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**Pay It Forward or Keep It for Myself? How Narcissism Shapes  
Daily Prosocial Motivation and Behavior After Receiving Help**

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## RECEIVED HELP AND NARCISSISM

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to deepen the understanding of how employees react to others' help in a day-to-day context, with a focus on the role of narcissism in employees' prosocial motivation and behaviors. We hypothesize that received help generally enhances employees' prosocial motivation at the daily level, in turn increasing their own behaviors to help other coworkers and decreasing their interpersonal deviance. In addition, these effects hold only among employees who are low in narcissism. In other words, employees who are more narcissistic tend not to "pay it forward" when they receive help from their peers at work because received help fails to increase their prosocial motivation. Data from a two-week daily experience sampling study of 129 employees' 1,047 daily reports confirmed the hypothesized model. Further, the results demonstrated that the effect was driven by the rivalry, but not the admiration, dimension of narcissism. Implications for the research of received help are presented.

**Keywords:** Received help, prosocial motivation, narcissism, organizational citizenship behavior, interpersonal deviance

**Pay It Forward or Keep It for Myself? How Narcissism Shapes Daily  
Prosocial Motivation and Behavior After Receiving Help**

Helping behaviors, also referred to as interpersonal organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBIs; Podsakoff et al., 2000, William & Anderson, 1991), are defined as the voluntary behaviors that benefit others in the workplace and involve helping others with or preventing work-related problems (Podsakoff et al., 2000). These discretionary behaviors have a strongly beneficial impact on individual and organizational success and, as a result, have been studied extensively across a wide range of contexts (Organ et al., 2006; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1994; Podsakoff et al., 2000). One of the most noteworthy benefits is the crossover effect of helping on recipients' own prosocial behaviors (Baker & Bulkley, 2004; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012). Research suggests that, after receiving help, employees are likely to exhibit prosocial responses, such as engaging in helping behaviors themselves and, at the same time, engaging in less interpersonal deviance (i.e., interpersonal counterproductive work behaviors, or CWBIs; Dalal et al., 2009), which are discretionary behaviors intended to harm individuals in the workplace. For example, research has shown that employees' helping behaviors increase as a function of teammates' help (Bommer et al., 2003; Chen et al., 2013; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012), with meta-analytic work broadly confirming a link between supportive coworker behavior and employees' tendencies to help coworkers (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Other research has shown that employees engage in fewer interpersonal deviant behaviors when others are considerate and helpful toward them (Holtz & Harold, 2013) and that deviance increases as a function of workplace stress (Meier & Spector, 2013) and feelings of frustration (Harold et al., 2016), which are most likely to occur in the absence of helpful, supportive workplace relationships (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008).

Whereas evidence of the implications of received help for employees' prosocial responses has begun to accumulate at the between-person level, the day-to-day dynamics of these impacts has not been fully understood at the within-person level. Specifically, we know little about the intra-individual mechanisms of how coworkers' help influences recipients' prosocial behaviors at the daily level (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012; Lee et al., 2019). This is an important research question, as helping behaviors have been found to be discrete, episodic, and temporally dynamic (Spence et al., 2011). Studying daily helping can better capture the actual context of how helping occurs and has an impact on others.

In addition, previous research has highlighted the value of understanding the differentiated mechanisms and processes of helping at between- and within-individual levels. For example, research shows that the reasons for engaging in helping behaviors not only differ from person to person but also vary from day to day for an individual (Dalal et al., 2009; Koopman et al., 2016; Spence et al., 2011). Whereas employees' stable helping behaviors are strongly influenced by their dispositions, attitudes, and perceived relationship quality (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 2000), their momentary helping behaviors can be more affected by their temporary states and workplace events (Ilies et al., 2006; Miner et al., 2005; Spence et al., 2011). Empirical research has found substantial intra-individual variances in employees' daily engagement and receipt of helping (Dalal et al., 2009; Ilies et al., 2006; Miner & Glomb, 2010; Uy et al., 2017), suggesting that individuals' responses to others' help also may vary from day to day. In sum, as enacted helping behaviors are better understood at the intra-individual level, it is reasonable to expect that an investigation of individuals' responses to others' help in a daily context also can deepen the understanding of the dynamic impact of received help.

