positive feelings about him or her), he or she will be more inclined toward future interaction and reciprocation than if he or she perceives the decision as based on role or cost-benefit calculation. It is proposed that these "decision modes" signal the helper's underlying attitudes about the recipient, which in turn, clarify their relationship. A boundary is also identified: The negative impact of apparent cost-benefit thinking is greatest when the amount of help provided is small. Predictions are confirmed in four studies of actual and experimentally manipulated helping episodes.*

---

**Keywords:** *helping; prosocial behavior; person perception; social exchange; decision modes*

Nearly half a century ago, scholars recognized that a recipient's perception of a helper's mental states, such as goals, had an impact on his or her evaluations of the helper as well as his or her reciprocation. For instance, Jones (1964) noted that the targets of ingratiation are chiefly concerned with the ingratiator's intentions. Schopler and Thompson (1968) found that people's attributions of favor-doer motives accounted for much of their willingness to reciprocate. M. S. Greenberg and Frisch (1972) showed that liking for helpers and willingness to reciprocate were much higher when helping was seen as deliberate rather than accidental. Despite these and related findings (e.g., Gergen, Ellsworth, Maslach, & Seipel, 1975; Tesser, Gatewood, & Driver, 1968), this line

of thinking was not fully developed in the ensuing decades. Psychological research went on to embrace the more pragmatic topics of "who helps, when, and why" (e.g., Berkowitz, 1972; Latane & Darley, 1970) and shifted away from the matter of how helpers are perceived by recipients. Accordingly, one contemporary review of prosocial behavior scholarship noted that "recipients' reactions to receiving help . . . remains a relatively neglected area" (Clark, 1991, p. 8), whereas another authoritative summary (Batson, 1998) covered recipients' attributions of helper motives in a single paragraph. We are drawn back to the matter of perceptions of helpers and their mental states<sup>1</sup> because key questions remain unanswered. How do recipients intuit helpers' mental states? What factors affect how these inferences are made? And why do perceived mental states matter at all?

In this article, we develop answers to these questions and test them empirically. We propose that when a recipient perceives that a helper is guided by positive affect, rather than formal role obligations or some calculation of costs and benefits, the recipient perceives the helper more favorably and shows a greater willingness to recip-

---

**Authors' Note:** This research was supported in part by Columbia University's Center for the Decision Sciences, Grant SES-0079664 from the National Science Foundation, and the Columbia Business School research fund. Preparation of the article was facilitated for the third author by a fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute for Advanced Study) zu Berlin. The authors wish to thank Joel Brockner and Adam Galinsky for insightful comments and Emily Amanatullah and Violeta Krasnic for help with data collection. Correspondence should be addressed to Daniel Ames, Columbia Business School, 3022 Broadway Ave., New York, NY 10027; e-mail: da358@columbia.edu.

*PSPB*, Vol. 30 No. 4, April 2004 461-474

DOI: 10.1177/0146167203261890

© 2004 by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc.

rocate the help. We believe this effect emerges because helping episodes can clarify the nature of the helper-recipient relationship (e.g., a new acquaintance who focuses on costs and benefits in responding to a modest request for aid is not signaling a strong desire to grow closer). We also identify an important boundary condition: The effect of certain perceived “decision modes” is greatest when the magnitude of help is small. Our results shed light on why this is so.

Our findings challenge a number of accounts, including models of reciprocity that revolve around costs and benefits (e.g., Pruitt, 1968), models that identify gratitude as a central force in reciprocation (e.g., McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001), and models that recognize the importance of intent but do not address boundary conditions (e.g., Tesser et al., 1968). In the end, we encourage a broader view of helping not as an isolated event that begins with a helper’s analysis of rewards and costs but as part of an ongoing stream of behavior and evaluations that flow from, and comprise, relationships.

#### *Why Do Perceived Helper Mental States Matter?*

We believe that recipients of help are generally attuned to helper mental states because they indicate the nature of the relationship between benefactor and recipient (i.e., “Does he [she] really care about me?”). Such thinking dates back to Goffman (1961), who described how even the most minor exchanges entail opportunities to negotiate identities and relations. More recently, Fiske (1991) and Clark, Mills, and Corcoran (1989) have found that different types of relationships, such as market-pricing or communal relationships, entail different decision rules for interactions such as helping. Furthermore, scholars such as J. Greenberg (1983) and Lickel, Hamilton, and Sherman (2001) have shown that people intuit forms of relationships from such interactions. Moreover, because relationships are dynamic (e.g., Lydon, Jamieson, & Holmes, 1997), perceived attitudes can signal a desire to build a closer bond (Flynn & Brockner, 2003). Thus, perceivers recognize these links in both directions: Different relationships give rise to different modes of thinking, and different modes of thinking signal different (current or potential) relationships.

When a recipient believes that a helper means to relate to him or her in an affectionate, noncalculating way, he or she tends to share such a congenial definition of the relationship and, accordingly, has a greater willingness to help and interact with the helper in the future (we call this willingness “interaction attitudes”). In this way, relationships are both causes and consequences of decision modes: Close and distant relations will generally lead to different modes of helping decision making, and upon witnessing different modes of decision mak-

ing, perceivers intuit different underlying relationship attitudes. We turn next to an examination of what these specific modes may be.

#### *Decision Modes*

Blau (1964) noted that helping “is an intermediate case between pure calculation of advantage and pure expression of love” (p. 112). Between these extremes lies a vast space on which recipients are challenged to locate the helper. Implicit in Blau’s description is that how a helper decides to help—calculating advantage, feeling love—is central to understanding their broader intentions and the nature of the relationship between helper and recipient. Thus, one answer to the question of how recipients intuit a helper’s general mental states is by considering how the helper made the decision to assist in a specific episode.

People arrive at such decisions in different ways: They may help because they like the person requiring assistance, or because they consider it their organizational duty, or because they think they will get something in return. These ways of deciding employ qualitatively different processes and decision representations that have been classified into decision modes by Weber and colleagues (e.g., Weber, 1998, 2001). Their work examines the use of decision modes and the norms surrounding them in different domains. For example, cost-benefit thinking tends to be used more and seen as more appropriate than affect-based thinking for financial matters, whereas the reverse is true for romance-related decision making.

Weber (2001) found that three modes are particularly relevant for social decisions: affect, cost-benefit, and role-based decision making. Affect-based decision making is driven by immediate affective reactions to elements of the decision. For our consideration of helping episodes, we focus on a positive affect mode—when a helper decides to act based on positive feelings for the recipient (we discuss negative affect and specific emotions in our final conclusions). When using a cost-benefit mode, a decision maker deliberately weighs potential rewards for himself or herself against potential costs of helping. Use of a role mode emerges in contexts where a decision maker considers his or her formal or organizational duties and obligations (to clarify role from affect in the present article, we focus on organizational roles rather than friendship, family, or intimacy roles). We do not suggest that these are the only decision modes involved in helping, only that they are perceived as prevalent ones, an assumption we test in Study 4. In addition, Morris, Podolny, and Ariel’s (2000) examination of work relationships has made similar distinctions, with interactions guided by affect in affiliative relationships,

