Paying You Back or Paying Me Forward: Understanding Rewarded and Unrewarded Organizational Citizenship Behavior

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The definition of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) has evolved from one in which the behavior is unrewarded to one in which rewards play a significant role. As a result, little is known about mechanisms that sustain unrewarded OCB. We used the theory of other orientation to examine 2 mechanisms based on the norm of reciprocity: the obligation to reciprocate the benefits already received from another (“paying you back”) and the expected reciprocity that one’s actions will stimulate future benefits from another (“paying me forward”). We propose that these mechanisms are more or less influential depending on one’s motivational orientation. In 3 experiments using both trait and state indicators of other orientation, we found that the prosocial behavior of individuals higher in other orientation was more strongly influenced by the obligation to reciprocate and less affected by the expectation of reciprocity.

Keywords: theory of other orientation, organizational citizenship behavior, prosocial behavior, social exchange, rational self-interest

An enduring challenge for organizations is encouraging behavior that serves the organization’s goals but is not easily monitored or explicitly rewarded. Management scholars (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) have long recognized the difficulty of motivating constructive, cooperative behaviors in the absence of formal rewards and controls. For example, Barnard (1938) wrote of the need for “self-abnegation” (p. 84), or the subordination of an employee’s personal outcomes to those of the organization. Understanding what motivates such prosocial behavior is of practical importance because organizations rely on their members to perform numerous behaviors that go beyond the formal employment contract and are not readily monitored or enforced (Katz & Kahn, 1966).

Contemporary interest in unrewarded organizational behaviors began with Organ’s (1988) original definition of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). He considered OCB as discretionary, noting that the “definition of OCB requires that it not be directly or formally recompensed by the organization’s reward system” (p. 5). However, subsequent research (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991, 1993; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994; P. M. Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Werner, 1994) has shown that OCB is related to managerial ratings of employee performance and to the allocation of rewards. Indeed, Organ (1997) modified his definition of OCB such that it does not “require as a construct definition that OCB be ‘beyond the job’ or ‘not lead to system rewards’” (pp. 91–92). According to N. P. Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Blume (2009), this revised definition “avoids some of the difficulty with viewing OCBs as discretionary behavior for which an individual might not receive formal rewards” (p. 122).

The definition of OCB has thus evolved from one that encompassed behavior that is not monitored or rewarded to one in which the observation and rewarding of behavior plays a significant role. As a result, the motivational basis for OCB has shifted from a mechanism that does not rely on a self-focused consideration of anticipated rewards to one that is rational and self-interested. Thus, explanatory frameworks for OCB have primarily emphasized rational, self-interested mechanisms such as anticipated rewards and impression management (e.g., Bolino, 1999; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000), which require that behavior be observed or monitored. Consequently, little is known about mechanisms that sustain unmonitored and unrewarded prosocial behavior and the factors that might encourage such mechanisms (for an exception, see Grant, 2008). In this investigation, we addressed this gap in theory and research. Specifically, we considered whether helpful, cooperative behavior is likely to occur in the absence of anticipated rewards and the factors that might encourage such mechanisms (for an exception, see Grant, 2008). In this investigation, we addressed this gap in theory and research. Specifically, we considered whether helpful, cooperative behavior is likely to occur in the absence of anticipated rewards and the factors that might encourage such mechanisms (for an exception, see Grant, 2008). In this investigation, we addressed this gap in theory and research. Specifically, we considered whether helpful, cooperative behavior is likely to occur in the absence of anticipated rewards and the factors that might encourage such mechanisms (for an exception, see Grant, 2008).
2006), which provides insight into the distinction between rational, self-interested judgment and heuristic, other-oriented processing. This theory suggests that under certain circumstances, persons will be motivated by self-interest and will engage in rational cognitive processing by systematically considering the personal consequences of their actions. Under different circumstances, however, persons will be motivated by other-interest and will engage in heuristic processing wherein they respond to social influences such as norms without careful consideration of rewards or consequences. This theory specifies that individual differences and contextual factors determine these motivational and process differences. As such, the theory of other orientation provides unique insights into the contrasting mechanisms that underlie various forms of OCB.

We also drew on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which is the prevalent explanatory framework for OCB (Zellars & Tepper, 2003). According to social exchange theory, OCBs constitute beneficial acts that employees provide to an organization in exchange for benefits they receive from the organization. These exchanges are regulated by expected reciprocity and the obligation to reciprocate (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Crapanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960), which mirror the contrasting mechanisms addressed by the theory of other orientation. Expected reciprocity (i.e., “paying me forward”) occurs when individuals act to benefit an exchange partner in order to ensure their receipt of future benefits from the partner (Blau, 1964). In contrast, the obligation to reciprocate (i.e., “paying you back”) arises when individuals, because they have internalized the norm of reciprocity as a moral norm, act on the obligation that was created by their prior receipt of a benefit (Perugini, Gallucci, Presaghi, & Ercolani, 2003). Thus, these individuals act to benefit another because they accept a social norm as opposed to their anticipation of a future benefit. In essence, expected reciprocity is motivated by self-interest, involves rational cognitive processing, and is consistent with the contemporary definition of OCB. In contrast, the obligation to reciprocate entails the uncritical acceptance of a social norm. Thus, it involves thinking heuristically, without regard for consequences, and is consistent with the traditional definition of OCB (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Malhotra & Bazerman, 2008).

In this investigation, we integrated the theory of other orientation and social exchange theory to examine expected reciprocity and the obligation to reciprocate as causes of prosocial behavior. We first discuss the theory of other orientation, which posits that differences in the motivational orientation of individuals—whether they are self- or other-oriented—are associated with their reliance on rational versus heuristic cognitive processing. We then discuss how motivational orientation influences the relative impact of expectations versus obligations on prosocial behavior. We next develop the basic proposition that other orientation will moderate the extent to which expectations or obligations influence prosocial behavior. Finally, we test this proposition in three experiments that manipulate expected reciprocity and the obligation to reciprocate and that examine both individual and contextual sources of other orientation.

