Effects of Threats to Self-Esteem and Goal Orientation on Asking for Help

by

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Abstract

This paper studied whether threats to self-esteem and goal orientation affected an individual's propensity to ask for help. Eighty-two undergraduate students from the University of Waterloo completed a self-esteem and goal orientation questionnaire in addition to completing two tests. One test was designed to be more self-relevant than the other, making that test more potentially threatening to an individual's self-esteem. In each test, subjects were given the opportunity to ask for help on each question. The results show that the use of social comparison motivates individuals to engage in self-protection by reducing their willingness to ask for help. In situations where many others had asked for help, help seeking behavior increased. These results extend other research in showing the impact of social comparison on individual behaviour.

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Introduction

When an employee is uncertain regarding their abilities to complete a specified task, they have the option of asking for help. Asking for help is potentially seen as a deficiency and can negatively impact the worker's current internal and external impressions, more importantly, it has the potential to damage self-esteem. Due to this potential risk, employees may deviate from doing what is right for the organization and put their personal esteem concerns first. Specifically speaking, in instances where asking for help is appropriate, an employee may not do so and attempt to the complete the task without the assistance of his/her supervisor.

Consider the following story: Kai is a student working for a painting company. One day, Kai's boss asks him to paint the trimming on the side of a house that they are currently working on. With the little experience he has had with painting he performs the job. Upon completion, Kai's boss becomes upset after looking at the final product because he used a one colour scheme when he should have used a two colour scheme. Why might Kai's boss be upset? What prevented Kai from asking for further instruction? What could have been done to prevent such outcomes? Think back to the first job that you ever had as a young child or adult. Did you ever encounter a situation where you were unsure as to how to complete a specific task and was hesitant to ask your supervisor for instruction? And in those instances, did you try to attempt the task only to realize, with the reactions of your supervisor, that it had been performed incorrectly? This paper attempts to explain the answers to such questions.

This paper calls such a phenomenon "Asking for Help Aversion" (AFHA). AFHA does not include seeking help from other sources such as the internet, books, or other forms of media. This phenomenon occurs in the workplace between employees and their supervisors. Conceptually, a manager will make a request to an employee to perform a task and the employee will respond and perform that task. The hopeful outcome of the request is that the employee performs the task successfully and meets the appropriate deadlines. However, employees make errors which could be explained by a number of reasons, one of which is the fact that they might not have the knowledge to perform the task when they could have proactively asked their supervisors for help. Such errors, if corrected, can increase organizational effectiveness and productivity.

An employee can either possess or not possess the requisite knowledge to complete the task. This paper focuses only on the latter case, as that is when not asking for help is problematic. The employee then must decide whether or not to ask for help. Ideally, if people realize they do not know how to perform a task, they would ask for help. However, they might not know that they do not know or they may realize that they do not know but for some reason choose not to ask for help. The focus of this paper is on when an employee does not have the requisite skills, and decides not to seek assistance.

The failure to ask for help when needed could lead to errors and wasted resources. As in the example above, if Kai had asked for help, he would not have wasted his own time, the company's money in paying him to complete that task, the paint used and the time that it will take to correct the errors. AFHA hinders an organization's ability to operate at maximum efficiency, that is to say, producing proper output while minimizing costs and error. Studying the causes of this phenomenon may enable organizations and

people to develop processes and/or resources to overcome AFHA and increase a company's overall productivity.

While there may be many psychological reasons behind AFHA, this paper will discuss Impression Management (Goffman, 1959; Ashford and Cummings, 1983; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Ashford, 1986; Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1991), Self-Esteem Maintenance (Kunda, 1990; Schlenker & Weigold, 1989) and Overconfidence (Lichtenstein et al., 1982; Russo and Schoemaker, 1992; Gigerenzer et. al, 1991; Juslin, 1993). Both impression management and self-esteem maintenance can be used as possible explanations in the case where the individual knows that they do not know how to complete the task. Likewise, overconfidence can be used to explain the case where the individual lacks metaknowledge and does not know that they do not have the skills to complete the task. This study will focus on how self-esteem concerns drives the willingness of people to ask for help.

Causes of Aversion to Asking for Help

In either of the cases described above, there exists an ideal outcome or "proper" response, that is, one that puts the organization's interests first, ensuring maximum productivity and effectiveness. The research presented in this paper will focus specifically on the case where the employee understands the task and knows that they do not know how to complete the task successfully. This paper will analyze the situation where individuals know that they do not have the skills to perform the task.

Before outlining the possible explanations for AFHA it is important to understand the two primary factors that influence an employee's decision to ask for help: their Meta-

knowledge of their skills and whether their actual Skill Set meets the requirement of the task. Meta-knowledge or Metacognition is defined as the ability to anticipate or recognize accuracy and error (Metcalfe & Shimamura, 1994), that is to say, it is the manifestation of knowledge on knowledge. It is what one knows about his/her knowledge limits.

The lack of metaknowledge forms the foundation for why individuals are overconfident. Confidence arises from the certainty of one's knowledge of a particular subject. This is better known as Metaknowledge, the manifestation of knowledge about knowledge. Russo (1992) defines it as "…an appreciation of what we do know and what we do not know." We as people make decisions based on information about our environments, more importantly, we make decisions based on our information about information about our environments. A sound decision is made when we realize the limits of our knowledge and act appropriately. For example, in the context of the present research, when an employee is asked to perform a task and their metaknowledge reveals to them the fact that they do not have the skills to complete the task, they should act in a manner which provides them with the knowledge to complete the task, one of which would be to ask for help.

Overconfidence occurs for a variety of reasons, one of which is when our knowledge about our limits is inaccurate, thereby leading to poor decision making. More specifically, overconfidence is an overestimation of one's skills. Within the context of AFHA, it is possible that individuals are overestimating their skills and therefore convinced that they possess the knowledge to follow through with the task and not require any assistance. It has also been found that overconfidence occurs in situations where the task is perceived as difficult. Experiments designed to study overconfidence

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typically involves asking a series of questions to subjects and asking for their prediction of the accuracy of their response (Lichtenstein et al., 1982; Russo and Schoemaker, 1992; Gigerenzer et. al, 1991; Juslin, 1993). Studies have shown that the difficulty of the questions affected the accuracy prediction of subjects. That is to say, that overconfidence occurred more frequently when the questions were harder (i.e. low accuracy) than when they were easier (i.e. high accuracy) (Ferrell, 1994; Suantak, Bolger, & Ferrell, 1996). In our above example, Kai may not have asked for help because he was convinced, based on his metaknowledge, that he knew how to paint the trim, when in reality, he did not, and over estimated his painting skills. Kai may have also perceived the task to be challenging which could have resulted in his overconfidence in this particular scenario.

Apart from the lack of metaknowledge and the difficulty of questions, there are other causes and explanations for overconfidence. There exist a series of decision making biases that could explain the motivations for overconfidence. One such bias is confirmation bias. Klayman (1995), a leading researcher in this field, states that confirmation bias is when an individual seeks, deliberately or not, information that confirms their current beliefs about something. For example, if I believed that birds only flew on sunny days, then for every time I saw a flying bird on a sunny day I would use that as evidence to confirm my beliefs despite the invalidity of my belief. In the context of this example, I may be overconfident in this belief and any confirmatory evidence encourages me to remain overconfident.

In relation to the AFH example, Kai may perceive himself as being able to take on any task regardless of its difficulty. For the tasks that Kai completed successfully without asking for help, such tasks could have served as confirmatory evidence for Kai.

Moreover, the recollection of the times where Kai successfully completed tasks versus times where he did not successfully complete a task leads to an availability bias. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) argue that availability bias occurs when individuals recall events based on the availability of the instances and the ease at which they can be recalled in order to make judgments in their decision making. The definition also covers the fact that the recollection of such events appears to be more numerous despite the fact that there are other events that can be potentially recalled, with equal frequency. Availability bias potentially impacts an individual's overconfidence. For example, if the frequency of the times that Kai completed a task successfully was equal to the number of times that he could not complete a task successfully and Kai recalled only events where he completed such tasks properly, not only is this an availability bias, but could also lead to his overconfidence. Kahneman and Tversky (1974) state that humans are inclined to recall events that are more vivid and recent. Since Kai recalls recent instances where he successfully completed tasks without asking for help, that would naturally lead him to believe that he could paint the trim. In such an instance, Kai has not accurately evaluated his skills and is basing his decision to not ask for help on similar past events ultimately leading to his overconfidence.