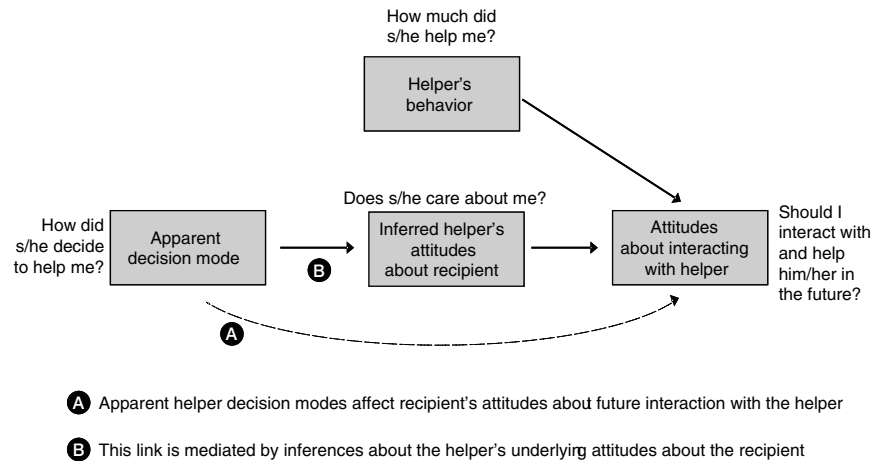


Figure 1 A basic model of helping recipient reactions.

cost-benefit analysis in market relationships, and role in legal-bureaucratic relationships.

We believe that perceiving someone has decided to help based on positive affect, rather than role or cost-benefit thinking, clearly signals positive attitudes toward the recipient.<sup>2</sup> Knowing that the helper consults his or her feelings about the target and is helping “from the heart” suggests an intrinsic concern and affection. Knowing that the helper is instrumentally concerned with what he or she will get in return, or simply considers role-related obligations, does not signal such current or desired affection and intimacy. This perspective bridges work on “liking begets liking” (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1978) and “helping begets helping” (e.g., Gouldner, 1960). We combine and extend these notions and present a mechanism that binds them together: When liking (rather than calculation or role obligation) is seen as underlying helping, it generally begets higher levels of liking and reciprocal help by virtue of signaling the helper’s attitudes about the recipient. We believe the helping literature has underappreciated this relational dynamic, whereas the attraction literature has not sufficiently examined helping.

In sum, we expect that a perceived positive affect mode will lead to assumed positive attitudes of the helper toward the recipient.<sup>3</sup> This will lead to the recipient having more positive evaluations of, and attitudes toward future interaction with, the helper than when role or cost-benefit modes are perceived (Figure 1).

#### Alternative Views

One alternative view, which we call the “accounting model,” suggests that recipients of help focus nearly exclusively on costs and benefits in deciding whether and how much to reciprocate. Such notions are implicit

in various work on social exchange (e.g., Blau, 1964; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), equity theory (e.g., Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). These models do not grant any role to perceived mental states or decision modes but instead focus on instrumental outcomes. The implicit assumption is that people generally expect one another to decide to help using cost-benefit calculations—that we are all, in effect, folk social exchange theorists and that perceived decision modes do not matter. In contrast, we expect perceivers to discriminate between positive affect, role, and cost-benefit modes and to evaluate helpers accordingly.

Another alternative is that a recipient’s gratitude, not inferred helper mental states, drives his or her interaction attitudes. McCullough et al. (2001) argue that (a) gratitude flows from the perception of “intentional benevolence” and (b) gratitude motivates prosocial behavior. This suggests that gratitude might account for the link between inferred helper mental states and the recipient’s interaction attitudes. Because we believe these inferred mental states themselves serve the function of clarifying the helper-recipient relationship, we do not expect gratitude to play such a mediating role.

#### A Magnitude Boundary

We now wish to consider the limits of the effects we have proposed. Goffman’s (1961) examination of mundane daily episodes suggests that even the most banal interactions can be profoundly informative in terms of status and relationships. We believe this is especially so with perceived cost-benefit thinking. For instance, if we asked a colleague to proofread a single sentence and it seemed that he or she carefully weighed the costs and benefits of helping, we would regard that mode as reasonably informative about his or her less-than-affection-

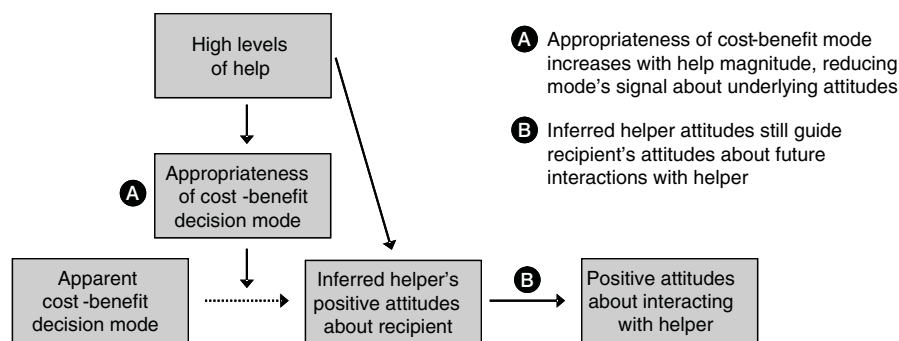


Figure 2 Alternative accounts for a magnitude boundary on the impact of decision modes.

ate attitude toward us. However, prior work on the norms surrounding cost-benefit mode usage (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Weber, 2001) suggests that such thinking is normative in “high-magnitude” episodes. Because of such a change in norms, mode usage itself becomes less informative about mental states. For instance, if we asked a colleague to proofread a book-length manuscript, we would not be surprised if he or she considered costs and benefits and, thus, we would not necessarily discount his or her affection.

In sum, we predict that the negative impact of perceived cost-benefit (vs. positive affect) decision modes on interaction attitudes will be diminished for large magnitudes of help. However, based on our prior work on person perception (Ames, 2003), we expect that inferred helper mental states will be predictive of interaction attitudes for both small and large magnitudes. At large magnitudes, we expect this decision mode difference will be less diagnostic of these underlying mental states (Figure 2).

#### PREDICTIONS AND RESEARCH

We make four specific predictions. First, we predict that *peoples' expectations about what modes should be used to make helping decisions vary by relationship*: Compared with distant relationships, close relationships are expected to engender more positive affect-based decision making and less cost-benefit and role-based decision making in the domain of helping. Evidence for such “relationship → mode” norms would lay the foundation for our claims that perceivers can intuit backward from evidence of such modes (“mode → relationship”).

Our second prediction extends this: *Perceptions of a helper's decision mode shape attitudes toward the helper and willingness to reciprocate*. Specifically, a recipient's perception that a helper decided to help on the basis of positive affect rather than cost-benefit or role-based reasoning will lead to the inference that the helper has a more positive attitude toward the recipient (e.g., “He [she] cares

about me”) and more positive attitudes by the recipient toward future interactions with the helper (e.g., “I look forward to interacting with and helping this person”).

Third, we address the underlying process: *The impact of perceived decision mode on interaction attitudes will be mediated by inferences about the helper's underlying attitudes*, such as whether the helper cares about the recipient (Figure 1). A particular episode of helping can signal these more general and enduring mental states, and it is these assumed mental states that define the relationship and shape future interaction.

Fourth, we identify a boundary: *The magnitude of helping limits the effect of perceived decision modes*. Specifically, we predict that as the size of helping increases, the negative effect of a perceived cost-benefit decision mode on evaluations of the helper and willingness to reciprocate will diminish because the perceived appropriateness of cost-benefit thinking will increase (Figure 2).