**Theory of Other Orientation**

The theory of other orientation (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004, 2006) is an exemplar of recent frameworks that examine how different motivational states affect modes of reasoning or judgment processes underlying prosocial behavior (Haidt, 2001; Loewenstein & Small, 2007; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2006; Tenbrunsel, Diekmann, Wade-Benzoni, & Bazerman, in press). The theory of other orientation examines the confluence of motivational orientations (self vs. other) and judgment processes (rational vs. heuristic) as explanations for individual behavior. The basic premise of this theory is that the actions of individuals who are higher in other orientation are more affected by social influence as opposed to rational and self-interested processes that involve weighing costs and benefits to the self.

The theory derives from evolutionary perspectives on altruism (Brewer, 2004; Simon, 1990) that posit a biological advantage associated with less dependence on rational judgment and greater sensitivity to social influence. Expanding limited cognitive resources in an exclusive reliance on rational judgment processes (i.e., weighing various personal consequences before acting) or on direct personal experience (e.g., extensive trial and error) can ultimately hamper the organism’s survival. However, by relying on information provided by others (i.e., social information obtained via imitation, vicarious learning, and normative influence), individuals can acquire relevant information more quickly and with fewer costs. Therefore, openness to social influence can be adaptive in an evolutionary sense. Such openness involves adopting and acting on social cues that specify appropriate modes of behavior, in lieu of independently assessing multiple courses of actions based on an exhaustive cognitive evaluation of anticipated consequences. Thus, openness to social influence involves a less rational process of adopting behavior that is specified by norms and social expectations. This mode of reasoning is referred to as heuristic processing (Chen, Shechter, & Chaiken, 1996; Korsgaard & Meglino, 2008) and stands in stark contrast to rational judgment wherein individuals deliberate over options and make choices based on anticipated consequences.

The evolutionary basis for the theory of other orientation suggests that an individual’s willingness to accept and act on social cues (i.e., engage in heuristic processing) is motivated by the fundamental human drive toward other orientation (Brewer, 2004; Caporael, Dawes, Orbell, & Van de Kragt, 1989). There are both state and trait forms of other orientation. State forms of other orientation result from contextual factors that lead individuals to focus on others. These include such factors as group identity (Brewer, 2004; Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005), priming (Smeesters, Warlop, Van Avermaet, Corneille, & Yzerbyt, 2003), and working on other-oriented tasks (Smeesters, Wheeler, & Kay, 2009). Research suggests that persons in an other-oriented state are more sensitive to social influence and are less likely to rely on conscious deliberations. For example, individuals who strongly identify with their group are more likely to adhere to group norms, regardless of their personal preferences (Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998). Further, research suggests that the effect of state-based other orientation on prosocial behavior is mediated by less deliberative processing (Smeesters et al., 2009).

Trait forms of other orientation include predispositions such as empathy (Davis, 1980), prosocial values (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004), and altruistic personality (Rushion, 1984). As with state-based other orientation, research suggests that trait-based other orientation is associated with greater sensitivity to social cues and
less reliance on rational self-interested processing. For example, individuals who are higher in other-oriented values are less likely to engage in outcome maximizing (i.e., rational) deliberations when choosing courses of action (Korsgaard, Meglino, & Lester, 1996). Further, persons higher in other-oriented values are more likely to accept and act on criticism from others (Korsgaard, Meglino, & Lester, 1997, 2004).

In summary, the theory of other orientation employs situational and dispositional forms of other orientation to explain how choices and actions are shaped by heuristic processes and social influence. The basic premise of this theory is that individuals who are more other-oriented, either dispositionally or as a result of situational factors, are also less likely to engage in rational and self-interested assessments of the consequences of their actions. As a result, they are more likely to adhere to social admonitions that run counter to their personal benefit. This process stands in sharp contrast to rational and self-interested processes that involve weighing costs and benefits to the self.

Other Orientation and the Regulation of Social Exchanges

The different processes described in the theory of other orientation are consistent with the dual motivational mechanisms underlying social exchanges. As noted above, the principle of reciprocity affects prosocial behavior for at least two reasons: expected reciprocity and the obligation to reciprocate (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960). Supporting the expected reciprocity mechanism (i.e., paying me forward), research shows that employees are more likely to engage in OCB when they believe that performing OCB will increase their personal outcomes (e.g., Hui et al., 2000; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). This belief is contingent on indicators of expected returns such as the opportunity for future exchanges, the other parties’ ability to provide valued benefits, and their willingness to do so.

In contrast, the obligation to reciprocate (i.e., paying you back) is triggered by the receipt of a favor. Although individuals sometimes reciprocate favors because they anticipate future exchanges (expected reciprocity), theory and research also suggest that persons respond to favors because they have internalized the norm of reciprocity (Kelman, 2006). In this case, reciprocity is viewed as a moral obligation irrespective of future benefits (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Gouldner, 1960). Gouldner (1960) refers to this mechanism as an alternative to expected returns:

The motivation for reciprocity stems not only from the sheer gratification which Alter receives from Ego but also from Alter’s internalization of a specific norm of reciprocity which morally obliges him to give benefits to those from whom he has received them. (p. 174)

It is important to note that uncritical adherence to an internalized norm such as the norm of reciprocity involves heuristic (as opposed to rational) processing wherein the individual reflexively responds with relatively little deliberation (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). That is, the mechanism of obligation to reciprocate does not involve consideration of future returns.

Viewed through the lens of the theory of other orientation, expected reciprocity is a rational process, whereas the obligation to reciprocate is a heuristic process. It thus follows that whether the rational process underlying expected reciprocity leads individuals to engage in prosocial acts depends on their level of other orientation. Thus, indicators of the likelihood of future returns such as the opportunity for future exchanges will have a stronger effect on the prosocial behavior of persons lower in other orientation. In contrast, the heuristic process governing the obligation to reciprocate should influence exchanges among persons who are higher in other orientation.

Research supports this contention. For example, when the basis of a relationship is communal, such as when one has concern for the welfare of the other party (Clark & Mills, 1979), prosocial behavior is less influenced by the opportunity for future exchanges than when the relationship is transactional (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986). Similarly, persons higher in prosocial traits tend to be less affected by the quality or fairness of benefits they receive (Colquitt, Scott, Judge, & Shaw, 2006; Jawahar & Carr, 2007; Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Orvis, Dudley, & Cortina, 2008). Conversely, the quality of exchanges has a stronger effect on individuals who possess self-interested traits (Coyle-Shapiro, 2002; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Kickul & Lester, 2001; Raja, Johns, & Ntalianis, 2004; Witt, Kacmar, Carlson, & Zivnuska, 2002).