Creating good first impressions is the key to almost any positive work experience. The act of creating such impressions is called Impression Management (IM). The roots of impression management can be traced back to Goffman's (1959) book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* According to Goffman (1959), there are "actors" and "performers" on the stage of life where individuals are determined to play out their desired scenario. Bozeman and Kacmar (1997, p. 25) state that "impression management

occurs because an actor has a goal of creating and maintaining a specific identity". By successfully establishing such an identity, individuals can then be seen as their desired image, in other words, an impression that is highly favoured by their audience.

The process of impression management involves two primary stages (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), Impression Motivation and Impression Construction. Essentially, impression motivation is the degree to which one is motivated to manage a certain impression to another. Impression construction, on the other hand, involves not only the kind of impressions that people try to construct but how they go about they will go about doing so (such as deciding whether to do it via non-verbal behaviour). Ashford and Cummings (1983) in their research on feedback seeking behaviour identified impression management as one of the motives for seeking feedback. They identified the fact that the process of seeking feedback was not rational since there would be conflicting motivations for seeking valuable and truthful feedback, while attempting to maintain a positive impression. The same type of conflict is believed to exist in this phenomenon. On one end, the individual is attempting to maintain a specific impression while attempting to perform their job correctly and efficiently. Asking for help brings up the possibility of being judged and becoming negatively evaluated and as such, may deter people from doing so, a similar side effect shown to exist in a person's adversity to seek feedback (Ashford, 1986). Impression management has been clearly proven to explain certain anomalies in human behaviour and can be said to potentially affect an individual's propensity to ask for help.

IM is not new to organizational literature; in fact, it has great implications for the workplace in that it has the potential to both positively and negatively impact

organizational effectiveness (Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1991). With respect to AFHA, an individual may have an adversity to ask for help simply because they want to be seen as a competent individual to their supervisors. In relation to the above example, perhaps Kai thought that painting was a simple task and that "anyone can paint". Therefore, by asking his boss for instruction, it might imply that he is unable to complete simple tasks that anyone can do and would therefore negatively impact his boss' impression of him.

Self-esteem Maintenance is another potential cause of AFHA. Self-esteem maintenance manages the internal perception of the self. Self-esteem maintenance includes any of the processes that maintain or promote the maintenance of high or low self-esteem (e.g. cognitive dissonance or self-affirmation). Research has shown the impact of the self-esteem of employees on an organization's productivity. Pierce et al. (2004) have aptly named it Organization-based Self-esteem (OBSE). That is "the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member." (p. 593). Therefore, self-esteem in the workplace is a significant variable in the outcome of organization effectiveness.

The importance of self-esteem maintenance

The self is driven by two primary sets of motives; self-knowledge and self-enhancement (Kunda, 1990; Schlenker & Weigold, 1989). Self-knowledge is concerned with how an individual sees themselves, their traits, abilities and desires. The need for self-knowledge is still unclear but has been shown to be driven by concepts such as uncertainty reduction (Trope, 1986) and the ability to predict or control one's environments. Self-enhancement, on the other hand, involves the desire to elicit positive

feedback from others about the self. The need for self-improvement is presumably believed to be rooted in the fact that as humans, we seek pleasure and avoid pain (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). That being said, self-improvement is motivated by an individual's desire to bring their self closer to an ideal image (Higgins 1987; Taylor & Lobel, 1989). Pleasure arises when we believe that we have successfully brought our self closer to such an ideal image and pain arises when we feel as though we have been somehow set back. In order to prevent such set backs, we engage in self-protection, an avoidance of feared selves. An example of a feared self could be one that is incompetent, immoral and lacking in integrity. In the context of this research, asking for help can be construed as a sign of incompetence in the eyes of the asker. As such, the reluctance to ask for help could be motivated by either self-enhancement or self-protection. If an individual were to not ask for help and successfully complete the task, this would most surely enhance the self and bring them closer to their ideal image of being a competent employee. Similarly, not asking for help can also be a self-protective act. That is to say, that by not asking for help, one prevents themselves from admitting that they do not know how to do it and that they are not incompetent individuals.

The research presented in this paper will focus on the effects of self-esteem maintenance on one's propensity to ask for help. Self-esteem maintenance was chosen not only because of the ease through which self-esteem could be measured, but also because it is often overlooked when studying the impact of self-esteem on organizational effectiveness. The results of this study may motivate further research as well as draw specific implications for organizational behaviour.

A vital construct of the self is Self-esteem, defined as "the positivity of the person's evaluation of self." (Gilbert et. al, 1998, p. 694). In evaluating one's self, one establishes what is known as a self-concept. Self-concept is defined as a cognitive schema which is organized via abstract and concrete memories and experiences about the self. As such, this controls the processing of self-relevant information (Campbell, 1990). It is the beliefs of one's attributes, essentially what is seen in terms of abilities, skills, etc. Therefore, an individual who possess high self-esteem, is one who holds their self-concept with great valence and acceptance and vice versa for an individual who possesses low self-esteem. Moreover, in order to preserve certain levels of self-esteem, individuals will engage in self-esteem maintenance. Baumeister (1993) proved that once established, that esteem levels tend to remain the same and goes on to discuss the various mechanisms utilized by individuals to maintain their esteem levels. His research explained the negative consequences of high self-esteem under situations where the ego was threatened. When the subjects in his experiment were subjected to ego threats, he found that individuals with high self-esteem would set risky and unrealistic goals as a mechanism to maintain their levels of esteem. The research ultimately led to results which indicated the dangers of egotistical illusions in self-regulation behaviour essentially implying that such behaviours can lead to failure if such goals are unrealistic.

Self-esteem maintenance is not a new concept and much research has been done using self-esteem maintenance as a means to explain certain behaviours. Previous research has shown that expectancies regarding success and failure influence students' attributions in achievement settings. Students who attributed poor performance to external factors, did so to maintain their high levels of self-esteem (Griffin et al, 1992).

Additional research has shown the existence of self-esteem maintenance mechanisms used by high esteem individuals to maintain their level of self-esteem (Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988). High self-esteem individuals have been shown to rationalize esteem-threatening decisions much better than those with low self-esteem (Steele et. al, 1993). This is primarily due to the fact that high self-esteem individuals have more favourable self-concepts with which to affirm. Other research demonstrated the use of self-esteem maintenance following a failure experience (Yagi & Shimizu, 1996). The research showed that people whose self-esteem is threatened use helping behaviour to restore self-esteem. In their two stage experiment, subjects who were given bogus failing scores for their intelligence test from the first stage were asked to help an individual who was unaware of their failing grade in the second stage. Only participants who were given failing scores were helpful. Within the context of organizations, self-esteem maintenance plays a role in human behaviour. Pierce et al. (2004) concluded that, self-esteem, both global and organization-based (Pierce et al., 1989) drives an individual's direction and motivation of human behaviour, particularly, self-esteem maintenance.

An individual's propensity to engage in self-esteem maintenance is primarily driven by one's desired image. Each individual conceptualizes a desired image – someone who possesses all the traits held in high regard by that individual. If a gap exists between one's self-concept and desired image and certain actions will be taken to bring an individual closer to that desired image. However, if the outcome of certain scenarios leads to a larger gap between the self-concept and desired image, then an individual will have a high propensity to engage in self-esteem maintenance. In this case, 'scenario' is as an event or series of events that lead to an increase or decrease in an individual's self-

esteem. So, scenarios leading to an increase in the size of the gap are defined as threats to self-esteem. Essentially, the higher the valence of one's self-concept the closer it resembles one's desired image. Individuals, regardless of self-esteem, hold desired images. However, high self-esteem individuals tend to have self-concepts that are perceived to be closer to that desired image, making it easier for them to affirm the self. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem tend to have a larger perceived gap between their self-concept and desired image. In essence, the perceived gap determines whether an individual has either high or low self-esteem.