We tested our predictions in four studies. In Study 1, we explored decision mode norms by asking participants about their expectations of how close and distant others would make helping decisions. In Study 2, we manipulated helper decision modes in vignettes, testing the causal impact of modes on inferred helper mental states and interaction attitudes. In Study 3, we repeated this test and also manipulated magnitude to examine boundaries. In Study 4, we gathered data from students and managers about actual episodes of help and examined whether our mode concepts were reflected in unstructured participant descriptions. We also tested links between mode usage, inferences of helper mental states, interaction attitudes, and reports of actual reciprocation.

#### STUDY 1

To test our predictions about mode appropriateness and relationships, we asked respondents to consider mode usage in requests for help from close and distant others. We predicted that norms would differ by relationship: Positive affect would be seen as more appropriate



than cost-benefit or role-based decisions for helping with close others, whereas affect would be seen as less appropriate than cost-benefit or role-based decisions for helping with distant others.

In pursuit of a wide range of perspectives and external validity, we recruited two samples: university students and full-time professionals/managers. University students considered everyday helping episodes, whereas the professionals/managers considered helping in the workplace.

### Method

Sixty respondents completed Study 1 as a Web-based survey, including 33 university students who completed the materials as part of a lab study ( $M$  age = 19.9,  $SD$  = 2.7; 16 men, 17 women) and 27 full-time executive/managerial-level employees enrolled in a part-time Master's of Business Administration program ( $M$  age = 33.6,  $SD$  = 5.4; 18 men, 9 women).

Participants rated the appropriateness of cost-benefit, role, and affect modes for close and distant targets. The order of the targets was counterbalanced between participants. Instructions for the close target for the lab participants began as follows:

Think about asking someone else for help, something that would be at least moderately easy to do. Imagine you are asking for this help from someone you're close to and know very well. How should they decide whether or not to help? Rate the statements below.

Instructions for the full-time working participants referred to their workplace:

Think about asking someone else for help at your workplace, something that would be at least moderately easy to do. Imagine you are asking for this help from someone you're close to and know very well. How should they decide whether or not to help?

Participants then rated each mode for its desired utilization on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *a great extent* (7). The three modes were described as follows: "By weighing the costs and benefits of helping you" [cost-benefit], "by considering their role (a role other than "friend") and what they were obliged to do and not do" [role], and "by examining their feelings about you" [affect]. The distant target rating instructions were preceded by slightly modified instructions: "Think about asking for some help from someone you don't know very well. It might be someone you work with or have met only a few times."

### Results

For mode appropriateness ratings, an ANOVA confirmed a significant interaction of relationship and mode,  $F(1, 57) = 88.8, p < .01$ .<sup>4</sup> Additional tests confirmed that there were no significant main effects or interaction effects of sample (students vs. full-time employed participants). The remaining analyses collapse across this dimension.

The pattern of ratings confirmed our predictions. For close others, affect mode was seen as more appropriate than cost-benefit (5.78 vs. 3.48,  $t = 7.6, p < .01$ ) and role (5.78 vs. 5.07,  $t = 2.8, p < .01$ ). For distant others, affect mode was seen as less appropriate than cost-benefit (3.47 vs. 5.08,  $t = -4.9, p < .01$ ) and role (3.47 vs. 4.75,  $t = -4.3, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, comparing across targets, affect mode was seen as more appropriate for close than distant others (5.78 vs. 3.47,  $t = 8.7, p < .01$ ), whereas cost-benefit mode was seen as more appropriate for distant than close others (5.08 vs. 3.48,  $t = 6.2, p < .01$ ). The appropriateness of role was not significantly different for close versus distant others.

### Discussion

As expected, participants viewed affect-based decision making as the most desirable mode for deciding to help in a close relationship and as more appropriate for close relationships than for distant ones. Cost-benefit and role-based decision making were seen as more appropriate than affect for helping decisions with distant others. These effects emerged for university students considering everyday helping as well as professionals/managers considering helping in the workplace.

The fact that social norms about decision modes vary by relationship type ("relationship  $\rightarrow$  mode") suggests that recipients of help might pay attention to decision modes as a cue to the nature of their relationship with the helper ("mode  $\rightarrow$  relationship"). Specifically, recipients may take a perceived affect-based decision as a signal of close relations, leading them to more positive attitudes about future interactions and reciprocation.

### STUDY 2

In Study 2, we sought experimental evidence for the causal impact of helper decision modes. We asked participants to imagine asking for and receiving help in several scenarios, manipulating the helper's apparent decision modes. We predicted that participants would show more positive attitudes about interacting with a helper who had used an affect-based decision mode and that this link would be mediated by inferences about the helper's underlying mental states about the recipient.

### Method

Forty-nine university student participants completed Study 2 as part of paid research sessions ( $M_{age} = 22.3$ ,  $SD = 3.5$ ; 26 men, 23 women). The design was a 2 (within-subject scenario)  $\times$  3 (within-subject helper decision mode: cost-benefit, role, and affect) interaction. Each participant made judgments about two of three possible scenarios of helping. Participants read the beginning of each assigned scenario and then read three alternative conclusions, featuring cost-benefit, role, and affect modes in counterbalanced order. For each conclusion, participants rated their assumptions about the helper's mental states and their attitudes about future interaction with the helper.

The scenarios asked participants to imagine requesting a favor from a somewhat distant other to whom they had some organizational tie. One scenario focused on requesting help in preparing a presentation:

Imagine that you started an office job about 6 months ago and you're now acquainted with your colleagues and comfortable with how things work. It's Wednesday afternoon and you've been given the job of preparing a presentation for your manager—she [he] needs it next week. You ask your coworker Nick, whom you've met once before, but only for a minute, if he can pitch in and help you for about 15 min.

For this scenario, the mode endings included, "He carefully considers the costs and benefits of helping you, calculating whether it's worth it. He decides to help"; "He considers his feelings about you. He decides to help"; and "He thinks about his role and obligations. He decides to help." After each ending, participants rated mental state inferences and interaction attitudes on a 6-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). Following the "Nick" scenario, the mental state inference items were "Nick likes and cares about me" and "Nick cares more about himself than helping other people." The interaction attitude items were "I would be willing to do a favor for Nick in the future" and "I'd look forward to future interactions with Nick."

Participants completed similar materials for two other scenarios. One of these scenarios asked participants to imagine being on vacation and receiving a request from a colleague who needed to locate some important paperwork; participants read that they called a little-known coworker and asked him to go through a series of files and copy the needed materials. The other scenario asked participants to imagine being hired as a camp counselor and needing to move some incorrectly delivered supplies to a different location; time pressure and the difficulty of the task meant that help was needed

**TABLE 1: Study 2: Inferred Helper Mental States and Attitudes About Future Interaction With Helper by Decision Mode**

Judgment About Helper	Decision Mode		
	Affect	Cost-Benefit	Role
Helper mental states	4.78 <sub>a</sub> (.73)	3.73 <sub>b</sub> (.92)	3.86 <sub>b</sub> (.85)
Attitudes about future interaction with helper	5.33 <sub>a</sub> (.61)	4.75 <sub>b</sub> (.75)	4.80 <sub>b</sub> (.80)

NOTE: Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ . Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

and participants read that they requested help from a fellow camp counselor whom they had just met.

### Results

The different scenarios produced very similar results, and no significant main effects or interaction effects involving the scenario variable emerged. Accordingly, the remaining analyses collapse across scenario.