In short, theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that persons higher in other orientation should be less influenced by expectations of reciprocity and more sensitive to the obligation to reciprocate.

Study 1

As noted in the introduction, our objective was to examine two potential alternative mechanisms that can be responsible for prosocial behavior, one that is rooted in past benefits (the obligation to reciprocate) and another that is linked to future benefits (consideration of expected reciprocity). Examining these mechanisms can be problematic because both may be operating at the same time within an ongoing relationship. Because a complicating feature of field experiments is an inability to separate multiple mechanisms that occur simultaneously (Sackett & Larson, 1990), we conducted our investigation using a series of laboratory experiments. In these studies, we employed a strategy that others have used to infer individual motives (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Clark et al., 1986; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965). That is, we controlled for alternative explanations and systematically varied the experimental circumstances to disentangle the relationship between the alternative mechanisms of obligation to reciprocate and expected reciprocity.

In the first of our three studies, we examined the role of individual differences in other orientation in response to the obligation to reciprocate previous benefits. We manipulated the obligation to reciprocate by varying the source of benefits provided to participants. To isolate the obligation to reciprocate from the expectation of reciprocity, we designed the study to minimize any possibility that participants would expect future returns. Specifically, we employed a single exchange wherein participants received a benefit and were provided with the opportunity to offer help in return, which they believed to be anonymous. Because their help was presumably anonymous, participants were led to believe that there was no opportunity for them to receive a future return for their help. This anonymity also removed any social benefit asso-
ciated with prosocial behavior such as subsequent recognition or thanks from the recipient.

In keeping with the premise underlying the theory of other orientation, we expected persons higher in other orientation to be more likely to respond to a request for help that had no clear benefit to themselves. Specifically, we hypothesized

Hypothesis 1: The impact of the obligation to reciprocate on helping behavior is moderated by other orientation such that the obligation to reciprocate will have a stronger effect on helping behavior for persons higher in other orientation.

Method

Participants and design. Participants were 80 full-time undergraduate business students who volunteered to participate in an experiment in exchange for extra credit in a management course. The mean age of the participants was 20.3 years, and 56% of the sample was male. The experiment was a single-factor design with a measured moderator. We manipulated the obligation to reciprocate by varying the source of gifts (experimenter vs. nonexperimenter) that were offered to the participants. We measured participants’ other orientation and their helping behavior directed at the experimenter.

Procedure. The experiment was conducted in groups of 15–20 students. Participants first completed a pretask questionnaire, which included a measure of their other orientation. The experimenter then explained the apparent purpose of the study, a “mental models” test, which in reality was a distractor task. In this task, participants were presented with a series of photographs of everyday objects (e.g., lamp, chair) and asked to rate each object on a given neutral attribute (e.g., large–small). Before beginning the task, we introduced the obligation to reciprocate manipulation (explained below). After participants completed the distractor task, the experimenter asked them to volunteer for a follow-up experiment, which constituted the principal dependent variable. Next, participants completed a posttask questionnaire assessing the manipulation check. Last, participants were debriefed as to the true nature of the experiment.

Manipulation. To stimulate the obligation to reciprocate, we varied the source of gifts provided to participants. Specifically, we varied whether the participants received these gifts (a souvenir wallet and cookies) from the experimenter or from another source. Research has shown that persons in a positive mood are more likely to help others (e.g., R. A. Baron, 1997; Levin & Isen, 1975; Salovey, Mayer, & Rosenhan, 1991). Therefore, to avoid confounding obligation to reciprocate with the mood-enhancing effect of receiving gifts (Brief, Butcher, & Roberson, 1995), we ensured that participants in both conditions received the same gifts, which were distributed immediately after the premeasure and before the distractor task.

In the low-obligation condition, participants received gifts that were not attributable to the experimenter. In this condition, the conference room in which the experiment took place contained materials ostensibly left from a previous meeting, namely, computer presentation equipment, literature, merchandise, and snacks. Immediately after participants completed the pretest survey, an accomplice entered the room. She stated that she had just returned from escorting a guest speaker from the building and had come to remove the items left in the room. The accomplice then explained that the box of merchandise and the cookies were promotional gifts left over from the presenter. Noting that she did not need or want the extra material, the accomplice handed out the remaining gifts to the participants. To underscore that the experimenter was not responsible for the gifts, the accomplice also gave the gifts to the experimenter.

In the high-obligation condition, the experimenter gave the gifts to participants in appreciation for participating in the study. This condition took place in the same room as the low reciprocity condition, and the same merchandise and snacks were on a table when participants entered the room. The experimenter reminded participants that they would receive extra credit in exchange for attending the experiment, which was the basis of exchange when participants signed up for the experiment. Thus, the gifts were portrayed as a present, that is, a token of thanks presented by the experimenter to the participants. Note that these gifts were beyond the prearranged terms of exchange (i.e., participation in exchange for extra credit).

Measures. Accurately assessing other orientation is problematic because other orientation describes a mode of behavior (i.e., helping other persons) that is socially desirable. Thus, measures of other orientation are vulnerable to social desirability bias (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964), which can seriously compromise the validity of the measure. This bias is present in normative (Likert-type) measures of other orientation (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987a). We addressed this issue by employing a forced-choice ipsative measure of other orientation. As described by Hicks (1970), forced-choice measures can be either normative or ipsative (Cattell, 1944). When the items that compose the measure are matched in attractiveness and the irrelevant items are unscored, the procedure yields a normative measure with important properties that enhance its validity. Specifically, this procedure reduces leniency, severity, halo error, faking, and response acquiescence (Hicks, 1970, p. 177).

We assessed other orientation using the Concern for Others subscale of the Comparative Emphasis Scale (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987a, 1987b). The Comparative Emphasis Scale is a 24-item forced-choice scale that requires respondents to choose between pairs of statements representing four values (concern for others, fairness, achievement, and honesty–integrity) that have been determined to be important in the workplace (Cornelius, Ullman, Meglino, Czajka, & McNeely, 1985). In keeping with the previously described normative procedure (Hicks, 1970), the pairs of statements in the Comparative Emphasis Scale are matched for social desirability. Moreover, we scored only the 12 statements that assessed other orientation (i.e., statements that assessed the other values were unscored). Scores ranged from 0 to 12 depending upon the number of times the subject selected one of 12 statements representing the value of concern for others (e.g., “trying to avoid hurting other people” and “lending a helping hand to someone having difficulty”).