An individual's self-esteem is threatened if the outcome of the scenario results in an increase in the size of the gap. Given a scenario, an individual will see it as threatening, if it has the potential to damage their self-image and/or self-esteem or hinder them from achieving their goals. For example, Steele et al. (1993) discovered that individuals generally seek self-images that represent one who possesses moral and adaptive adequacy. Therefore, individuals who desire to possess this image, will engage in activities that bring their self-concept closer to that desired image, for example, donating money to the poor or speaking out against human rights violations. Such scenarios will bring the individual closer to that desired image. However, events that point out immoralities in these individuals will bring their self-concept further away from their desired image. Therefore, individuals with high self-esteem are constantly striving to close the gap between their desired image and self-concept while at the same time, preventing it from broadening. In contrast, individuals with low self-esteem, since they are fully aware of the perceived size of the gap, strive to prevent it from broadening as they do not see themselves in adequate positions to close the gap. Research has shown

that individuals with low self-esteem eventually become resistant to positive feedback so that they can maintain their low self-esteem (Josephs et al. 1992).

Self-esteem threat can be created in various social situations, one of which involves social comparison. Festinger (1954) initially brought up the idea stating that individuals are motivated to compare themselves to others in certain social situations. Generally speaking, social comparison involves the comparison of others who are worse off (i.e. downward comparison) or better off (i.e. upward comparison). In either case, social comparisons are made due to underlying motives such as self-improvement, self-enhancement or self-protection. For example, individuals motivated by self-enhancement motives tend to make downward social comparisons (Greenberg, Laprelle & Pyszczynski, 1985; Taylor, Wood, & Lichtman, 1983). A significant amount of research has shown that self-evaluations are more positive when one has compared themselves as being better off than others (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Diener, 1984; Gibbons, 1986; Hakmiller, 1966; Morse & Gergen, 1970). This implies that social comparisons can be used as a self-esteem maintenance mechanism. By comparing oneself to others who are perceived to be worse off, this increases the value of the self by having higher self-evaluations. Such evaluations can be said to be downward comparisons. Research has shown that such comparisons are used as strategies for self-enhancement (Hakmiller, 1966; Tesser, 1988; Thornton & Arrowood, 1966). Therefore, it is clear that social comparison can be used to explain behaviours of the self in certain social situations. In the context of the research, social comparison can serve as a potential threat to individuals. For example, if a new employee is asked to perform a task that he/she does not know how to do and their supervisor states that the majority of new employees are

able to complete this task correctly without any help, this preemptive social comparison creates an esteem threat. The employee, in this case, is in a worse off situation than the majority since they are unable to perform the task correctly with great certainty and potentially leads to negative feelings of self-worth. As a result, the employee is in a situation whereby if they ask for help, they are not as "good" as the majority. In such a scenario, an individual is less likely to ask for help.

Scenarios that either bring an individual's self-concept closer or further away from their desired image is said to be self-relevant. The definition of self-relevance is the assessment that one is personally involved in any given situation and that the outcome has implications for the self, in particular, the self-concept and its distance from the desired image. The outcome of a situation could have implications for the self, if, for example, the situation required an individual to respond to queries in their knowledge domains. For example, a university calculus professor should be able to answer queries concerning advanced calculus. In such a scenario, if the professor is unable to answer such queries, it would question his qualifications as a professor and could lead to negative feelings of self-worth. On the other hand, if the same professor was asked to answer queries concerning poetry and was unable to do so, this would not question his qualifications as a calculus professor since it is not within his/her knowledge domain and hence, not self-relevant, unless of course, if the professor had a hidden passion for poetry.

Self-Enhancement vs. Self-Protection

There are two motivations for engaging in self-esteem maintenance; Self-enhancement, i.e. performing an action that brings their self-concept closer to their

desired image, and Self-protection, i.e. an action that defends against the loss of self-esteem or detracts from one's self-concept, in other words, defends against an increase in the size of the gap.

There are essentially two main conclusions regarding self-esteem maintenance. The behaviours of individuals with either low or high self-esteem were found to behave differently under threatening circumstances by either engaging in self-protective or self-enhancing behaviours. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to engage in self-enhancing behaviours when under threatening scenarios (Baumeister et al., 1993). On the other hand, Baumgardner et al. (1990) have determined that a high esteem individual is likely to engage in self-protective behaviour since he/she holds their positive self-conceptions with high valence. That is to say, that high self-esteem individuals are comfortable and confident with themselves and do not need to affirm this belief. These contrasting theories regarding self-esteem maintenance hold one thing in common (Banaji and Prentice, 1994), and that is the positivity with which one holds their self-conception.

Individuals will seek to maintain or enhance their self-conception if the outcome of a scenario implicates certain aspects of the self-concept. A situation that is of high threat, can therefore be defined as a situation that directly questions or challenges one's self concept. Under high threat scenarios, individuals with high self-esteem will seek to enhance their self-conceptions to bring them closer to their desired image. On the other hand, under high threat scenarios, individuals with low self-esteem will seek self-protective measures in order to avoid a feared self-image.

In the particular case that we are examining, we are interested in the desired image and its relationship to an individual's motivation to ask for help. If a positive

outcome of the situation aligns itself well with an individual's desired image, this would imply a specific risk or threat. For example, suppose that someone wants to be seen as a great mathematician. If the task that is asked of them involves difficult math there is a greater risk to his or her image (since he or she wants to be considered a mathematician) and hence a threat. In such a case, a person with high self-esteem , would take on the task without asking for help as the optimal situation for him or her is for him to solve the math on his or her own. However, if the problem were to involve poetry the relevancy of the task would be low, because it is not math related nor is it in their knowledge domain and as a result he or she may ask for help. In this case there is little threat to his or her desired image and so he will most likely ask for help (Baumgardner et al., 1990). In this case, people with high self-esteem do not need to assert to others that they are good in order to have positive self-regard (Baumgardner et al., 1990).

A high self-esteem individual will seek self-enhancing behaviours in high threat situations Baumeister et al. (1993). Therefore, this could imply that high self-esteem individuals would not ask for help (assuming they knew that they needed help) in order to enhance their self-concept. On the other hand, low self-esteem individuals will seek self-protecting behaviours. Therefore, regardless of the fact that asking for help is seen as a deficiency, an individual with low self-esteem would ask for help since the increase in the size of the gap between their desired image and self-concept is at risk. One might point out that since asking for help is a deficiency should that not also increase the size of the gap? The answer is yes, however, the increase of the size of the gap when asking for help is theoretically smaller in magnitude compared to a situation where an individual performs a task incorrectly and does not ask for help. This can be attributed to the fact

that if a task is performed incorrectly, there is a feedback element, an external source of the affirmation of one's incompetence. For example, in an organizational context, if I am asked to perform a task that I know that I do not know how to do and I attempt it without asking for help, my supervisor would likely be unhappy with the results and affirm, to me, my incompetence since I did not ask for help to begin with. In asking for help, however, there is no external affirmation of one's incompetence and it is argued here, that such affirmations are strictly internal.

> Hypothesis 1: When faced with a threatening scenario, high self-esteem individuals are less likely to ask for help than low self-esteem individuals.

Baumgardner et al. (1990) on the other hand, claims that high self-esteem will not concern themselves with self-enhancing strategies since they are comfortable with their self-conceptions. As such, regardless of the fact that asking for help is seen as a deficiency, a high self-esteem individual has no interest in asserting their self-conceptions and will therefore not ask for help. However, the same cannot be said for individuals with low self-esteem. The main reason behind that is the fact that individuals with low self-esteem are not comfortable with their self-conceptions and are interested in taking advantage of situations that may enhance their self-concept in order to feel good about themselves. Moreover, they are more likely to attempt to assert their self-conceptions in low risk situations. Therefore, in the case of a low threat scenario, a low self-esteem individual will be less likely to ask for help and they will do this for two main reasons. One, asking for help is seen as a deficiency and can potentially damage their self-concept and esteem. Two, should they be unsuccessful in completing the task, there is little

damage done to their self-concept since the scenario is of a low threat and therefore not self-relevant.

> Hypothesis 2: When faced with a non-threatening scenario, low self-esteem individuals are less likely to ask for help than high self-esteem individuals.

Goal Orientation

There has been research performed in the education field that has shown that children pursue two different goals in school; Learning and Performance (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). VandeWalle furthered that research using Dweck's findings to and proving that there are three constructs within goal orientation: Learning, Proving and Avoiding. (VandeWalle, 1997).