*Impact of mode on mental state inferences and interaction attitudes.* As expected, interaction attitudes (an average of the "willing to do a favor" and "look forward to future interactions" items) were more positive with affect-based decisions to help (Table 1). Furthermore, inferences about helper mental states (an average of the "cares about me" and the reversed "cares more about himself" items) differed significantly, with affect mode leading to more positive ratings.

*Mediation.* A mediation analysis was conducted to test if the effect of decision mode on interaction attitudes was mediated by mental state inferences (Figure 3). An initial regression model showed that affect mode (coded as 1 for affect, 0 for cost-benefit or role) predicted attitudes about future interaction with the helper. A separate model confirmed that perceived affect mode predicted mental state inferences (i.e., inferences of more positive helper attitudes toward the recipient). In turn, these assumed mental states predicted interaction attitudes. In a combined model, however, the predictive power of mental state inferences remained high, whereas the predictive power of perceived affect mode disappeared, consistent with our prediction that mental state inferences acted as a mediating variable.

### Discussion

The manipulation of decision modes in Study 2 had the predicted impact. When presented with cases of affect-based help, participants indicated more positive attitudes about future interactions with the helper than they did with cases of cost-benefit or role-based help. As expected, this link was mediated by inferences about the helper's attitudes toward the recipient.

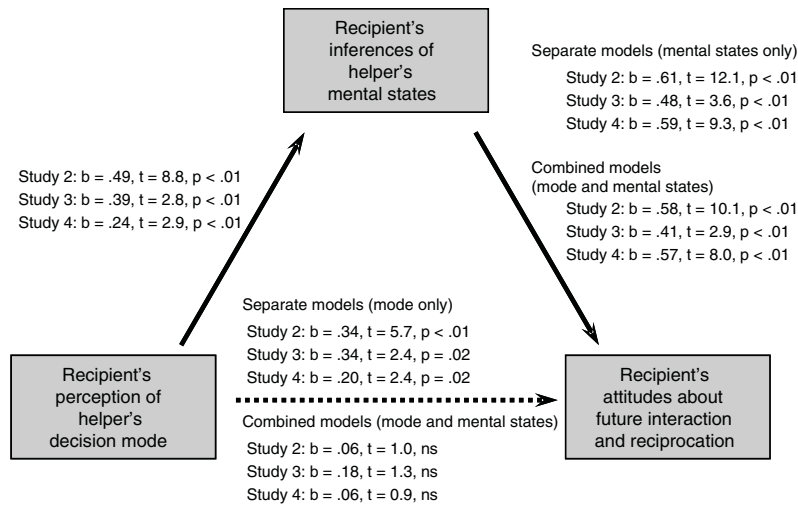


Figure 3 The impact of helper decision modes on interaction attitudes is mediated by mental state inferences (Studies 2, 3, and 4).

### STUDY 3

Thus far, our pattern of results supports our model: Participants have different norms for decision modes for close and distant others, and when they perceive different modes, they diverge in their inferences of helper mental states and their attitudes about future interactions with helpers. Our prediction about the underlying process also has been validated: The effect of apparent decision modes on the recipient's attitudes about future interaction with the helper appears to be mediated by the extent to which the mode signals the helper's underlying attitudes about the recipient.

In Study 3, we sought to identify the limits of these effects by examining a boundary condition: the magnitude of helping. We used a between-subjects design in which participants considered different combinations of magnitude of requests for help and the decision mode in which the request was granted. We predicted that the impact of decision modes would be greatest in episodes featuring small requests for help.

In addition, we expected that the cost-benefit mode would be seen as more fair in the large magnitude condition versus the small magnitude condition. Accordingly, mode would become less diagnostic of helper mental states, but helper mental states would remain predictive of interaction attitudes. Participants in Study 3 also recorded ratings of gratitude, allowing us to check an alternative account in which recipient gratitude accounts for the effect of intuited helper mental states on interaction attitudes.

The order of the dependent measures (inferred helper mental states, interaction attitudes) was counter-balanced to test whether order accounted for the media-

tion pattern in Study 2. In addition, because Studies 1 and 2 showed that the most dramatic contrasts emerged between affect and cost-benefit modes, we focused Study 3 on the differences between these two modes (setting aside "role") to clearly test for boundary effects.

### Method

Forty-nine participants completed Study 3 as part of paid research sessions ( $M_{age} = 20.0, SD = 3.4$ ; 25 men, 24 women). Participants made judgments about two scenarios: one about receiving help in submitting a term paper and one about receiving help while employed as a camp counselor. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four between-subject versions for each scenario: decision mode (affect vs. cost-benefit)  $\times$  helping request size (small vs. large). In constructing the scenarios, we were guided by results of pilot work suggesting that perceivers regard helping on the order of several minutes as "small" and helping involving sustained physical effort and/or lasting several hours or more as "large."

The affect mode, small request version of the term paper scenario read in part as follows:

Imagine that it's the end of the fall term and you've left for the holiday break. Before leaving, you turned in a term paper that's a huge part of your grade in an important class. However, you've just gotten an e-mail from the professor saying that your paper is missing. . . . You remember that one of your roommate's friends, Nick, lives a block away and has a key to the apartment. You've met Nick before but don't know him very well. You call him up and ask if he could grab the paper and take it over, explaining it will take about 5 min. Nick considers how he feels about you and how he feels about the situation you're in. He decides to help.

In the cost-benefit mode version of the scenario, the penultimate sentence read, "Nick carefully considers the costs and benefits of helping you, calculating whether it's worth it for him." In the large request scenario, Nick lived 10 blocks from the apartment and the paper needed to be printed and delivered to the professor's home in a nearby city, with an estimate that "the whole thing might take 3 to 4 hours."

The camp counselor scenario featured a small request scenario in which the participant asked another counselor for help in moving a single inflated raft from a building to the neighboring building, with an estimate that "it will probably take just a minute or two." In the large request scenario, the participant asked another counselor for help in unloading several heavy boxes of inflatable rafts up a hill, with an estimate that "it will probably take most of the day." The decision mode endings were the same as those used in the term paper scenario. Decision mode and helping request size were assigned in a block fashion such that participants always encountered different modes and sizes for the two scenarios.

After reading each scenario, participants rated mental state inferences and interaction attitudes in a counterbalanced order. Mental state inference ratings featured two items ("X likes and cares about me" and "X cares more about his own interests than he does about helping me out") on a 12-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (12). Interaction attitude ratings featured two items ("If I needed help in the future, I would ask X" and "I'd look forward to future interactions with X") on the same scale. Participants also rated how grateful they would feel (on a 12-point scale ranging from *not grateful at all* [1] to *extremely grateful* [12]) and how they would classify the favor in terms of size (on a 12-point scale ranging from *very small/minor* [1] to *very large/major* [12]). Participants also rated the fairness of the decision process, indicating agreement with the statement "X made his decision in a fair way" on a scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (12).

## Results

The mental state inference construct was created as an average of "X likes and cares about me" and the reverse of "X cares more about his own interests than he does about helping me out." The interaction attitude construct was created as an average of "If I needed help in the future, I would ask X" and "I'd look forward to future interactions with X." We did not predict scenario main effects or interaction effects with mode and size. However, a main effect emerged with more positive mental states ascribed to the helper in the term paper scenario than in the camp scenario. No main effect of sce-

nario emerged for interaction attitudes, and no interaction effects emerged. Accordingly, we included scenario as a covariate in our test for the effects of mode and size.