The Concern for Others subscale has demonstrated convergence with constructs that are related to other orientation, such as empathy (Davis, 1980) and social interest (Crandall, 1975), and divergence with measures of self-orientation, such as narcissism and self-enhancement (Korsgaard et al., 1996; McNeely, 1992; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). Test–retest reliability of the subscale, estimated in a separate study of 358 job applicants over a 4-week
Results

A $t$ test of the manipulation check indicated that the participants in the high obligation condition were significantly more likely to indicate that the experimenter had provided a gift for participating in the study (low obligation: $M = 4.64, SD = 2.33$; high obligation: $M = 6.73, SD = 0.87$), $t(78) = 5.36, p < .01$.

To test Hypothesis 1, that the effect of the obligation to reciprocate on helping would be stronger for persons high in other orientation, we conducted a logistic regression on the dichotomous dependent variable of helping, with obligation to reciprocate, other orientation, and the interaction of obligation and other orientation as the predictors. The results of this analysis, presented in Table 1, revealed a significant interaction, $\chi^2(1) = 4.10, p < .05$. To interpret the interaction, we calculated the odds ratio for other orientation within high- and low-obligation conditions. An odds ratio of 1.73 ($p < .05$) was observed in the high-obligation condition, which indicates that when the obligation to reciprocate is high, a one-point increase in other orientation will increase the likelihood of helping by a factor of 1.73. In the low-obligation condition, the odds ratio estimate for other orientation was not significantly different from 1 (0.90, ns), suggesting that participants high in other orientation were no more likely to help than those low in other orientation. These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 1.

To graphically illustrate the interaction, we estimated the rates of helping within condition for persons high versus low in other orientation, using a median split on other orientation. The pattern, illustrated in Figure 1, shows that the obligation to reciprocate had a greater impact on persons high in other orientation (percentage of helping: low obligation = 78.26, high obligation = 100.00) than for persons low in other orientation (percentage of helping: low obligation = 81.25, high obligation = 73.68). Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that the obligation to reciprocate has a stronger impact on persons higher in other orientation.

Because receiving gifts has the potential to enhance positive affect (Brief et al., 1995), we examined the effect of obligation to reciprocate on mood. Specifically, we conducted hierarchical moderated regression analysis of the mood scale scores. The results indicated that obligation to reciprocate did not have a significant main effect on mood, $F(1, 75) = 0.15, ns$. Moreover, this effect was not moderated by other orientation, $F(1, 75) = 0.13, ns$. Thus, the findings do not seem to be attributable to the potential mood-enhancing effect of receiving a gift.

Discussion

One way in which the norm of reciprocity stimulates prosocial behavior in exchange relationships is through the obligation to

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>Wald $\chi^2$</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obligation to reciprocate</td>
<td>-1.16</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other orientation</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation × Other Orientation</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>4.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>4.91</td>
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* $p < .05$. 
reciprocate. This effect is believed to reflect a heuristic process wherein individuals act out of a sense of moral obligation. Given that the theory of other orientation maintains that other-oriented individuals are more likely to act on social information (such as norms) without considering future benefits, we reasoned that when the obligation to reciprocate is salient, individuals higher in other orientation would be more likely to act on the norm of reciprocity in the absence of future benefits. The findings of Study 1 supported this prediction in that, compared with those who were lower in other orientation, participants higher in other orientation were significantly more likely to volunteer when there was an obligation to reciprocate.

Because we assessed other orientation as an individual difference in Study 1, we were limited in our ability to make strong causal inferences about its effects. As discussed earlier, the theory of other orientation maintains that other orientation is both a state and a trait. To clarify the causal influence of other orientation, we conducted a second study in which we manipulated both other orientation (high vs. low other orientation prime) and the obligation to reciprocate (high vs. low obligation).

**Figure 1.** Interaction of obligation to reciprocate and other orientation on helping behavior in Study 1.

Study 2

**Method**

Participants and design. One hundred and forty-two full-time undergraduate business students (mean age = 20.3 years, 52% male) participated in the study in exchange for extra credit in a management course. We employed a 2 × 2 experimental design in which we manipulated both other orientation (high vs. low other orientation prime) and the obligation to reciprocate (high vs. low obligation).

Procedure. The procedure for Study 2 was similar to the general procedure we used for Study 1. As in Study 1, the experimenter explained the apparent purpose of the study as a mental models test, which in reality was a distracter task. In this task, participants were presented with a series of photographs of everyday objects (e.g., lamp, chair) and asked to rate each object on a given neutral attribute (e.g., large–small). Before beginning the task, we introduced the obligation-to-reciprocate manipulation (explained below).

After participants completed the distracter task, the experimenter asked them to volunteer for a follow-up experiment. As in Study 1, participants were told that the follow-up task was similar to the one they had just completed but was contained in an online survey. On an index card contained in their questionnaire packet, participants were asked to indicate their desire to participate by choosing “yes” or “no” and, if they indicated yes, to record their e-mail address. Participants then placed these cards in an envelope circulated by the experimenter. Because all cards were placed in the same envelope, the confidentiality of each participant’s choice was protected. The experimenter emphasized that the online survey was anonymous and there would be no additional credit or rewards for participating in the survey. Participants were not asked to provide their names on either the card or the questionnaire packet.

Participants who indicated that they would volunteer received an e-mail link and an access code for an online survey containing several pages of mentally taxing logic and word problems. The access codes matched a hidden code on the sign-up cards and the questionnaire packet, enabling us to link participants’ responses to the online task to their condition. At the conclusion of the study, all participants were debriefed via e-mail.

Manipulations. We manipulated the obligation to reciprocate in the same way as in Study 1. Specifically, participants received a gift (cookies) that was attributable to the experimenter or to a third party.