Individuals with learning goal orientations are more focused on the development of their skills and learning from their experiences and not so much on their performance. For example, within an academic domain, a student may take a harder course to learn more and receive a lower grade than if they were to take an easy course, learn less, and acquire a higher grade.

Individuals with either a proving or avoiding goal orientation are more concerned about their performance. Having a proving goal orientation means that the individual focuses more on proving their competence. For example, within an academic domain, a student may take an easier course to acquire a high grade. In contrast, having an avoiding goal orientation implies that an individual focuses on preventing unfavourable outcomes, that is to say, situations which reflects poor performance. For example, if a student was not doing well in a course, he/she would likely drop that course and take an easier one to acquire a higher grade and avoid receiving a low one.

Vandewalle's theory has been widely used to explain various behaviours moderated by differences in goal orientation. Bettencourt (2004) investigated whether goal orientation served as a moderating effect in change-oriented organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) in retail stores. Briefly, OCB, in the retail context, refers to extra-role efforts by the employees to identify and implement any organizational functions that require improvement, whether it be organizational policies, methods or procedures within their retail location (Morrison & Phelps 1999). The research showed that learning goal orientations were antecedent to such behaviours and that performance goal orientations moderated change-oriented OCBs. Gray and Meister (2004) examined the extent to which individuals seek the expertise, experiences and insights from others within an organization. They demonstrated that an individual's learning goal orientation partly determined the strength of the effect of knowledge sourcing in organizations. The theories concerning goal orientation are being used more and more to explain the behaviours of individuals particularly within an organizational behaviour context.

In terms of the current research and given these three constructs that help to define goal orientation, I hypothesize that one's goal orientation can determine the threat of the task requested and affect an individual's propensity to ask for help. For example, if Bob's goal orientation is that of learning, he may have a higher propensity to ask for help since he is only seeking to extend his knowledge. In such a case, asking for help does not implicate any sort of incompetence on the part of Bob since he has a learning orientation. In such a case, the effect of a learning goal orientation on self-esteem threat would be relatively low compared to the effect of a performance goal orientation on threat. On the other hand, Jim, whose goal orientation is that of proving (or avoiding) is highly

concerned about how well he will be able to complete the task. I hypothesize that goal orientation has a moderating effect on task relevance. That is to say, that it will aid in determining the level of threat of the requested task, which in turn affects an individual's propensity to ask for help.

Performance Goal Orientation. When an individual has a performance goal orientation, priority is place on performing the task successfully. Having a performance goal orientation in combination with a threatening scenario heightens the need for an individual to maintain their esteem levels. That being said, self-esteem threat moderates asking for help in such a scenario. Since asking for help is seen as a deficiency, then performing such an action will have certain implications concerning under performance since one is not completing the task in the "proper" way. "Proper" in this case, refers to completing the task on one's own and not asking for help.

A change from a high to low threat scenario may yield a different behaviour. The decrease in esteem threat lowers an individual's sensitivity to negative feedback, therefore, even with the addition of a performance goal orientation, an individual's acceptable level of performance is decreased. For example, if I am a math major and I am given a test on poetry, an acceptable score would be lower than if I were administered a mathematical test.

> Hypothesis 3: Individuals with a performance goal orientation are less likely to ask for help in a high threat scenario than in a low threat scenario.

Learning Goal Orientation. When an individual possesses a learning goal orientation, he/she is not concerned with how well he/she performs a specific task.

Rather, their goal is to learn as much as possible, even if that means sacrificing performance.

Self-esteem no longer plays an instrumental role in determining an individual's propensity to asking for help since the individual's objective is to learn and neither self-enhance nor self-protect. As a result, having a learning goal orientation would automatically decrease the threat of the scenario. This is primarily attributed to the fact that the individual is more concerned about adding to their knowledge domain rather than proving that they are sufficiently knowledgeable in that domain. Therefore, no predictions of an individual's decision to ask for help can be made with respect to learning goal orientations since no effect will occur.

Experiment

Eighty-two undergraduate students were randomly recruited from the University of Waterloo's Paid Psychology Pool with subjects originating from various disciplines and backgrounds. Within both pools there were 42 males and 40 females all of whom were partaking in undergraduate programs at the University of Waterloo.

To test the hypotheses two methods were designed and implemented where each method differed in terms of esteem threat. That is to say, that Method One threatened self-esteem by affecting performance and Method Two threatened self-esteem via social comparison. The study was administered online through an internet browser interface on-campus at the University of Waterloo in a supervised computer lab.

Procedure

Participants were not told the true motivation behind the study but instead that the study concerned the effectiveness of standardized testing in large organizations and that they would be required to complete two standardized tests; Test for Academic Excellence and Success (TAES) and Poetry IQ Test (PIQT). The reason deception was necessary was that we needed to examine the behaviours of the participants in simulated environments where their esteem is challenged. Should the participants be aware of the fact that the two tests are not indicative of their knowledge of poetry or future success, they will answer the questions differently and the results of the study would have been inadequate.

The survey was completed online and in a supervised computer lab. Upon their arrival, they were administered user IDs which were randomly generated 5 – 6 digit numbers with no spaces or letters. The survey itself took subjects no longer than 1 hour to complete and began with them completing a self-esteem questionnaire and ending with them completing a goal orientation questionnaire. Instructions to the test were administered via the computer program on the screen. Each test (i.e. PIQT and TAES) consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions and each question presented 5 possible answers of which only one was correct. Questions for the PIQT test were created by researching the various concepts in poetry and questions for the TAES test were adapted directly from a Barron's GRE preparation book. Each subject was paid $8.00 for their participation.

After each question answered within either of the tests, subjects were notified whether their answer was correct or incorrect. The motivation behind this experiment

design decision was to increase or decrease the threat as they proceeded through the questionnaire. This means that answering a question incorrectly, and being told that the answer was incorrect, might increase the threat posed to the participant's self-esteem. Moreover, being told that the answer was correct would likely decrease the threat to self-esteem.

Subjects were told that once the questions were answered, that corrections to that answer were not possible. Participants were told that their scores would not be revealed to them until the end of the test and that the worth of each question was random. I speculated that revealing the scores in real time or revealing the worth of each question would affect their behaviour. For example, if the individual knew that the score was low for a particular question, then asking for help would have a minimal impact on their final score, and they would act accordingly. At the end of the survey, subjects were told the true premise of the study in detail and were also given the opportunity to provide any comments that may have affected their performance or our research findings.

Two methods were employed in this study over a four week period with forty-five subjects participating method 1 and thirty-seven subjects participating in method 2. The experiment was designed to simulate an environment where subjects would have the opportunity to ask for help in both threatening and non-threatening scenarios. For each question in the PIQT and TAES tests, participants had the option of removing one or more of the choices available to them. The objective of giving participants such an option was to provide them with the chance to ask for a hint, or, in the context of this research, to ask for help. At the end of the survey, subjects were given the opportunity to provide comments and feedback concerning their experience with the tests.

Self-Esteem Threat

Two methods were employed in which both methods attempted to threaten self-esteem in two different ways. The first method threatened self-esteem by affecting performance while the second method used social comparison as a means to threaten the esteem of subjects. The motivation behind the creation of these two methods, was to determine if the behaviours of the individuals would change between different simulations and whether more significant results could be acquired from one method to another.