*Impact of mode and size.* An ANOVA showed a marginally significant interaction of size X mode on positive mental states,  $F(1, 94) = 13.0$ ,  $p = .07$ , and a significant interaction of size X mode on interaction attitudes,  $F(1, 94) = 20.1$ ,  $p = .02$ . Focused contrasts revealed the expected effects. For episodes of small help, an affect mode led to higher ratings of mental states (8.21 vs. 6.74,  $t = 2.8$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and higher ratings of interaction attitudes (8.93 vs. 7.68,  $t = 2.4$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than did a cost-benefit mode. However, for episodes of large help, an affect mode did not lead to higher ratings of mental states (8.59 vs. 8.31, *ns*) or higher ratings of interaction attitudes (8.61 vs. 9.22, *ns*).

*Explaining the magnitude boundary.* As expected, although the decision mode contrast did not predict interaction attitudes for large magnitudes of help, inferred helper mental states were predictive of interaction attitudes for both large ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and small ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) helping. Furthermore, the link between decision mode and inferred mental states was not significant for large help ( $r = -.16$ , *ns*), although it was for small help ( $r = .34$ ,  $p = .02$ ). As predicted, cost-benefit decision processes were seen as more fair in the large versus small magnitude condition (9.52 vs. 8.00,  $t = 2.0$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Although perceived helper mental states remained important for recipients' interaction attitudes, cost-benefit mode usage was less diagnostic of those underlying mental states in cases of high magnitude.

*Mediation.* A mediation analysis was conducted with decision mode (affect coded as 1, cost-benefit as 0), inferred helper mental states, and interaction attitudes in small requests. As expected, the effect of helper decision mode on recipient interaction attitudes appeared to be mediated by inferred helper mental states (Figure 3). This pattern appeared in both dependent measure order conditions, casting doubt on a spurious order effect.

*Gratitude.* Not surprisingly, participants' ratings of gratitude were higher in the large versus small magnitude condition (10.32 vs. 9.28,  $t = 2.3$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Gratitude ratings were correlated with both inferred helper mental states ( $r = .45$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and interaction attitudes ( $r = .56$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, in a combined model predicting interaction attitudes, both gratitude (standardized  $\beta = .35$ ,  $t = 2.9$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and mental states (standardized  $\beta = .35$ ,  $t = 3.9$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were separately predictive. This is consistent with our view but casts doubt on an alternative that suggests the impact of inferred helper mental states would be accounted for by the recipient's gratitude.



## Discussion

Consistent with our prior findings and our predictions, a positive affect decision mode led to more positive interaction attitudes than a cost-benefit mode in the case of small levels of helping. As before, this connection appeared to be mediated by inferences about the helper's mental states; this pattern emerged regardless of the order of the dependent measures. Participants' ratings of gratitude also predicted interaction attitudes, but consistent with our view, these ratings did not mediate the effect of inferences about the helper's mental states.

As expected, magnitude of helping limited the impact of decision modes: At high levels of magnitude, differences in evaluations following the apparent use of positive affect and cost-benefit decision modes were minimal. Although decision mode was no longer predictive of interaction attitudes, inferred helper mental states remained highly predictive. This apparent lack of diagnosticity of mode may be explained by the fact that participants saw cost-benefit decision making as a more fair process for large versus small magnitudes of help.

## STUDY 4

By controlling decision mode in Studies 2 and 3, we clarified its causal role in helping recipients' reactions, but the question of whether perceivers naturally recognize these modes and are influenced by them requires additional evidence. Perhaps the most compelling evidence that decision modes matter would come from actual, noncontrived episodes of help and from respondents' unstructured descriptions of them. In Study 4, we collected such data about helping—as well as a measure of actual reciprocation—from both close and distant others. As in Study 1, we sampled university students and working professionals/managers to ensure a wide range of helping episodes. Along with asking for descriptions of specific episodes, we asked our professional respondents to open-endedly tell us how people generally make helping decisions; coding of these responses allowed us to test if the modes we have focused on are indeed viewed as prevalent.

Our prediction was that codings of the unstructured descriptions of actual helping decisions would reveal a pattern of mode usage that paralleled the results of mode norms found in Study 1: Help from close others would be more likely to involve positive affect-based decisions, whereas help from distant others would be more likely to involve cost-benefit and role-based decisions. We also used participants' own subsequent closed-ended ratings of modes to consider how perceived helper decision mode related to inferred helper mental states and attitudes about interacting with the

helper. We predicted that a perceived positive affect mode would positively correlate with interaction attitudes and that this link would be mediated by inferred helper mental states. We also predicted that, as in Study 3, magnitude of helping would limit the negative impact of a cost-benefit decision mode.

Finally, these results allowed us to test a model of interaction attitudes and reciprocation predicted by both inferred helper mental states and amount of help. This afforded a comparison of our model with the alternative accounting model (i.e., "It's not the thought that counts but the help"). Contrary to this alternative, we expected an independent effect of inferred helper mental states beyond the impact of magnitude.

## Method

Eighty-seven participants completed Study 4 as a Web-based survey, including 46 university student participants ( $M$  age = 20.2,  $SD$  = 3.6; 20 men, 26 women) and 41 full-time executive/managerial-level employees ( $M$  age = 34.2,  $SD$  = 5.6; 30 men, 11 women).

**Materials.** Participants recalled and recorded judgments about two episodes of helping: one from a close other and one from a distant other (relationship order was counterbalanced between participants). For the workplace sample, instructions referring to an episode of helping from a close other read as follows: "Think about a recent time in which you asked someone close to you at your workplace, someone you knew well, for help and they did what you asked (not a huge favor, just an ordinary one)." Instructions for the student sample omitted reference to the workplace. Instructions for an episode of helping from a distant other referred to "someone you didn't know very well at the time." For each target, participants answered several open-ended questions. First, they were asked to "briefly describe the help that you asked for" and then to "tell us how you think they decided to do this favor for you. In other words, what process went through their heads. . . . What do you think they felt, considered, or thought about?" These open-ended items were repeated for both the close and distant relationship episodes before participants completed closed-ended ratings about the episodes.

In the closed-ended ratings, participants were prompted to recall each episode in turn and answered the question, "How do you think this person decided to help you?" by rating each of the three decision modes ("by weighing the costs and benefits of helping you" [cost-benefit], "by considering their role (a role other than 'friend') and what they were obliged to do and not do" [role], and "by examining their feelings about you" [affect]) using a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *to a great extent* (7). Participants rated the mental states

**TABLE 2: Study 4: General Helping Decision Modes and Frequency of Mention**

<i>Mode</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Cost-benefit	Helper considers benefit to himself or herself (including future reciprocation) and/or the costs he or she will incur by helping	94%
Positive affect	Helper considers their positive feelings toward the recipient	39%
Role	Helper considers workplace obligations (e.g., recipient is part of my team, favor falls under my area of responsibility)	39%
History	Helper considers whether receiver has helped in the past and/or obligation to reciprocate past help	17%
Altruism	Helper primarily concerned with providing recipient with some benefit	17%
Ability	Helper considers his or her ability to help (noblesse oblige)	11%
Empathy	Helper considers compassion for the recipient's predicament	11%
Legitimacy	Helper considers whether it is appropriate or reasonable for recipient to ask for help	11%
Fear	Helper considers fears about consequences of not helping	8%
Reputation	Helper considers how help would make him or her look better in the eyes of others	6%
Belonging	Helper considers whether the help would allow him or her to feel connected to others	3%

of the helper ("He [she] cares more about himself [herself] than helping other people" and "He [she] cares about me") and their own attitudes about future interactions with the helper ("I'd look forward to future interactions with him [her]" and "I'd be willing to do a favor for him [her] in the future") using a 7-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Participants also rated their actual reciprocation to the helper ("After this episode, did you reciprocate or help this person in return?") on a scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (7).