A variety of methods exist for priming other orientation that generally involve reading or writing narratives or sentences that center on an other-oriented theme (e.g., Grant, Molinsky, Margolis, Kamin, & Schiano, 2009; Nelson & Norton, 2005; Smeesters et al., 2003). To manipulate other orientation, we employed a priming manipulation using a reading comprehension task (Nelson & Norton, 2005). Participants read an essay that was either a high other orientation prime (helping hurricane Katrina victims) or a low other orientation prime (managing student loans and investments). Each essay contained factual background information and interviews with individuals involved in the situation (i.e., a hurricane victim and volunteer or a student and an investment adviser). To reinforce their focus on the essay, we told participants that they
would be asked four reading comprehension questions. The two
tasks were equivalent in length and reading difficulty. Moreover,
the names of the individuals interviewed and the number and
content of the reading comprehension questions were the same for
each essay (e.g., “Who is Henry Williams and what did he do?”).

We pilot-tested the efficacy of the other orientation priming
manipulation to activate the concept of other orientation using a
word-stem completion task, which is a standard method of implicit
ly measuring cognitive activation (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006).
Thirty-one participants in a pilot study completed 15 word-stem
items, seven of which could be completed as other-oriented or
non-other-oriented words (e.g., HE__ for help or head, CA__ for
care or cake, KI__ for kind or kick). The remaining word stems
were neutral words (e.g., then, went, slow). The results showed that
participants in the high other orientation condition completed a
higher proportion of stems with other-oriented words (M = 0.71,
SD = 0.22) than participants in the low other orientation condition
(M = 0.53, SD = 0.28), t(29) = 2.05, p < .05.

**Measures.** Helping behavior was measured as a function of
agreeing to participate in the follow-up survey and the degree of
actual participation in the survey. As noted above, the survey
contained several pages of tedious and mentally taxing problems.
At the end of each page, participants could elect to end the study
or continue to the next page. As a result, participants were free
to exit the survey at any time. The index of helping was created by
standardizing and averaging the following: (a) whether the partici-
ant volunteered for a follow-up survey, (b) the number of online
survey problems completed, and (c) the total length of time spent
on the survey. Because this variable was skewed (roughly 54% of
the respondents did not volunteer and thus did not receive an
e-mail link), we used the square-root transformation of this index.
The pattern of significant results reported below was the same for
the untransformed version of this measure.

We used the same indirect manipulation check for the obligation
to reciprocate. As in Study 1, this consisted of one Likert-type item
assessing the extent to which participants perceived receiving a
gift from the experimenter (“The experimenter provided me with a
gift for participating in today’s study”: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 =
strongly agree).

**Results**

A t test indicated that the obligation to reciprocate manipulation
was successful (low obligation: M = 3.64, SD = 0.97; high
obligation: M = 4.48, SD = 0.67), t(140) = 5.54, p < .01.

A 2 x 2 analysis of variance yielded a significant interaction of
reciprocity and other orientation on helping, providing support for
Hypothesis 1 (see Table 2). Simple effects analysis provided
further support for the hypothesis. The obligation to reciprocate led
to significantly higher levels of helping in the high other orienta-
tion condition (high obligation: M = 1.18, SD = 0.44; low
obligation: M = 0.94, SD = 0.32), F(1, 64) = 9.04, p < .01, but
not in the low other orientation condition (high obligation: M =
0.87, SD = 0.24; low obligation: M = 0.87, SD = 0.25), F(1,
78) = 0.00, ns. Further, pairwise comparisons (Tukey’s honestly
significant difference [HSD] = 0.194, df = 4, 138, and p < .05)
revealed that helping in the high other orientation, high-reciprocity
condition was significantly higher than in all other conditions and
that no other conditions were significantly different from one
another. Thus, the combined effect of obligation to reciprocate and
other orientation led to the highest level of helping. These results,
depicted in Figure 2, supported Hypothesis 1.

**Discussion**

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and extend the findings
of Study 1 by employing a manipulated operationalization of other
orientation, allowing for a stronger causal inference. Additionally,
whereas Study 1 examined choice behavior (volunteering for a
follow-up experiment), Study 2 examined actual, effortful helping
behavior. Because Study 2 produced a pattern of findings similar
to that of Study 1, it provided convincing support for the hypo-
thesis that persons high in other orientation are more sensitive to the
normative obligation to reciprocate.

It is noteworthy that the findings of both Study 1 and Study 2
were obtained in the absence of future returns in that participants
had no promise of any future rewards or compensation if they
volunteered to help. Further, the choice to help in both studies was
private in that the experimenter and the other participants could not
know whether a participant had agreed to help. Moreover, in Study
2, actual helping was anonymous in that participants in the online
survey were not identifiable by name. Thus, it is unlikely that
impression management effects were operating in either study.
Therefore, from a rational, self-interested perspective, it would
make little or no sense for participants to help under the circum-
cstances represented in either Study 1 or Study 2. Indeed, as Figures
1 and 2 illustrate, the obligation to reciprocate had little effect on
behavior of participants low in trait or state other orientation in
either study. Thus, the obligation to reciprocate alone appears to be
insufficient to motivate prosocial behavior among participants who
are low in other orientation. Social exchange theory would suggest
that motivating prosocial behavior among these individuals re-
quires the expectation of future returns.

This interpretation of the findings for Studies 1 and 2 illustrates
how the theory of other orientation informs on the competing
motivational mechanisms for prosocial behavior suggested by the
different definitions of OCB discussed in the introduction.
Whereas individuals high in other orientation are more likely to
engage in prosocial behavior in response to the obligation to
reciprocate, the prosocial behavior of individuals low in other
orientation, who are theorized to act in a more rationally self-
interested manner, should be contingent on the expected personal
returns for doing so. That is, expectations that a helpful act will
produce positive future returns should be a stronger motivator of
helping behavior for persons lower in other orientation. To directly
address this possibility, we conducted a third study in which we

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
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<th>F</th>
<th>η²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obligation to reciprocate</td>
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<td>0.47</td>
<td>4.95*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>11.96*</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation × Other Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>4.84*</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>13.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.
manipulated expected reciprocity and examined how other orientation moderated this effect. Our hypothesis for this study was

**Hypothesis 2:** The impact of the expected reciprocity on helping behavior is moderated by other orientation such that expected reciprocity will have a stronger effect on helping behavior for persons lower in other orientation.