Method One. As mentioned earlier, the objective of the experiment was aimed at simulating both threatening and non-threatening environments so that we could observe the propensity of participants to ask for help. Moreover, asking for help needed to be simulated. Asking for help is seen as a deficiency and a trade off between competency and correctness. In method one, if participants removed an option, they would only be awarded a percentage of the score for that question if they answered the question correctly. Correctly answering the question and removing 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4 options, yielded a penalization of 0%, 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% off the score respectively. In a real world situation where an individual asks for help, there is a perceived trade-off of internal competency for the successful completion of the task. Asking for help, sacrifices competency but increases the chances that one will complete the task correctly. This trade-off was simulated in the experiment by penalizing the participants whenever they removed an option by removing a percentage of their score (i.e. asked for help. By apply the penalty, this would impact their score negatively. Such a penalty was created based

on the assumption that their overall score (out of 100) would be correlated to the participants' perceived competence. For example, if an individual were to score a 50% on the TAES this would imply that the individual does not possess adequate intelligence and thus imply incompetence and a lower chance of becoming successful in the future. Moreover, a university setting lends itself well to such a threat as the majority of students, particularly undergraduates, could be concerned about their future potential success

Method two. Unlike Method one where the penalty for asking for help was a more tangible loss, the design of method two involved making the penalty less tangible and more internal. Method two did not penalize the participants score for the removal of an option. Theoretically, a participant could remove 3 of the 5 options and have a 50/50 chance of answering the question correctly and obtain a score of 100%. So? Instead, the penalty in this case uses social comparison as a threat. An additional phrase was displayed for each question reading "Approximately, X% of UW students who took this test obtained the correct answer without removing any of the options" where X was either 30%, 50%, 70% of 80%. . As opposed to having the threat on paper that affected final performance (i.e. score penalty) I decided to use a social comparison threat which would make the threat more salient and substantial. If an individual could not answer the question without removing an option when 80% of all UW students could, the subject would then think that he/she was a part of the small percentage that could not get the answer without removing an option. This is an example of an adverse social comparison which would lead to negative feelings of self-worth if the individual was unable to answer the question correctly without removing an option (Stiles & Kaplan, 2004). Such

a social comparison is a threat because it forces the participant to compare themselves to the percentages; the higher the percentage, the higher the perceived threat. This is due to the fact, that the percentage represents the portion of students who are currently "better off" than the participant since they were able to answer the question without removing an option.

Materials

      Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. The self-esteem of the subjects was assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). The scale was chosen based on the commonality of its use and its simplicity. This four point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree,* consisted of 10 questions (Appendix I).

      Poetry IQ Test (PIQT). The questions for this test were created by the investigators and drew upon basic poetic knowledge. The PIQT (Appendix III) intended to simulate a low esteem threat environment. It was assumed that the probability of poetry being a relevant domain for an undergraduate's was rather low since the academic programs at the University of Waterloo are mainly focused on science, technology and business.

      Test for Academic Excellence and Success (TAES). Question for the Test for Academic Excellence and Success (TAES) were adapted from practice Graduate Record Examination (GRE) questions. The GRE was chosen for 2 main reasons. First, it provided the look and feel of an academic standardized test through the wording and different genre of questions. Secondly, the questions were difficult enough such that it

would give participants a challenge. The TAES (Appendix IV) intended on simulating a high esteem threat environment by asking various math, logic and language questions, questions which were highly relevant particularly to students in science, technology, and business related disciplines.

Academic Goal Orientation Scale. The goal orientation of participants were measured using Vandewalle's (2001) Academic Goal Orientation Scale. The scale, consisting of 13 questions, used a 5-point likert scale as opposed to the original 7-point likert. Responses ranged from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* (Appendix II).

Results

Method One

Responses to the self-esteem test were highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.81$) and participants' scores on this test were used to categorize participants as high or low self-esteem. Twenty subjects who scored higher than the median of 20 on the self-esteem scale were classified as high self-esteem, and the 24 who scored below the median were classified as low self-esteem individuals. To test whether esteem affected the likelihood of asking for help the total times participants asked for help was compared in both tests grouped by self-esteem. On the academic test (high threat), low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 4.17 times. This was not significantly different than the average of 4.35 times that high self esteem participants asked for help, $t(42) = 0.11$, ns. On the poetry test (low threat), low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 4.63

times. This was not significantly different than the average of 5.10 times that high self-esteem participants asked for help, $t(42) = 0.205$, ns.

Scores for questions one to four, on the academic goal orientation scale were averaged to determine an individual's learning goal orientation and scores for questions five to thirteen were averaged to determine an individual's performance goal orientation. Responses to the learning goal orientation component were highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.86$). Responses to the performance goal orientation component were moderately reliable ($\alpha = 0.63$). Fifteen subjects who scored a higher average on the performance goal orientation component than on the learning goal orientation were classified as having a performance goal orientation and twenty-nine subjects who scored a higher average on the learning goal orientation component were classified as having a learning goal orientation. To test whether goal orientation affected the likelihood of asking for help under low versus high threat scenarios, the total times participants asked for help was compared in both tests but only tests of those with a performance goal orientation. No significant effects were found, $t(42) = 0.32$, ns.

The average score on the poetry test was 64.3% which was not significantly different than the average score of 61.6% on the academic test, $t(43) = 0.998$, *ns*.

Method Two

Responses provided on the self-esteem test were highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.8727$) and participants' scores on this test were used to categorize participants as high or low self-esteem. Seventeen subjects who scored higher than the median of 20 on the self-esteem scale were classified as high self-esteem, and the 20 participants who scored below the

median were classified as low self-esteem individuals. To test whether esteem affected the likelihood of asking for help the total times participants asked for help was compared in both tests grouped by self-esteem. On the academic test (high threat), low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 4.88 times. This was not significantly different than the average of 6.50 times that high self esteem participants asked for help, $t(35) = 0.71$, ns. On the poetry test (low threat), low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 3.47 times. This was not significantly different than the average of 3.95 times that high self-esteem participants asked for help, $t(35) = 0.26$, ns.

Responses to the learning goal orientation component were highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.74$). Responses to the performance goal orientation component were also highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.72$). Sixteen subjects who scored a higher average on the performance goal orientation component than on the learning goal orientation were classified as having a performance goal orientation and twenty one subjects who scored a higher average on the learning goal orientation component were classified as having a learning goal orientation. To test whether goal orientation affected the likelihood of asking for help under low versus high threat scenarios, the total times participants asked for help was compared in both tests but only tests of those with a performance goal orientation. No significant effects were found, $t(35) = 0.34$, ns.

Additional analysis was performed for method two. Recall the phrase appended to each question that read, "Approximately, X% of UW students who took this test obtained the correct answer without removing any of the options" where X equaled 30, 50, 70 and 80. A comparison of the means of total asking for help by participants between questions where X equaled 50 or 70 and where X equaled 80, revealed insignificant differences. I

will therefore focus only on the extremes, i.e. questions where X = 30 and where X = 80. For the purpose of the discussion, I will refer to the questions that read 30% as being low threat questions and 80% as being high threat questions. The total asking for help by participants was analyzed between low and high threat questions. In the poetry test, for low threat questions, individuals asked for help an average of 0.46 times. This was not significantly different than the average of 0.41 times that individuals asked for help in the high threat question, $t(36) = 0.264$, ns. In the academic test, for low threat questions, individuals asked for help an average of 2.65 times. This was significantly different than the average of 1.00 times that individuals asked for help in the high threat question, $t(36) = 3.619, p < 0.05$.

Further analysis was performed within the low threat questions in each test and between esteem levels. In the poetry test, low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 0.55 times in the low threat question (30%). This was not significantly different than the average of 0.35 times that high self-esteem individuals asked for help in the low threat question, $t(35) = -0.582$, ns. In the academic test, low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 2.55 times in the low threat question (30%). This was not significantly different than the average of 2.77 times that high self-esteem individuals asked for help in the low threat question, $t(35) = 1.394$, ns.

A similar analysis was performed within the high threat questions in each test and between esteem levels. In the poetry test, low self-esteem individuals asked for help an average of 0.2 times in the high threat question (80%). This was not significantly different than the average of 0.65 times that high self-esteem individuals asked for help in the high threat question, $t(35) = 0.227$, ns. Likewise, in the academic test, low self-

esteem individuals asked for help an average of 1.3 times in the high threat questions. This was not significantly different than the average of 0.65 times that high self-esteem individuals asked for help in the high threat questions, $t(35) = 0.937$, ns.

Individuals asked for help an average of 0.46 times in the poetry test for low threat questions (30%). This was significantly different than the average of 0.41 times that individuals asked for help in the low threat question in the poetry test, $t(36) = 5.466$, $p < 0.01$. Similarly, individuals asked for help an average of 2.65 times in the academic test for high threat questions (80%). This was significantly different than the average of 1.00 times that individuals asked for help for high threat questions in the academic test, $t(36) = 1.711$, $p < .1$.