In addition, our professional/manager respondents were given a general question at the beginning of the survey before they identified specific episodes: "What might go through someone's head when they decide whether or not to lend a coworker a hand? What do they think about? What do they consider?" Participants were told that they were free to describe as many alternatives as they wished. We focused this question on our professional sample because we expected our student sample to have limited experience with organizational role-based helping.

**Coding.** The open-ended responses to the general mode question ("What might go through someone's head . . . ?") were reviewed to identify modes, including those we focus on in this article (e.g., cost-benefit) as well as other modes respondents mentioned (e.g., history, empathy). We developed additional mode categories until all responses were readily categorized into at least one of the modes in our coding scheme. This bottom-up approach yielded 11 different modes, defined as shown in Table 2. One of the authors and a research assistant unaware of the hypotheses coded all responses for consistency with these modes. Responses that had at least some reference to a given mode were coded as "1," whereas those with no reference were coded as "0."

The open-ended mode descriptions for the specific recalled helping episodes were coded for their reference to positive affect, cost-benefit, and role-based decision

making on a scale ranging from *not consistent* (1) to *highly consistent* (3). The affect mode was defined as "decision making that is driven by positive affective reactions to the requester." The cost-benefit mode was defined as "deliberate weighing of potential rewards for the focal individual against potential costs of helping he or she may incur." The role mode was defined as "a decision maker considers his or her duties and obligations in terms of organizational roles." We expected to find role mode usage in the workplace sample but not in the student sample.

### Results

**Coding reliability.** The general mode responses from the professional sample yielded an agreement of 98.7% ( $\kappa = .96$ ). For the recalled episodes, the student sample yielded 39 episodes with close others and 39 episodes with distant others that could be coded. The workplace sample yielded 39 close-other and 40 distant-other episodes. Across all these episodes and all three decision modes, the coders agreed in 80.2% of cases with the three-level coding scheme ( $\kappa = .72$ ; see Table 3 for examples). The remaining analyses rely on the coding values of the research assistant who was unaware of the hypotheses. As expected, the student sample did not reveal any perceived use of organizational roles; accordingly, ratings for role mode usage are set aside for that sample.

**General mode usage.** Our professional participants' responses to the general mode question confirmed our expectations that cost-benefit, positive affect, and role-based decision modes were the most commonly identified ways in which people make helping decisions (Table 2). Ninety-four percent of responses mentioned that some form of cost-benefit thinking might be used in helping decisions. Positive affect and role modes were each mentioned in 39% of responses. The next most prevalent modes were history and altruism at 17% each.

**TABLE 3: Study 4: Examples of Open-Ended Decision Descriptions**

Descriptions coded as highly consistent (3) with affect-based decision making:
“She probably thought, perhaps unconsciously, I like her, I’m happy to help.”
“He felt badly that I have been so busy and stressed with school, work, and family problems.”
Descriptions coded as highly consistent (3) with cost-benefit-based decision making:
“They probably considered the actual cost to themselves—four pieces of paper plus the use of their computer—and weighed it against the benefits—my appreciation and their own self-satisfaction.”
“I would imagine that the person thought about the political implications of helping me on the presentation. In other words, what would be the repercussions of not helping me on the project. The person also likely considered whether he or she would be credited for his or her participation.”
Descriptions coded as highly consistent (3) with role-based decision making:
“Since it was really the person’s job to assist me, he really did not have a choice.”
“They considered my formal position in the organization—I am a company officer.”

*Recalled episodes: Coded mode usage by relationship.* For the mode usage codings of the recalled episodes, an ANOVA confirmed a significant interaction of close/distant relationship and decision mode,  $F(1, 73) = 64.7, p < .01$ . Additional tests confirmed our expectation of no significant main effects or interaction effects of sample (students vs. full-time employed participants), except as already noted with role mode usage. Unless noted otherwise, the remaining analyses collapse across this dimension.

The open-ended coding results were consistent with our predictions. Higher usage of a positive affect mode was found in close relationships (1.99 vs. 1.13,  $t = 8.2, p < .01$ ), whereas higher usage of a cost-benefit mode was found in distant relationships (2.42 vs. 1.69,  $t = 5.3, p < .01$ ). Role mode usage was also higher in distant relationships (2.25 vs. 1.44,  $t = 4.7, p < .01$ ).

*Rated mode usage.* The analyses above suggest that respondents’ unguided descriptions of helper decision processes corresponded to our expectations about positive affect, cost-benefit, and role modes. After the open-ended descriptions were collected, these modes were described to participants, who then rated them for each episode. The participants’ own ratings provide a useful check to see if our codings captured their own interpretations. For all three modes, our codings correlated positively with the participants’ own ratings (affect  $r = .33$ , cost-benefit  $r = .35$ , role  $r = .40$ , all  $ps < .01$ ).

*Mediation.* As in Studies 2 and 3, a mediation analysis was conducted with decision mode (ratings of affect usage), inferred helper mental states (an average of the

“cares about me” item and the reversed “cares more about himself [herself]” item), and interaction attitudes (an average of the willingness-to-reciprocate and looking-forward-to-future-interactions items). As expected, the effect of helper decision mode on recipient interaction attitudes appeared to be mediated by inferred helper mental states (see Figure 3). This same pattern emerged for both the student and workplace samples and for both close and distant helpers.<sup>5</sup> Overall, these results are consistent with our view that perceived mode usage affects interaction attitudes and does so by highlighting underlying helper mental states.

*Magnitude boundary.* In Study 3, we found that an apparent cost-benefit decision mode was less predictive of mental states and interaction attitudes for large amounts of help. In Study 4, we tested to see if this boundary emerged in real-world helping episodes. One of the authors and a research assistant unaware of the hypotheses coded participants’ open-ended descriptions of the episode on a scale ranging from *small/minor* (1) to *large/major* (3). The coders agreed in 80.5% of cases, yielding a kappa of .68. Codings from the research assistant were used in the analysis.

In episodes of low magnitudes of help (those coded as a “1”), we found significant negative correlations between cost-benefit mode usage ratings and both inferred helper mental states ( $r = -.56, p < .01$ ) and attitudes about future interaction with the helper ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ). As expected, in high-magnitude episodes (those coded as “3”), these correlations were not significant ( $ps > .26$ ). As in Study 3, although the correlations with decision mode diminished for high magnitudes of help, the connection between inferred mental states and interaction attitudes remained strong ( $r = .50, p < .05$ ). In short, as magnitude of helping increased, apparent decision modes had less of an impact.