The existing literature, however, has not provided an adequate understanding of the intra-individual relationship between received help and prosocial responses. One exception, however, is that of Halbesleben and Wheeler (2012), who approach the intra-individual process through the lens of conservation of resources. They demonstrated that received coworkers' help increases the perceived availability of resources, which have a positive impact on recipients' resource investment through helping coworkers. Nevertheless, the research on the underlying mechanisms of the impact of daily received help and relevant boundary conditions is scarce.

We therefore extend this stream of research by considering a motivation perspective through investigating whether received help can activate recipients' daily motivation to engage in prosocial behaviors. Specifically, prosocial motivation, which is an other-orientated willingness to make a positive difference in others' lives (Grant, 2007; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Lanaj et al., 2016), can explain how daily received help shapes employees' daily state of motivation, leading to prosocial behavioral responses that represent "paying it forward." Moreover, we build on interactionist models of employee behavior (Mischel & Shoda, 1998; Murray, 1938; Tett & Burnett, 2003) by considering how individual personality shapes prosocial tendencies in response to daily received help. Specifically, whereas daily-level prosocial motivation represents an *other-oriented* motive (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Lin et al., 2017), we contend that *self-oriented* individuals' prosocial motivations may not be easily activated by others' help at the daily level.

Thus, we incorporate the moderating effect of employee narcissism, an individual difference trait characterized by high self-orientation with the grandiose perceptions about the self (Ames et al., 2006; Back et al., 2013). Due to its assertive and antagonistic self-focus, a high level of narcissism can prohibit the other-oriented motives induced by daily received help.

Specifically, the *narcissistic admiration* trait, i.e., self-enhanced feelings of entitlement and egocentric focus, and the *narcissistic rivalry* trait, i.e., self-defended tendencies to devalue others' actions (Back et al., 2013), can reduce the daily prosocial motivation that employees experience after receiving help from others and dampen the tendency to “pay it forward.”

In sum, using a daily experience sampling method (ESM) design, we test how employees' narcissism influences the tendency to experience increased prosocial motivation and behaviors after receiving help from coworkers at the daily level. In total, we offer several contributions to the literature of received help. First, we contribute to this stream of literature by focusing on a daily context when studying employees' prosocial responses—specifically, employees' enactment of helping and withdrawal of interpersonal deviance—to received help. Second, we deepen the understanding of the underlying mechanism of the responses to daily received help by incorporating a motivation perspective and focusing on the mediating role of the daily prosocial motivation state. Third, we extend the understanding of how self-oriented narcissism traits shape the tendency to respond to daily received help, demonstrating that some employees, but not all, who receive help at work tend to pay it forward in the form of prosociality at the daily level. The overall result is an improved understanding of how and when daily received help has an impact on the daily motivation and behavior of recipients.

### **Theory and Hypotheses**

#### **Daily Received Help and Prosocial Motivation**

In comparison to the considerable research that focuses on why employees help others, how recipients react to others' help has been much less studied (Podsakoff et al., 2009; Thompson & Bolino, 2018). Research has shown that helping behaviors have a differentiated impact on recipients. On the one hand, some researchers contend that individuals might be

reluctant to accept others' help due to the potential threat to self-esteem and interpersonal equity (Fisher et al., 1982; Thompson & Bolino, 2018). On the other hand, research supports the positive effects of received help, such that recipients perform better at work and are less likely to leave their organizations than are their peers (Podsakoff et al., 2009). Further, after receiving help, employees tend to engage in prosocial behaviors themselves by paying it forward to help other coworkers at work more and avoid harming them, creating a crossover effect (Baker & Bulkley, 2014; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012).