	Phrase 30	Phrase 80
PIQT	0.4595	0.4054
TAES	2.6486	1.000

Table 1 Means of total asking for help in the poetry and academic tests

The average score on the poetry test was 71.6% which was significantly different than the average score of 54.5% on the academic test, $t(36) = 5.203$, $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

The intended effects with respect to performance goal orientation did not occur. This can be attributed to the experiment's design. It is likely, that the academic goal orientation scale did not examine the participant's goal orientation in the correct domain. That is to say, that the questions were not specific to standardized testing or to the task they most recently completed, which were the tests. For example, question three on the goal orientation scale reads, "I like classes that really force me to think hard". While the

response to this question may be indicative of an individual's goal orientation within a classroom setting, it does not appear to reflect the individual's goal orientation specific to the standardized test.

While method one failed to find any effect of self-esteem, some of the results in method two showed a significant effect of esteem threat on participants. This may have been caused by a general reluctance to ask for help due to the penalty applied to the score. As a result, the expected motivations to remove an option did not take place. For example, in removing an option, one of the expected motivations was one driven by self-esteem maintenance. Since the penalties may have been too high, the motivations could have been driven by something other than the self, for example, performance. In such an instance, the desire to score high, may have overridden the desire to ask for help. It may just also be that self-esteem maintenance does not play as large of a part as anticipated in an individual's propensity to ask for help. I mentioned earlier that both impression management and over confidence could be potential theories to explain an individual's aversion to asking for help. As such, the study could be extended to capture these theories in the experiment design. Moreover, the experiment design did not verify whether the domain of the tests were self-relevant. Tasks that are not self-relevant will not create an esteem threat since the individual is not pressured to respond correctly. One participant commented, "I seem to have performed poorly on the math questions; how embarrassing since I'm in the math faculty". This comment provides evidence of the fact that domain relevance plays a role in esteem threat since he/she admits to his/her poor performance despite their knowledge domain. Therefore, the domain of the task is not only important in the design of the experiment, but also in a real world application.

The difference in the test scores between the poetry and academic tests in method two illustrate an interesting point. The desired means between total asking for help was not acquired where the expected result was to have higher asking for help in the poetry test than in the academic test. This could imply that the poetry test was too easy relative to the academic test and as a result, did not prompt individuals to ask for help. Further evidence of this is revealed in the average score of 72% on the poetry test. Since the average is relatively high, and there was not a great deal of asking for help, this could imply that the PIQT test was too easy thereby influencing the results.

Of particular interest are the results acquired from comparing total asking for help between high (80%) and low (30%) threat questions in the poetry and academic tests. The results reveal no effect taking place in the poetry test. That is to say, that threat had no effect on an individual's propensity to ask for help. In contrast, in the academic test, more asking for help took place for low threat questions than in high threat questions. However, as revealed in the results, self-esteem levels did not affect these results, nor did individuals with low versus high self-esteem behave differently. The difference in asking for help in the academic test can be explained using social comparison theory. In any social comparison scenario, humans strive to become a part of the better category particularly if the better category includes a majority of individuals. This is verified in the results of the experiment as there were statistically significant differences between the means of the total asking for help between low and high threat questions within the academic test. More asking for help took place when subjects were told that a smaller number of people answered correctly without removing an option (i.e. low threat question). This is likely the result of a social comparison. Participants believed that it was

more acceptable to be a part of a majority who removed an option and answered the question correctly than to be a part of a minority who removed an option and answered the question correctly. One participant even commented on this behaviour in the feedback section stating, "I usually 'removed answers' when it said that 'Approximately 50% of UW students answered...' but for higher percentages I tended not to remove answers".

Asking for help was hypothesized as a means to maintain self-esteem, however, differences in asking for help, particularly under the threatening scenario (i.e academic test), was not affected by self-esteem levels. Both low and high esteem individuals behaved the same in the academic test. Moreover, more asking for help took place in the academic test in comparison to the poetry test, contradictory to what was expected. Such results support the theory that individuals with high self-esteem engage in self-protection under threatening circumstances since they hold their self-concepts with positivity (Baumgardner et al., 1990). It also supports the fact that individuals with low self-esteem engage in self-protection under threatening circumstances. Self-protection in the context of this research, involves doing what is necessary to avoid answering the question incorrectly, particularly under threatening circumstances. With that in mind, it is natural to see that individuals who engage in self-protection would ask for help in the low threat questions (30%) on the academic test as a self-protective measure. For the high threat questions (80%), not asking for help can be interpreted as a self-protective measure. According to social comparison theory individuals seek to avoid being placed in a worse category. Since asking for help for those questions puts them in a worse category than the majority who answered the question without removing any options, they will avoid

doing so. The decision to not ask for help in such an instance can also be driven by another reason. That is, that asking for help and getting the answer wrong, is a much more substantial blow to self-esteem than not asking for help and getting it wrong. Therefore, not asking for help under a high threat scenario (80%) is driven by self-esteem maintenance.

Apart from quantitative evidence showing self-esteem maintenance, the feedback provided at the end of the testing by participants also reflected instances of self-esteem maintenance. Rationalization has been identified as a self-regulatory behaviour (Tesser, 2000; Steele, 1988). Rationalization occurs after a decision or event has occurred via a different mental process. Post-decision rationalization can be explained by one's desire to protect one's self-image (Steele, 1988). One participant states, "My weakness lies in multiple choice testing particularly on computers". This is a prime example of rationalization whereby the individual justifies his/her poor performance with their perceived weakness in multiple choice testing on computers. Two other subjects attributed their poor performance on the tests to their lack of knowledge stating, "I haven't taken a word problem test since grade 5 or so" and "I haven't learned anything about poetry since grade 12 in high school". Another participant states, "I did poorly in the poetry test mostly because I am in Math faculty and haven't "touched" poems for a long time." This participant recognizes that poetry is not a self-relevant domain and uses that as a justification for a low score. These quotes clearly indicate a post-decision rationalization process and provide qualitative evidence of self-esteem maintenance.

General Discussion

Open communication within an organization is an extremely valuable addition to any company's corporate culture. According to Charan (2001), employees fail to communicate honestly due to intimidation and lack of trust leading to indecisive results. This implies that the lack of honest communication or, in the context of the research, that by not asking for help when it is necessary negatively impacts organizational effectiveness.

The use of social comparison clearly had an effect on an individual's propensity to ask for help. This provides some interesting implications for an organizational setting. Participants were less likely to ask for help when they were told that the majority of students answered correctly without removing an option versus when they were told that a minority of individuals answered correctly without removing an option. Such comparisons can then be used in the workplace to encourage employees to ask for help when it is needed. For example, if an employee is new to an organization and is given a completely new task, the manager could state that many people are unable to perform this task on their first try. According to our results, this would encourage an individual to ask for help. There is, however a flip side to this coin. The results also show that opposite social comparisons discourage individuals from asking for help, as seen in the results of the high threat questions (80%). This indicates that managers should be wary of what they say to employees who are given new tasks. For example, if an employee is given a new task and is told that the majority of people found this task to be very easy and did it relatively well, this inadvertently discourages the individual to ask for help and instead puts pressure on their performance. This could result in poor performance particularly if

the individual knows they do not know how to perform the task and makes an attempt without asking for assistance.

The results provided by the use of social comparison as a threat demonstrates that it only works in self-relevant scenarios. The study assumed that the knowledge domains of undergraduates at the University of Waterloo does not include that of poetry. This is further verified in the results, whereby no significant differences were found in asking for help between low (30%) and high (80%) threat questions in the poetry test. The study also assumed that the academic test would be self-relevant. Based on this assumption and the fact that the results clearly show differences in asking for help between low and high threat questions in the academic test, I conclude that the use of social comparison is only effective under self-relevant conditions.

Based on the differences in asking for help in the academic test between low and high threat questions, I can conclude that when threat is applied appropriately (in this case using social comparison), that that affects an individual's decision to ask for help. Subjects were less likely to ask for help in the high threat questions (80%) than in the low threat questions (30%).

Limitations and Future Research

A number of limitations can be pointed out. The procedure did not measure domain relevance. That is to say, no mechanisms were designed to ensure that the tests (i.e. poetry and academic) were of either low or high self-relevance. This is a rather important limitation since the experiment depends highly on the threat potential of the tests to the participant. For example, if the academic test was not self-relevant and hence

not threatening, the behaviours of the individual would not reflect what was outlined in the original hypotheses. Future research should include a check for domain relevance.