*An accounting model alternative.* An accounting model would predict that magnitude of help itself is directly responsible for interaction attitudes. In contrast, our view is that intuited helper mental states contribute above and beyond any direct effect of magnitude. To test for this, a multiple regression model was run, predicting interaction attitudes with intuited helper mental states and codings of magnitude. To ensure comparability of the two predictors, inferred mental states were subjected to a tertiary split and recoded on a 1 to 3 scale, as with the magnitude measure. In the resulting model, inferred helper mental states were strongly predictive of attitudes about future interaction with the helper (standardized  $\beta = .52, t = 7.6, p < .01$ ). However, magnitude did not predict interaction attitudes (standardized  $\beta = -.01, t = -0.2, ns$ ). This pattern emerged for both workplace and student samples and for both close and distant helpers. It is

also worth noting that in a separate model, magnitude was not predictive of inferred helper mental states (standardized  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t = -0.4$ , *ns*).

Advocates of an accounting view might take issue with interaction attitudes as the relevant outcome measure, arguing instead that reciprocation is the central matter in social exchange. However, using participant's ratings of their reciprocation to helpers, the results remain similar to those above: Helper mental states were significantly predictive of reciprocation to the helper (standardized  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.26$ ,  $p = .03$ ), whereas magnitude was not (standardized  $\beta = .07$ ,  $t = 0.9$ , *ns*).

### Discussion

Reports of real-world episodes of help from close and distant others confirmed our predictions about perceived mode usage and its consequences. Responses to a general question confirmed that positive affect, cost-benefit, and role were the most commonly identified helping decision modes. Open-ended descriptions of specific recalled helping decisions by university students and working professionals/managers were coded for each of these three decision modes, showing that positive affect mode usage was higher for close others, whereas cost-benefit and role-based decisions were more prevalent for distant others. These results parallel the findings about mode norms from Study 1 and confirm that perceivers' unguided descriptions of helping episodes contain judgments about helper decision modes.

Participants' ratings of mode usage also predicted their attitudes about future interactions with the helper. As expected, this relationship was mediated by inferences about the helper's attitudes toward the recipient (e.g., "she [he] cares about me"), replicating the mediation pattern shown in Studies 2 and 3. Furthermore, codings of the magnitude of help allowed us to replicate the boundary condition shown in Study 3: The cost-benefit mode mattered most when levels of help were small.

We also compared our model with an accounting alternative that would predict interaction attitudes with magnitude rather than inferred helper mental states. Our results showed the opposite: a significant effect of inferred mental states but not of magnitude. This same pattern also emerged in a combined model of actual reciprocation, casting doubt on an alternative magnitude-centric accounting model.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

In our view, recipients of help do not stop with the questions "Did I get help?" and "How much did it benefit me and cost them?" Instead, we suggest that recipients also are concerned with the questions of "How did the person who helped me decide to do so?" and "What are

their attitudes about me and what is the nature of our relationship?" Thus, we often pay close attention to whether others decide to help from the heart (affect), from the head (cost-benefit), or by the book (roles). Across four empirical studies—including both student and working professional samples, both experimentally manipulated as well as real-world helping episodes, and both open-ended and closed-ended responses—we found evidence that recipients identify these as the most common helping decision modes and judge helpers according to how they appear to use them. As predicted, we generally found that recipients have more positive attitudes about future interactions with people who decide to help them on the basis of positive affect compared with cost-benefit and role modes. Those perceived as "helping from the heart" were seen as more worthy of reciprocal helping and future interaction. As expected, inferences of the helper's underlying mental states ("she [he] cares about me") mediated this link; in other words, modes matter because they can signal the nature of the relationship.

Importantly, magnitude of helping places a boundary on some of these effects: The impact of decision mode was strongest when the amount of helping was comparatively small. Specifically, cost-benefit rather than affect-based decision making yielded less positive assumed helper mental states and interaction attitudes for small magnitudes of help, but this gap disappeared for large magnitudes of help. Cost-benefit decisions were viewed as increasingly fair for large magnitude decisions and thus did not necessarily signal a lack of affection.

### Contrasts With Other Models

In contrast to accounting models that focus solely on costs and benefits, we have found substantial effects of perceived mental states. Indeed, in Study 4, we gathered reports of more than 150 real-world episodes of help and found that interaction attitudes and reciprocation were strongly predicted by perceived helper mental states but not by the magnitude of help. Our respondents did not appear to be simple "folk social exchange theorists." Instead, they expected helping decisions to be made differently depending on the nature of the relationship with the helper; their judgments of helpers—as well as their willingness to reciprocate—varied accordingly. The fact that peoples' intentions about their own future, reciprocal helping behavior were substantially influenced by their historical, relational evaluations of past helpers (e.g., "she [he] helped me because she [he] likes me") suggest that egoistic and purely consequentialistic models of prosocial behavior that rely only on aversive indebtedness (e.g., "I have to pay her [him] back") and/or forward-looking calculativeness (e.g., "it's in my



interest to reciprocate/help her [him]”) are incomplete (cf. Batson, 1998).

Our results also cast doubt on the role of gratitude as a mediator of inferred helper mental states. Participants' ratings of gratitude did appear to have a meaningful role in Study 3 (significantly predicting interaction attitudes) but did not account for the effects of inferred mental states.

Our work calls for the identification of boundary conditions in models of helping perceptions. Although prior work has noted that perceived mental states have an effect on evaluations of helpers (e.g., Tesser et al., 1968), we found that this effect unfolds differently for large versus small amounts of helping. Furthermore, our examination of the differences between perceptions of close others and distant others in helping episodes shows that relationship may serve as an important boundary. These and other boundaries deserve further consideration by investigators seeking to reveal the “rules” of helping and perceptions of helpers.

#### *Related Questions and Future Directions*

Our results raise a number of important questions. At a broad level, we believe that these findings should draw the attention of helping researchers to recipients' reactions to help. More specifically, our work raises a number of questions about cues, relational goals, and other topics.

*Cues to modes and mental states.* In Study 4, we found that recipients of help were able to recall and describe the apparent decision modes of helpers, which raises the crucial question of “how?” As an exploratory step, we asked participants to tell us about “what tipped them off” to how the helper made his or her decision. Cost-benefit decision descriptions often involved cues of hesitation, such as “She hesitated before saying it was OK” and “This person did consider the request briefly before consenting, so I assume they were pondering whether it was a worthwhile move since they would get only a small benefit.” Nonverbal behaviors (“He sighed when I asked for his help”) and affective displays (“Her facial expression showed that she was torn between helping me and doing her homework,” “He seemed reluctant because his brow furrowed and he looked at his watch”) were cited as well. Speed and nonverbal behaviors were also cues for affect-based decisions (“Her immediate response tipped me off—absolutely no problem,” “It was the way she responded, ‘Oh, sure’ without any hesitation”). Future research could fruitfully explore how particular cues such as these are used as signals for decision modes and underlying mental states.

*Relational goals.* Although we suggest that, in most cases, people seek affiliation with and affection from

those around them, relational goals sometimes point in other directions (we thank one of our reviewers for making this observation). For instance, a temporary employee who dreads attachments may actually prefer to interact with coworkers on the basis of role or cost-benefit thinking. Likewise, a young female worker may react negatively to help offered with affection by the office creep. Some exploratory analyses of our data in Study 4 confirm this notion. We coded our managerial participants' descriptions of their relationship to the helper into peer, subordinate, and superior groups. In cases where the helper was the respondent's peer or superior, cost-benefit thinking was negatively associated with interaction attitudes, but when the helper was the respondent's subordinate, cost-benefit thinking was somewhat positively associated with interaction attitudes. Moreover, perceived mental states were strongly positively related to interaction attitudes for peers/superiors but not for subordinates. This suggests that the logic of these relationships may differ: Many managers may not have the goal of securing the affection of their subordinates and may instead prefer that subordinates avoid affect-based thinking in their helping decisions. Additional work on how relational goals qualify the effects described here would be worthwhile.