A proximal explanation for the positive crossover effects of received help on recipients' prosocial behaviors draws from the literature on prosocial motivation. Prosocial motivation reflects the desire to expend effort to benefit other people (Grant, 2008; Batson, 1987; De Dreu et al. 2000). Individuals who are high in prosocial motivation aim to act in ways that benefit the people around them (Beersma & De Dreu, 2005; Grant & Berg, 2011; Rioux & Penner, 2001). When placed in situations that pit prosocial and pro-self courses of action against each other, prosocially motivated individuals focus less on rational self-interest and the potential costs and benefits of helping others (Lester et al., 2008; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). Instead, they adopt a more broadly other-focused mentality (Grant & Berry, 2011), pay more attention to others' needs (Grant & Berg, 2011), and seek to promote collective welfare, even when it goes against their self-interests (Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). Importantly, even though most existing studies in the management literature focus on individuals' prosocial motivation as a relatively stable desire (e.g., Grant, 2008; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Grant & Sumanth, 2009; Hu et al., 2019; Lanaj et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2021), a person's state of prosocial motivation can vary from day to day and is influenced by daily contextual and situational factors (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Grant & Berg, 2011). Thus, researchers have advocated paying more attention to understanding



the implications of prosocial motivation as a temporary state and the situational experiences that can induce prosocial motivation at work (Bolino & Grant, 2016).

Although recent research indicates substantial intra-individual variation in employees' daily helping behaviors (Dalal et al., 2009; Ilies et al., 2006; Miner & Glomb, 2010; Uy et al., 2017), evidence for received help as an antecedent of state-level prosocial motivation is limited (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Nonetheless, this link is consistent with the existing prosocial motivation literature. Prosocial motivation theory suggests that two key situational factors that give rise to an employee's prosocial motivation are (a) the extent to which an employee believes that his or her actions could have a positive impact on a beneficiary and (b) the level of commitment to the beneficiary (Grant, 2007).

We contend that both factors are likely to be positively affected by the daily experiences of receiving help from others. First, regarding the perceived potential impact, we argue that, as beneficiaries of coworkers' help, employees are more likely to be reminded of behavior-outcome contingencies, wherein employees learn that they also can make a prosocial impact on their coworkers by engaging in similar daily behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Bommer et al., 2003; Lemoine et al., 2015). Second, received help shows the caring and support of coworkers, such that employees are likely to develop deeper feelings of commitment to their relationships and a stronger temporary tendency to maintain positive reciprocity with coworkers (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Colquitt et al., 2014; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). In contrast, employees who do not receive help during a given day are not provided with the opportunities to see how they might have a positive impact on their coworkers or to feel an increased commitment to their relationships with coworkers and, as a consequence, are less likely to be prosocially motivated at the daily level (Lemoine et al., 2015).

### **Implications for Employees' Daily Enacted Help and Interpersonal Deviance**

Presuming that daily received help increases employees' prosocial motivation state, we are interested in the effects that these motivational shifts can be expected to have on employees' downstream behavior at the daily level. To address to this concern, we focus on employees' own enacted help as well as their enacted interpersonal deviance. Inasmuch as prosocial motivation is defined as the desire to help others, the link between a prosocial motivation state and employees' own daily helping behaviors reflects the link between motivation and behavior (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Although one's motivation to engage in a behavior does not mean that the behavior will ultimately be performed (e.g., due to external constraint or lack of ability), the link between the two phenomena is consistently positive (Kanfer & Chen, 2016). An employee who is motivated to act prosocially will tend to seek opportunities to engage in prosocial behavior, increasing the intensity, frequency, and duration of energy directed toward these prosocial goals and, thus, enhancing opportunities to enact helping behaviors at the daily level.

Consistent with the theorized implications of prosocial motivation for helping behaviors, several empirical studies offer evidence of such an effect. For example, Ong et al. (2018) linked prosocial motivation to OCBs in two broad samples of working adults across various industries. Hu and Liden (2015) linked prosocial motivation to cooperative behaviors in teams, and Hu et al. (2016) linked prosocial motivation to corporate volunteering. Some of this research has employed an experimental approach, offering further confidence in the causal nature of the link between prosocial motivation and subsequent prosocial behavior (Grant & Berg, 2011). Thus, we offer the following mediation hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Received help positively influences recipients' enacted help via prosocial motivation at the daily level.