The threat created in method two of the experiment can be construed not only as a social comparison, but also as the creation of a norm. A norm can be defined as an "acceptable standard of behaviour within a group that is shared by the group's members" (Robbins et al., 2003, p. 185). In the context of this method, the acceptable standard would be asking for more help on low threat questions than on high threat questions. Therefore, when participants are told that a high percentage of individuals did ask for help it becomes acceptable to do the same. This reduces the self-esteem damage done by asking for help. Further research should consider whether norm conformance is a major factor in this result.

While the "Remove an Option" button was designed to simulate an individual asking for help there is a limitation to this design decision. Asking for help in a real world environment does not have the same associated risks. What this means is that removing an option in the test does not guarantee that the participant will answer the question correctly since all they have really done, is increased their chances of answering correctly. Comparing this to a real world example, asking for help from another person can potentially reveal the correct answer increasing the chances of answering correctly to 100%. Referring back to the painting example, if Kai asked his boss for instruction as to how to paint the trim, while this does not decrease the chance of error to 0%, it increases the chances that Kai will perform the task correctly.

Furthermore, the difficulty of the poetry test may have been too low. As a result, individuals were able to attain high scores without removing any of the options. Future

research on this topic should take this into consideration and ensure that the difficulties of the tests are at an adequate level in order to elicit the desired behaviours. This could be accomplished by running a handful of test subjects to complete just the test. Furthermore, these test subjects should be knowledgeable on the subject matter of the test. For example, a handful of English majors could have been used to determine the appropriateness of the difficult of the poetry.

The mixed results in the experiment motivates further research in determining whether self-esteem maintenance is truly a cause to an individual's aversion to asking for help. The results of the study were inconclusive and neither accept nor reject the hypotheses. On one hand, it may be that self-esteem maintenance does not play a role in one's aversion to asking for help thereby refuting the hypotheses pertaining to the self. But on the other, as mentioned before, there were two other alternative causes to an individual's adversity to ask for help; Impression Management and Overconfidence. These two theories were not included in the study. Future research should include these theories. First, it would be interesting to see how these theories independently affect an individual's propensity to ask for help. Secondly, it would be useful to see how these three theories, Impression Management, Overconfidence and Self-esteem Maintenance, interact and impact a person's aversion to asking for help.

Of particular interest were the results acquired in method two. These results provide a firm justification that social comparison can be used as an effective means to threaten self-esteem. Future research in the laboratory can therefore use social comparison as an effective way to threaten self-esteem.

The sample of undergraduates used at the University of Waterloo can also be identified as a limitation as it creates a challenge for the results to be generalized. Employees at work are given specific tasks to perform and can be analogous to the tests administered to students. Similar behaviors can be predicted in the workplace since tests can be construed as a work task for students. It may be beneficial to run this in a more realistic environment, with employees performing their real jobs. This would create a number of benefits, one of which is increasing the probability that the task requested of the subjects is self-relevant. For example, if the study was performed in a bank where the bank tellers were our subjects, the tasks requested of them could be those that pertain to their job. However, it would be difficult to measure and control other factors that may come into play such as impression management, particularly if asking for help is measured via an employee asking for help from his/her supervisor.

On a different note, further research could be done to reveal the impact of this phenomenon on organizational effectiveness. The occurrence of such an event occurs everyday within organizations. Such research would be able to reveal exactly how much it occurs and the impact of such occurrences on the organization.

Finally, should the research reveal the drivers behind an individual's aversion to asking for help, one could then determine potential solutions to the problem. Perhaps it is an issue with the corporate culture or how managers are trained as leaders.

Conclusion

Research on the self has been on-going over the last 30 years and has yet to explore the deeper meanings of the self. The motivation behind this study originated from all the times during my internships where I found myself in situations where I was not

sure if asking for help was appropriate and if it would make me look incompetent. This was primarily the reason why I thought the phenomenon truly existed. While the results of the study were mixed, it is apparent that social comparison plays a fairly large role in an individual's decision to ask for help. The results of the study reveal that the use of social comparison motivates individuals, of both high and low esteem, to engage in self-protection; asking for help in higher threat situations. However, the use of social comparison was only effective in creating differences in behaviour under self-relevant scenarios (i.e. the academic test). If people were simply asking for more help when others did, this change in help seeking behavior would have been seen on both tests. This result is more suggestive of a self-protection explanation rather than one of norm conformance.

The research provided in this paper is important particularly for organizations. Determining the true underlying causes behind an individual's aversion to asking for help would enable organizations to save money and increase productivity thereby ultimately increasing their effectiveness and their financial profitability. As such, organizations should seek to create a help seeking culture in order to mitigate such aversions by communicating the desirability and regular occurrence of help seeking behaviour.

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Appendix I – Self-esteem Scale

Please answer the following questions. Your responses will help us interpret your score. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible for accurate results.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	☐	☐	☐	☐
At times I think I am no good at all	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that I have a number of good qualities	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am able to do things as well as most other people	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I certainly feel useless at times.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I wish I could have more respect for myself.	☐	☐	☐	☐
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure	☐	☐	☐	☐
I take a positive attitude toward myself	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix II – Academic Goal Orientation Scale

Please answer the following questions. Your responses will help us interpret your score. Please answer the questions as honestly as possible for accurate results.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
I prefer challenging and difficult classes so that I'll learn a great deal	□	□	□	□	□
I truly enjoy learning for the sake of learning	□	□	□	□	□
I like classes that really force me to think hard	□	□	□	□	□
I'm willing to enroll in a difficult course if I can learn a lot by taking it.	□	□	□	□	□
It's important that others know that I am a good student.	□	□	□	□	□
I think that it's important to get good grades to show how intelligent you are.	□	□	□	□	□
It's important for me to prove that I am better than others in the class	□	□	□	□	□
To be honest, I really like to prove my ability to others	□	□	□	□	□
I would rather drop a difficult class	□	□	□	□	□
I enjoy it when others at school are aware of how well I am doing.	□	□	□	□	□
I prefer to take courses where I can prove my ability to others.	□	□	□	□	□
I would avoid taking on a new task if there was a chance that I would appear rather incompetent to others.	□	□	□	□	□
Avoiding a show of low ability is more important to me than learning a new skill.	□	□	□	□	□
I'm concerned about taking on a task at school if my performance would reveal that I had low ability	□	□	□	□	□
I prefer to avoid situations at school where I might perform poorly	□	□	□	□	□
When I don't understand something at school, I prefer to avoid asking what might appear to others to be "dumb questions" that I should know the answer to already.	□	□	□	□	□

SA - Strongly Agree
A - Agree
N - Neither
D - Disagree
SD - Strongly Disagree

Appendix III – Poetry IQ Test Questions

Questions 1-4

Directions: For each of the following questions, select the lettered poetic device that BEST describes the phrase.

1. "like a rocket shot to a ship ashore/ the lean red bolt of his body tore"

A. Personification
B. simile
C. alliteration
D. paradox
E. metaphor

2. "If anything might rouse him now/ the kind old sun will know"

A. alliteration
B. paradox
C. simile
D. metaphor
E. Personification

3. "the road was a ribbon of moonlight, looping the purple moor"

A. paradox
B. metaphor
C. simile
D. Personification
E. alliteration

4. "they were bright bubbles bursting from the trees"

A. metaphor
B. Personification
C. alliteration
D. paradox
E. simile

Questions 5-8

Directions: For each of the following poems, selected the lettered response that best represents the poem type.

5.
There was a boy named Cody
who had a dog named Jody.
His dog was boney
because he acts like a foney.
Finally, Cody ran away from Jody.