*Emotional valence and specific affect.* Although our work focused on a general, positive affect-based decision mode, helping episodes sometimes involve negative affect, including specific emotions such as fear or sadness. An exploratory review of the open-ended descriptions in Study 4 found that guilt, fear, sadness, and/or pity emerged in less than 10% of cases. Coding and analyses revealed one significant effect: Fear negatively predicted inferred mental states and interaction attitudes. Thus, fear-based helping is somewhat rare but does not endear helpers to recipients.

We believe our results on affect are noteworthy but acknowledge that the experience and perception of affect in helping episodes is likely complex. One view worth consideration is a balance theory approach: A recipient has negative feelings about his or her dilemma and a helper has positive feelings about the recipient and negative feelings about the dilemma. In this view, the more positively a helper feels about the recipient, the more negatively she or he will feel about the dilemma; and the more negatively she or he feels about the dilemma, the more positively she or he will feel about the recipient. Our initial work in this article could be integrated with work on empathy to better understand these feelings and mutual perceptions.

#### *Conclusion*

In sum, we have framed helping episodes not so much as transactions in which efforts and rewards accrue but as

social interactions that can signal the nature of relationships and underlying attitudes. Helping does occur between strangers, but we suspect it most frequently occurs in the context of developing and ongoing relationships, in an unfolding stream of requests and prosocial behaviors. In this way, helping is viewed by recipients not only through the lens of the existing relationship but as indicative of the relationship's direction. This contextualized, relational view of helping suggests that if we as scholars want to better understand the important question of "who helps, when, and why," we need to more completely understand how recipients themselves answer the question, "who has helped me . . . and how did they decide to do so?"

## NOTES

1. In this article, by "perceptions of mental states" or "mental state inferences," we mean the assumptions a recipient of help makes about a helper's desires, goals, and intentions, such as the motives underlying the act of helping and the attitudes of the helper toward the recipient (e.g., "she [he] cares about me").

2. Different decision modes likely involve different processing systems (e.g., Weber, 2001) and thus may run in parallel, albeit at different speeds. Thus, we acknowledge that multiple modes may often (perhaps even always) be operating and that recipients of help may, correctly or not, assume helpers are using multiple modes. For the present article, however, we sought to simplify our claims and research by treating modes as independent and assuming perceivers will often identify a single dominant mode used by helpers.

3. We wish to stress how the concepts of perceived decision modes and inferred mental states differ. Perceived decision modes are assumptions about the process by which a help/don't help decision was reached (e.g., weighing costs against benefits or checking whether one's obligations include the requested act of help); they are judgments about the specific act of deciding. Mental state inferences, meanwhile, are assumptions about ongoing states of the helper (e.g., "she [he] doesn't really care about me"); they are judgments about the general goals and attitudes of the helper toward the recipient. We believe that these ongoing states affect people's implicit choice of decision process and that perceivers reason backward, inferring ongoing states from cues about decision processes.

4. All *p* values reported throughout are two-tailed.

5. To confirm that these effects were not specific to a particular type of help, we coded descriptions of the favor act into three types of help: information, goods, and services (Foa & Foa, 1980). An uninformed research assistant's coding had perfect agreement with one of the authors' coding. All effects, including the impact of mode on inferred helper mental states and the recipients' interaction attitudes, emerged similarly in all three categories.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, J. S. (1965). Inequity in social exchange. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 267-299). New York: Academic Press.
- Ames, D. R. (2003). *Mental state inference in person perception: Everyday solutions to the problem of other minds*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Batson, C. D. (1998). Altruism and prosocial behavior. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 282-316). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Berkowitz, L. (1972). Social norms, feelings and other factors affecting helping and altruism. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 6). New York: Academic Press.
- Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. H. (1978). *Interpersonal attraction*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Blau, P. M. (1964). *Exchange and power in social life*. New York: John Wiley.
- Clark, M. S. (1991). *Prosocial behavior*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Clark, M. S., Mills, J., & Corcoran, D. M. (1989). Keeping track of needs and inputs of friends and strangers. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 15(4), 533-542.
- Fiske, A. P. (1991). *Structures of social life*. New York: Free Press.
- Flynn, F. J. (2003). What have you done for me lately? Temporal changes in subjective favor evaluations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 91, 38-50.
- Flynn, F. J., & Brockner, J. (2003). Its different to give than to receive: Asymmetric reactions of givers and receivers to favor exchange. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 1-13.
- Foa, E., & Foa, U. G. (1980). Resource theory: Interpersonal behavior as exchange. In K. Gergen, M. Greenberg, & R. Willis (Eds.), *Social exchange: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 215-237). New York: Plenum.
- Gergen, K. J., Ellsworth, P., Maslach, C., & Seipel, M. (1975). Obligations, donor resources, and reactions to aid in three cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 390-400.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Encounters*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 161-179.
- Greenberg, J. (1983). Equity and equality as clues to the relationship between exchange participants. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 13, 195-196.
- Greenberg, M. S., & Frisch, D. M. (1972). Effect of intentionality on willingness to reciprocate a favor. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 8, 99-111.
- Jones, E. E. (1964). *Ingratiation: A social psychological analysis*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Kelley, H. H., & Thibaut, J. W. (1978). *Interpersonal relations: A theory of interdependence*. New York: John Wiley.
- Latane, B., & Darley, J. M. (1970). *The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help?* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Lickel, B., Hamilton, D. L., & Sherman, S. J. (2001). Elements of a lay theory of groups: Types of groups, relational styles, and the perception of group entitativity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5, 129-140.
- Lydon, J. E., Jamieson, D. W., & Holmes, J. G. (1997). The meaning of social interactions in the transition from acquaintanceship to friendship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 536-548.
- McCullough, M. E., Kilpatrick, S. D., Emmons, R. A., & Larson, D. B. (2001). Is gratitude a moral affect? *Psychological Bulletin*, 127, 249-266.
- Morris, M. W., Podolny, J. M., & Ariel, S. (2000). Missing relations: Incorporating relational constructs into models of culture. In P. C. Earley & H. Singh (Eds.), *Innovations in international and cross-cultural management* (pp. 52-90). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pruitt, D. G. (1968). Reciprocity and credit building in a laboratory dyad. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8, 143-147.
- Schopler, J., & Thompson, V. D. (1968). Role of attribution processes in mediating amount of reciprocity for a favor. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 10, 243-250.
- Tesser, A., Gatewood, R., & Driver, M. (1968). Some determinants of gratitude. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9, 233-236.
- Walster, E., Walster, W., & Berscheid, E. (1978). *Equity: Theory and research*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Weber, E. U. (1998). *From Shakespeare to Spielberg: Predicting selection among modes of decision making*. Presidential address, annual meeting of the Society for Judgment and Decision Making, Dallas, TX.
- Weber, E. U. (2001). "How do I choose thee? Let me count the ways": A functional analysis of different modes of decision making. Invited address, biannual meeting of the Society for Probability, Utility, and Decision Making, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Received July 9, 2002

Revision accepted June 18, 2003