### Study 3

**Method**

**Participants and design.** One hundred and twenty undergraduate business students participated in an experiment in exchange for extra credit in a management course. The mean age of the participants was 21.0 years, and 46% of the sample was male. After we dropped 11 participants for whom English was a second language and four who did not follow the instructions correctly, the total sample was reduced to 105. The experiment was a 2 × 2 factorial design in which we manipulated other orientation (high vs. low other orientation prime) and expected future returns (high vs. low expectation).

**Procedure.** The general paradigm of the experimenter asking for help was similar to that of the previous studies, except that we manipulated expected reciprocity instead of the obligation to reciprocate. This experiment took place in a computer laboratory, and all tasks and measures were completed on a computer. As in Study 2, helping was measured by participants’ volunteering and completing an online survey at a later time. Participants were told at the beginning of the experiment that there was an error in the computer program, causing it to end prematurely. After completing the manipulations, participants were informed that the program was prematurely interrupted. The experimenter then explained that the error would be fixed later that day and that the investigator would e-mail a link to allow the participants to complete the remainder of the study.

**Manipulations.** In keeping with past research (e.g., Grant et al., 2009; Nelson & Norton, 2005), we sought a stronger manipulation of other orientation priming by employing two priming techniques in succession. Specifically, we employed the same essays used in the previous study, and we asked participants to unscramble sentences based on the manipulation developed by Smeesters et al. (2003). The scrambled sentences contained words that were either high in other orientation (e.g., “I donated blood.”) or neutral (e.g., “I closed the door.”). We pilot-tested this manipulation in a sample of 28 students using a 15-item word-stem completion task. The results supported the manipulation, indicating that participants in the high other orientation condition completed a higher proportion of word stems using other-oriented words ($M = 0.54, SD = 0.18$) than participants in the low other orientation condition ($M = 0.34, SD = 0.28$), $t(26) = 2.31, p < .05$.

We manipulated expected reciprocity by varying the potential benefits of helping the experimenter. All participants were told that they would receive full credit for attending the experiment. Those in the low-expectation condition were told that no additional credit would be offered for completing the interrupted study. In the high-expectation condition, participants were told that presently no additional credit would be offered; however, they would receive a confirmation number when they accessed the online study, which they could use as a proof of participation if a way could be found to award them additional credit. In this way, anonymity of participation was held constant across conditions, but participants in the high-expectations study were led to believe that there was a chance of an expected return. Later that day, all participants received e-mail containing a link to the same online survey used in the previous study.

Because there was a significant temporal gap between the priming of motivational orientation and the observation of dependent variable (helping), we followed Stajkovic, Locke, and Blair’s (2006) approach of reminding the participants of the previous activity in which the priming took place to reactivate its effect. Specifically, when participants logged into the survey, they were asked to recall the essay and scrambled sentence tasks they had been exposed to in the earlier session. We employed the same measure of helping as in Study 2, that is, an index consisting of (a) whether the participant logged into the survey, (b) the number of problems completed, and (c) the total length of time spent on the survey. We again used a square-root transformation of this index to address the skewness of the data (59% did not access the online study). The pattern of significant results reported below was the same for the untransformed version of this measure.

### Results

Hypothesis 2 stated that the impact of expected reciprocity on helping would be moderated by other orientation such that the effect of expected reciprocity on helping would be greater for persons low in other orientation. A 2 × 2 analysis of variance, summarized in Table 3, indicated a significant interaction of ex-
depicted in Figure 3, supported Hypothesis 2. Expected reciprocity led to significantly higher levels of helping in the low other orientation condition (high expectation: $M = 1.15$, $SD = 0.36$; low expectation: $M = 0.79$, $SD = 0.20$), $F(1, 58) = 18.56, p < .01$, but not in the high other orientation condition (high expectation: $M = 0.95$, $SD = 0.32$; low expectation: $M = 0.87$, $SD = 0.36$), $F(1, 47) = 0.80, ns$. Further, pairwise comparisons (HSD = 0.23, $df = 4$, 101, and $p < .05$) revealed that helping in the low other orientation, high-expectations condition was significantly greater than both the low other orientation, low-expectation cell and the high other orientation, low-expectation cell. None of the other conditions were significantly different from one another. Thus, whereas expected reciprocity did not affect rates of helping among participants in the high other orientation condition, among participants in the low other orientation condition, expected reciprocity led to significantly higher level of helping. These results, depicted in Figure 3, supported Hypothesis 2.

**Discussion**

The purpose of Study 3 was to examine the effect of expected reciprocity on helping behavior. Reasoning that expected reciprocity is based on a rational and self-interested process, we proposed that persons low in other orientation would be more likely to help when there was a potential for future benefits. We tested this effect in a situation in which the obligation to reciprocate was relatively low in that, unlike in Studies 1 and 2, participants had not received any outstanding benefits from the experimenter. Thus, we observed the effects of expected reciprocity in the absence of the normative influence resulting from the norm of reciprocity.

The results supported the hypothesis that persons low in other orientation would respond more strongly to the expectation of reciprocity. Individuals in the high other orientation condition, who should be less prone to engage in rational deliberations regarding future benefits, were unaffected by the presence of expected reciprocity. In contrast, individuals in the low other orientation condition, who are liable to be more rational and self-interested in their decision making, appeared to be more swayed by the potential personal benefits of helping.

Studies 2 and 3 involved manipulations of other orientation in which other orientation was primed by a prosocially themed essay. This condition was contrasted with an essay that did not refer to the welfare of others but rather focused on personal money management. Because research suggests that money may activate self-interest (Vohs et al., 2006), it is not clear whether the findings in Studies 2 and 3 are attributable to self-interest or to other orientation. In contrast, in Study 1, we employed a unidimensional trait measure of other orientation (Korsgaard et al., 1996), ranging from high to low other orientation. Thus, the findings in Study 1 are clearly attributable to differences in other orientation. Given the similarities between Studies 1 and 2, it is likely that, in Study 2, the joint effect of the priming manipulation and the norm of reciprocity is also attributable to other orientation and not to self-interest. We can be less sure about the findings of Study 3 because the moderator was different from that used in Studies 1 and 2. In Study 3, in which we manipulated expected returns, the findings may be more attributable to heightened self-interest rather than diminished other orientation. This interpretation, however, is not inconsistent with the theory of other orientation because expected reciprocity is theorized to appeal more to rationally self-interested persons. However, delineating these two motivational orientations warrants further research.