Beyond its implications for employees' enacted help, we theorize that the daily prosocial motivation state that employees experience after receiving help also has implications for employees' daily interpersonal deviant behaviors. Examples of such behaviors include criticizing a coworker's opinion or suggestion and excluding a coworker from a conversation (Dalal et al., 2009). Although direct evidence of a link between prosocial motivation and interpersonal deviance is limited, there are several theoretical reasons to expect such a link. First, although self-interested motives and prosocial motives are largely orthogonal at the trait level, research suggests that they are negatively related at the situational level (Grant & Berg, 2011). This correlation implies that state levels of prosocial motives toward one's coworkers will result in fewer selfish behaviors as employees direct their energy toward helping their coworkers. Second, prosocial motivation is associated with increased empathy, which, in turn, is negatively linked to a tendency to act destructively toward another person (Batson, 1991; Grant, 2007). Finally, prosocial motivation has been linked to a decreased tendency to act counterproductively due to reasons such as being treated unfairly (Bobocel, 2013) or to feel that one is licensed to act counterproductively due to past good deeds (Klotz & Bolino, 2013). For these reasons, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Received help negatively influences recipients' enacted interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation at the daily level.

### **The Demotivating Role of Narcissism**

As received help may increase employees' prosocial motivation at the daily level, an important consideration is when received help is more or less likely to occur. In other words, we are interested in for whom daily received help is more likely to spark the state motivation to

benefit others. To address this concern, we utilize theory and research from the narcissism literature, which argues that narcissism fundamentally shapes how employees interpret the help that they receive from their coworkers at a daily level (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). Narcissism refers to the extent to which an individual “has an inflated sense of self and is preoccupied with having that self-view continually reinforced” (Chatterjee & Hambrick, 2007, p. 353). According to Back et al. (2013), narcissistic individuals’ overarching goal of maintaining a grandiose self is manifested in two sub-components, namely *narcissistic admiration*, i.e., the tendency to approach social admiration through assertive self-enhancement, and *narcissistic rivalry*, i.e., the tendency to avoid social failure through antagonistic self-protection. Nevertheless, narcissistic individuals are generally characterized by their peers as charismatic (Deluga, 1997) and tend to emerge as leaders in their teams (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). In their unflagging efforts to maintain a positive self-view, however, narcissistic individuals tend to pursue opportunities to demonstrate their superiority over others publicly and defend themselves against situations in which their positive sense of self might be threatened (Deluga, 1997; Judge et al., 2006; Lubit, 2002; Raskin & Terry, 1988).

Employees with higher narcissistic traits will feel less prosocially motivated than will their peers when they benefit from daily received help for several reasons. First, a general reason that daily received help is unlikely to spark a prosocial motivation state in more narcissistic employees is that they are more self-focused. They are more likely to exhibit a general disregard for others (Campbell & Foster, 2007; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001) and be uninterested in being seen as possessing communal qualities (Campbell et al., 2002). Similarly, they generally exhibit more independent and less interdependent self-construals (Konrath et al., 2009). Given this self-focus, employees who are more narcissistic are likely to be less sensitive to environmental cues

that encourage them to identify the positive impact of prosocial behaviors, feel committed to others, and act prosocially. Instead, they are likely to be somewhat dismissive of the help that they receive from others, showing less reactive other-oriented motives. In contrast, employees who are less narcissistic show greater awareness of and sensitivity to the daily-level prosocial behaviors of the people with whom they interact as compared to their more narcissistic peers.

Second, a defining feature of narcissism is a sense of entitlement (i.e., narcissistic admiration). Employees who are more narcissistic tend to believe that they deserve special treatment from those around them because they are superior to others. They feel that they have a right to preferential treatment from others and are, therefore, justified in demanding such preferential treatment (Bishop & Lane, 2002; Campbell et al., 2004). As a result, individuals with stronger narcissist traits can be expected to interpret daily received help differently than do their peers. Whereas employees who are less narcissistic might interpret coworkers' help as an act of kindness and generosity, those who are more narcissistic are likely to interpret such help as justly deserved, a repayment of past debts, and "the least that he/she could do." Stated differently, this sense of entitlement is likely to shift how more narcissistic employees interpret the help that they receive from others at the daily level, viewing them as less motivated by prosociality and, consequently, a weak reminder of the potential positive impact of being prosocially motivated themselves.