A. Limerick
B. Cinquain
C. Haiku
D. Ballad
E. Acrostic

6.
Star
Very light
Shining, hot, gas
Object of deep mystery
Solar

A. Limerick
B. Cinquain
C. Haiku
D. Ballad
E. Acrostic

7.
Old crow in command
Always foraging for food
On his daily route

A. Limerick
B. Cinquain
C. Haiku
D. Ballad
E. Acrostic

8.
Sun
Universe's Light
Natural light

A. Limerick
B. Cinquain
C. Haiku

D. Ballad
E. Acrostic

9. A Ballad is

A. a humorous, nonsense verse consisting of a triplet and couplet
B. a poem having fourteen lines and definite meter and rhyme
C. a poem written entirely in prose
D. a story told in verse
E. a pair of rhymed lines

10. An Epic is

A. a comparison between two distinctly different thing using the word "like" or "as."
B. a four line stanza
C. a poem that consists of five tercets and a quatrain, all on two rhymes
D. a short pithy poem or saying of two or four lines containing a neatly expressed thought that often ends with a surprising or witty turn of thoughts
E. a long narrative poem on a serious subject or action involving heroic characters

11. A five line stanza is a

A. Triplet
B. Sestet
C. Quintet
D. Quatrain
E. Octet

12. Poetry is defined as

A. a repetition of similar sounds occurring at determined, or regular, intervals
B. a series of words used to express one's feelings
C. the systematic analysis of metrical patterns of stress, syllable by syllable, sound unit by sound unit
D. a composition in which rhythmical, and usually metaphorical, language is used to create and aesthetic experience
E. a term applied to the emphasis placed on a syllable in a word

13. An antagonist is

A. the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work
B. the major character in opposition to the hero or protagonist of a narrative or drama
C. A character in a work who, by sharp contrast, serves to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament of the protagonist

D. the first-person narrator, whether this is the "I" of a narrative poem or novel or of the speaker whose voice we hear in a poem
E. the chief character in a work, on whom the reader's interest centers

14. Satire is defined as

A. the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward to attitudes of amusement
B. a lyric poem consisting of a single stanza of fourteen iambic pentameter lines linked by an intricate rhyme scheme
C. poetry that describes the simple life of country folk
D. a theme, character, device, reference or verbal pattern which recurs in works of literature
E. a lengthy speech made by a single person

15. The poem entitled "The Raven" (1841) was written by which poet?

A. William Shakespeare
B. Sir Walter Scott
C. Elizabeth Barrett Brown
D. Edgar Allan Poe
E. Emily Dickinson

Appendix IV – Test for Academic Excellence and Success

Questions 1-3

Directions: Each question below consists of a word printed in capital letters, followed by five words. Choose the lettered word that is most nearly opposite in meaning to the word in capital letters.

1. DIFFUSE

A. contend
B. concentrate
C. imply
D. pretend
E. rebel

2. ELATED

A. Crestfallen
B. inebriated
C. punctual
D. insulted
E. lamented

3. PROVIDENT

A. manifest
B. prodigal
C. thankful
D. tidy
E. refuted

4. The average (arithmetic mean) of x and y is 20. If z = 5, what is the average of x, y, and z?

A. 8 1/3
B. 10
C. 12 ½
D. 15
E. 17 1/2

5. In a certain year, Minnesota produced 2/3 and Michigan produced 1/6 of all the iron ore produced in the United States. If all the other states combined produced 18 million tons that year, how many million tons did Minnesota produce that year?

A. 27
B. 36
C. 54
D. 72
E. 162

6. Early_____ of hearing loss is _____ by the fact that the other senses are able to compensate for moderate amounts of loss, so that people frequently do not know that their hearing is imperfect.

A. discovery .. indicated
B. development .. prevented
C. detection .. complicated
D. treatment .. facilitated
E. incidence .. corrected

7. Winsor McCay, the cartoonist, could draw with incredible _____: his comic strip about Little Nemo was characterized by marvelous draftsmanship and sequencing.

A. sincerity
B. efficiency
C. virtuosity
D. rapidity
E. energy

8. All good athletes want to win, and all athletes who want to win eat a well-balanced diet; therefore, all athletes who do not eat a well-balanced diet are bad athletes. Which of the following, if true, would refute the assumptions of the argument above?

A. Ann wants to win, but she is not a good athlete
B. Bob, the accountant, eats a well-balanced diet, but he is not a good athlete.
C. All the players on the Burros baseball team eat a well-balanced diet
D. No athlete who does not eat a well-balanced diet wants to win
E. Cindy, the basketball star, does not eat a well-balanced diet, but she is a good athlete

9. Wilbur is over six feet tall.

The statement above can be logically deduced from which of the following statements?

A. The average height of the members of the basketball team is over six feet; Wilbur is the center on the basketball team.

B. If Wilbur was not asked to join the basketball team, then he is not six feet tall; Wilbur was asked to join the basketball team

C. If Wilbur is over six feet tall, then he can see the parade; Wilbur can see the parade.

D. In Dr. Gray's seminar, everyone who is not over six feet tall is seated in the first row; Dr. Gray seated Wilbur in the second row.

E. Everyone who is over six feet tall has to help stack cartons in the stockroom; Wilbur has to help stack cartons.

10. Information that is published is part of the public record. But information that a reporter collects, and sources that he contacts, must be protected in order for our free press to function free of fear.

The above argument is most severely weakened by which one of the following statements?

A. Public information is usually reliable
B. Undocumented evidence may be used to convict an innocent person
C. Members of the press act ethically in most cases
D. The sources that a reporter contacts are usually willing to divulge their identity
E. Our press has never been altogether free.

11. Camille's average on her 6 math tests this marking period is 75. Fortunately for Camille, her teacher drops each student's lowest grade, and this raises her average to 85. What was her lowest grade?

A. 20
B. 25
C. 30
D. 40
E. 50

12. Last year Leo bought two paintings. This year he sold them for $2000 each. On one, he made a 25% profit, and on the other he had a 25% loss. What was his net loss or profit?

A. He broke even.
B. He lost less than $100
C. He lost more than $100
D. He earned less than $100
E. He earned more than $100

13. Each of the integers from 1 to 7 inclusive, is to be assigned to one of two sets – X and Y – such that:
    No integer is a member of both sets
    Neither set has more than four members

1 and 4 must be in the same set
If 2 is a member of set X, then so is 7
If 6 is a member of set Y, then 5 is not a member of Y

Which of the following could be a complete list of the integers in set X?

A. 1, 4
B. 1, 2, 7
C. 1, 4, 7
D. 1, 2, 4
E. 1, 4, 5, 7

14. Strict gun control laws cause a decrease in violent crime; in the six months since the city council passed a gun control law, armed robberies in City X have dropped by 18 percent.

All of the following, if true, are valid objections to the argument above EXCEPT

A. A decrease in crime in one city does not mean that such a decrease would occur anywhere a gun control law was enacted
B. Other factors may have caused the drop in armed robberies
C. Armed robbery is only one category of violent crime that might be affected by a gun control law
D. The gun control law has made it more difficult for citizens to purchase guns for legitimate purposes of self-defense
E. Since the law was passed, murders involving guns in City X have increased by 22 percent

15. Every Saturday, Maria has pizza for lunch and then goes to the movies.

If the sentence above is true, which of the following statements must also be true?

I. If it is not Saturday, then Maria is not having pizza for lunch and is not going to the movies.
II. If Maria has pizza for lunch and then goes to the movies, it is Saturday.
III. If Maria has pizza for lunch, but does not go to the movies, then it is not Saturday.

A. I only
B. II only
C. III only
D. I and III only
E. II and III only

Appendix V – Online Survey Screenshot (Method 1)

Poetry IQ Test

Poetry IQ Test (PIQT) is an accurate indicator of your ability to interpret and reflect upon poetry.

Directions for Questions 1 - 4: For each of the questions, select the poetic device that BEST describes the phrase.

Question 1.

"like a rocket shot to a ship ashore
the lean red bolt of his body tore"

- ◯ Personification
- ◯ Simile
- ◯ Alliteration
- ◯ Paradox
- ◯ Metaphor

[Answer] [Remove Option]

Appendix VI – Online Survey Screenshot (Method 2)

Poetry IQ Test

Poetry IQ Test (PIQT) is an accurate indicator of your ability to interpret and reflect upon poetry.

Directions for Questions 1 - 4: For each of the questions, select the poetic device that BEST describes the phrase.

Question 1.

"like a rocket shot to a ship ashore
the lean red bolt of his body tore"

- ◯ Personification
- ◯ Simile
- ◯ Alliteration
- ◯ Paradox
- ◯ Metaphor

(Approximately 50% of UW students who took this test answered this question correctly without removing any of the options)

[Answer] [Remove Option]