**General Discussion**

The definition of OCB has evolved from one in which behavior is not directly or formally rewarded (Organ, 1988) to one in which explicit rewards play a significant role (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2009). This definitional change has shifted the motivational basis for OCB from a mechanism that does not rely on anticipated rewards to one that is rational and self-interested. The apparent result of this shift is that research has not considered mechanisms that sustain unrewarded prosocial behavior and the factors that might encourage such mechanisms. In this investigation we em-

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**Table 3**

*Analysis of Variance of the Effect of Other Orientation and Expected Reciprocity on Helping in Study 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Expected reciprocity</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
<td>12.56*</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Reciprocity × Other Orientation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>4.92*</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>12.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05.$

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**Figure 3**

Interaction of expected reciprocity and other orientation on helping behavior in Study 3. Transformed scores are reported. Cell means are reported above each bar. Transformed helping scores ranged from 0.69 to 2.13, with an overall mean of 0.94 and a standard deviation of 0.34.
ployed the theory of other orientation (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004, 2006) to examine two social exchange mechanisms that underlie different forms of prosocial behavior.

One such mechanism, expected reciprocity, is anchored in cognitions about the future and is based on expectations of future benefits. As such, it reflects a rational and self-interested process of considering the personal consequences of engaging in prosocial behavior (i.e., paying me forward). The second mechanism, the obligation to reciprocate, is anchored in cognitions about the past and is not based on anticipated benefits. In this case, prosocial behavior results from a heuristic process that is triggered by the salience of the norm of reciprocity (i.e., paying you back). The theory of other orientation and associated prior research suggest that the effect of these processes on employee behavior is moderated by other orientation.

We tested and found support for this proposition in three experiments. In total, these findings suggest that exchange relationships underlying OCB are influenced by dual processes (i.e., normative obligations and the expectations of reciprocity) that are likely to assume greater emphasis for persons who differ in other orientation. Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that in the absence of expected returns, individuals high in other orientation were more responsive to the obligation to reciprocate than were those correspondingly low in other orientation. Study 3 demonstrated that in the absence of the obligation to reciprocate, individuals low in other orientation were more responsive to expected returns. These findings make a theoretical contribution to the literature by demonstrating the applicability of the theory of other orientation for explaining OCB that is neither monitored nor rewarded.

Contrasting the findings from Study 3 with those of Studies 1 and 2 suggests that there are circumstances under which persons low in other orientation are likely to exhibit a higher degree of prosocial behavior. Specifically, when there are sufficiently attractive incentives implied in the exchange relationship, relatively rational and self-interested individuals, who are more attuned to the future benefits of their actions, should be more likely to exhibit higher levels of prosocial behavior than other-oriented individuals. This pattern is consistent with the results of a study (Lester, Meglino, & Korsgaard, 2008) that found that under very high levels of job satisfaction (implying highly favorable exchanges), employees low in other-oriented values engaged in higher levels of OCB compared with those who were high in other-oriented values. Similarly, Grant et al. (2009) found that when individuals were required to take an action that would undermine a positive exchange relationship with a partner (i.e., deliver an unjust decision), those low in other orientation exhibited higher levels of prosocial behavior than those who were high in other orientation. Thus, the two mechanisms of reciprocity suggest two routes to greater OCB and prosocial behavior, one of which does not necessitate high levels of prosocial motivation or prosocial values.

Implications

As noted in the introduction to this investigation, organizations face a significant challenge in encouraging OCB that furthers the accomplishment of the organization’s goals but is not easily monitored or explicitly rewarded. The findings of our three studies have important implications for encouraging such behavior. Most important, these findings show that organizational practices that are designed to stimulate OCB should be consistent with the other orientation of employees, whether that orientation is reflected in employees’ dispositional (i.e., trait) differences or in situational (i.e., state) characteristics. Specifically, our findings suggest that human resource policies that stress providing employee-friendly types of benefits with the objective of inducing the obligation to reciprocate will have a greater impact when employees are high in other orientation. Benefits that create a more meaningful and pleasant work environment (e.g., involvement in decision making, support for learning new skills) instill a psychological obligation (see Schein, 1968). Employees higher in other orientation are apt to respond to this obligation to reciprocate by engaging in OCB. Coyle-Shapiro (2002) found that past provision of such benefits prompted greater OCB among employees who strongly endorsed the norm of reciprocity.

On the other hand, the findings of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that such a strategy would be less likely to stimulate OCB among employees who are low in other orientation. In both studies, creating an obligation to reciprocate had little impact on helping among persons who were low in other orientation. For such individuals, making salient the potential benefits of OCB may prove to be a more beneficial strategy. Such a strategy for encouraging OCB is consistent with the findings of Study 3.

It is thus important for organizations to comprehend the dominant level of other orientation that exists among their employees. Research suggests that persons with certain personality characteristics tend to congregate in the same organizations and that one dimension along which this occurs is prosocial values and dispositions (Crandall & Harris, 1976). Similarly, Holland’s (1985) theory of vocational personalities identifies “social” types who prefer prosocially oriented occupations (e.g., teaching, training, and developmental professions) and thus exhibit higher levels of prosocial disposition. Similarly, organizations can be dominated by persons who are more individualistic and competitive. Because the impact of normative obligations versus anticipated benefits should differ strongly across such organizations, it behooves managers to consider the dominant character of their employees when attempting to promote OCB in their organizations.

Rather than passively accept the established character of employees, managers can assume a more active role by influencing the type of employees who come to dominate their organizations. Specifically, managers can influence the characteristics of their employees by attracting, selecting, and retaining employees (the attraction–selection–attrition cycle; Schneider, 1987) with the desired level of other orientation. Thus, by matching the individual characteristics of employees (i.e., high vs. low other orientation) with the methods used to motivate them (i.e., obligations vs. expectations), managers can take an active role in encouraging OCB in their organizations.

The findings of our investigation show that other orientation can be conceptualized as a situational (i.e., state) characteristic as well as a dispositional (i.e., trait). In keeping with the situational view, organizations can adopt practices that create contextual differences in the dominant level of other orientation in the workplace. For example, leaders can shape the organization’s culture by promulgating a set of beliefs, values, and artifacts that reflect the level of other orientation that is desired in the organization (Schein, 1985). Moreover, organizations can employ various socialization techniques to reinforce and make salient other-oriented values or
self-interest (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In addition, jobs can be designed in ways that create a work context that promotes prosocial motivation. For example, Grant (2007) proposed that relational job architecture, wherein jobs provide opportunities to impact and interact with beneficiaries, influences the degree to which the design of the job affects prosocial motivation. Thus, the findings of this investigation indicate that organizations can pursue multifaceted (i.e., situational as well as dispositional) approaches to encouraging other orientation in organizations.

In deciding upon different ways to encourage OCB (i.e., obligations vs. expectations), management should also recognize that each social exchange process (i.e., the obligation to reciprocate and expected reciprocity) can affect the character of the OCB that it encourages. For example, because expectations of reciprocity address OCBs that also serve the self, persons are more likely to exhibit such behaviors when it can be observed by those who are responsible for awarding future desired outcomes (see, e.g., Bolino, 1999). Moreover, OCBs that are active and thus inherently more visible, such as helping another employee, should be more affected by expectations of reciprocity than less visible, passive behaviors, such as refraining from complaining. Thus, in organizations where the climate or culture promotes self-interest, or where, through the attraction-selection-attrition cycle (Schneider, 1987), the workforce is low in other orientation, less visible forms of OCB are less likely to occur. On the other hand, OCBs that are motivated by the obligation to reciprocate should be independent of such conditions and thus more likely to occur across a broader range of situations. Therefore, by employing an obligation-oriented strategy in an organization that is dominated by an other-oriented culture or workforce, management can promote a broader range of OCB.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the rationale for the hypotheses that we examined in this investigation centered on underlying cognitive processes, we did not directly measure these processes. Although this does present a limitation, we should note that the hypotheses themselves are essentially a test of these processes. More specifically, in this investigation we employed an approach known as moderation-as-process (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005), wherein the moderator represents the conditions under which the process is present versus absent. Spencer et al. (2005) noted that such a design is appropriate under two conditions: when the mediating process is difficult to measure (as is the case with heuristic processing) and when there is an established link between the process and the moderator. This latter condition is the case for the relationship between the obligation to reciprocate and prosocial behavior and the relationship between expected reciprocity and prosocial behavior (for a review, see Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Despite our attempts to create the impression of confidentiality and anonymity, we cannot be absolutely certain that participants in Studies 1 and 2 did not expect their good deeds to be recognized and/or rewarded. However, it is unlikely that these expectations could have produced the observed pattern of interactions across all three studies. Note that in Studies 1 and 2, participants high in other orientation were more strongly affected by the reciprocity manipulation. In Study 3, in which expectations for being recognized and (potentially) rewarded were salient, the pattern of interaction was in the opposite direction: Participants in the high other orientation condition were less affected by expectations of returns. Instead, participants in the low other orientation condition engaged in higher levels of helping when expectations of being recognized were high.

Another potential limitation is our use of an experimental setting consisting of a single exchange. Although OCBs typically occur in the context of recurring exchanges, it would have been impossible to isolate the effects of the obligation to reciprocate from those of expected reciprocity in an ongoing exchange relationship. Therefore, we opted to examine these phenomena in a series of three laboratory studies in which we controlled for extraneous factors as well as the opportunity for future exchanges. In doing so, we addressed theoretical or “can” questions that enabled us to isolate and better understand certain psychological mechanisms that might otherwise be confounded in a prescriptive study in real-world setting (Anderson & Bushman, 1997; Mook, 1983).

Concerns regarding our use of a single exchange are also offset by the fact that our findings are consonant with those obtained in ongoing relationships in field settings. Specifically, several studies suggest that indicators of future beneficial exchanges have a stronger impact on the pro- and antisocial behavior of employees lower in other-oriented traits (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Kamdar, McAllister, & Turban, 2006; Lester et al., 2008). These studies provide corroborating evidence of similar mechanisms whereby individuals lower in other orientation are more sensitive to expected reciprocity. Further, these studies provide evidence that even in ongoing relationships, one mechanism can dominate another, thus enhancing the need to understand the separate effects of each mechanism.

Moreover, our findings are directly relevant to organizational circumstances that mirror those of single-exchange events. For example, the initiation of an exchange relationship often involves uncertainty regarding the opportunity for future exchanges, and the termination of relationships typically implies no expectation of future exchanges. Our findings suggest that motivational orientation may play an important role in these events. Further, many forms of OCB cannot be expected to result in reciprocal benefits to the actor. For example, employees may engage in civic virtue (talking favorably about their firm) when their supervisors and coworkers are not present to observe such actions. Because the firm and its agents may never know that the action took place, the employee cannot realistically expect any reciprocation for his or her behavior. In such instances, engaging in OCB does not reflect expected reciprocation but more likely a moral obligation to reciprocate.

Notwithstanding the similarities of our findings to phenomena and findings in field settings, future research is needed that examines the multiple processes underlying prosocial behavior in ongoing work relationships. Another important consideration is examining prosocial behaviors that are broader than the helping behavior examined in the current investigation. For example, research indicates that OCB consists of multiple dimensions beyond helping (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2009). Further, employees may engage in prosocial behavior in other ways such as ethical standards. In some cases (e.g., whistle-blowing), these actions may be harmful to certain individuals but beneficial to the organization in the long run (Paul & Townsend, 1996). The same dilemma may apply in the case of punishing or denying help to
employees who are engaging in unethical conduct (Valentine, Godkin, & Lucero, 2002). Clearly, future research should examine mechanisms underlying a broad range of OCB in a variety of settings.

Summary
Katz (1964) noted the apparent foolishness of prosocial behaviors in stating that persons who perform such behaviors are generally regarded as “dedicated damn fools” (p. 143). Katz believed that this behavior was foolish because it was unrewarded and thus not in an individual’s self-interest. Our findings suggest that Katz’s characterization is at least partially accurate. To be sure, adherence to the norm of reciprocity stems from a moral obligation that is not rooted in self-interest (Gouldner, 1960). On the other hand, prosocial behavior can be based on expected returns and thus serve the self-interests of the performer. Therefore, the presence of multiple motives underlying OCB and prosocial behavior limits our ability to make unqualified statements about the basis of such behavior and encourages further exploration into the nature of these underlying processes.

References


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