Third, due to the preference for antagonistic self-protection (i.e., narcissistic rivalry), narcissistic individuals always strive for supremacy over others. They do this in part by devaluing the actions of others and even acting aggressively against them, a suite of behaviors that has been identified as a reason for negative evaluations of narcissistic individuals of long-term acquaintance (Blair et al., 2008; Paulhus, 1998). Therefore, when employees who are more

narcissistic are helped by their coworkers, they will seek to maintain their positive self-views by devaluing the help, telling themselves that they could have completed the task without assistance. Thus, rather than spark the state of prosocial motivation, daily received help is likely to spark feelings of annoyance and even hostility.

As Back et al. (2013) notes, admiration and rivalry components of narcissism represent different pathways in maintaining the grandiose self. We therefore hypothesize a moderating effect of narcissism as an overall personality trait and the effects of the two components separately. Thus, we offer the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: Narcissism moderates the positive relationship between received help and prosocial motivation at the daily level, such that the relationship will be mitigated when employees' trait narcissism is higher.

Hypothesis 3 (extension): The admiration and rivalry dimensions of narcissism each moderate the positive relationship between received help and prosocial motivation at the daily level, such that the relationship will be mitigated when employees' admiration or rivalry is higher.

Combining Hypotheses 1 and 2 with Hypothesis 3, we contend that narcissism, with its dual dimensions of admiration and rivalry, also can moderate the indirect effects of received help on enacted help and interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation. Thus, we offer the following moderated mediation hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4: Narcissism moderates the positive indirect effect of received help on enacted help oneself via prosocial motivation at the daily level, such that the indirect effect will be mitigated when employees' trait narcissism is higher.

Hypothesis 4 (extension): The admiration and rivalry dimensions of narcissism each moderates the positive indirect effect of received help on enacted help oneself via prosocial motivation at the daily level, such that the indirect effect will be mitigated when employees' admiration or rivalry is higher.

Hypothesis 5: Narcissism moderates the negative indirect effect of received help on enacted interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation at the daily level, such that the indirect effect will be mitigated when employees' trait narcissism is higher.

Hypothesis 5 (extension): The admiration and rivalry dimensions of narcissism each moderates the negative indirect effect of received help on enacted interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation at the daily level, such that the indirect effect will be mitigated when employees' admiration or rivalry is higher.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedures**

Data were collected from a large state-owned manufacturing company located in Eastern China. The company's main products are home appliances, such as refrigerators, washing machines, and air conditioners. The author team received permission to contact 193 people within the company and invite them to participate in the research. Of the 193 employees whom we contacted with invitations to participate, 185 ultimately agreed. These employees occupied various positions in the company, including human resources management, finance, accounting, product quality management, brand promotion, and administrative staff.

The study was conducted in two phases, including an initial survey phase and a daily survey phase. The initial survey served two purposes. The first purpose was to serve as an invitation for the employees to participate in the research and for us to provide an explanation of

the general purpose of the study. The second purpose was to collect data on the between-person level variables, namely employees' narcissistic personalities and demographic information. Ten days after the initial survey was sent out, the daily survey phase of the study began. The daily survey was conducted for ten consecutive business days, from Monday to Friday, over the course of two weeks. Participants received emails with the web-link to the daily survey around 3 p.m. each business day, and the survey was closed by the end of that day. Participants completed the survey, on average, at 3:42 p.m. each day. Each respondent was provided with 50 Chinese *yuan* (8 USD) in cash as an incentive to participate in the survey.

Among the 185 employees who originally agreed to participate in our research, 129 completed at least seven daily surveys, for a final retention rate of 69.7%. In total, 1,047 daily reports were obtained and included in the analysis. Of this final sample, 42.6% were male, and 57.4% were female. The mean age of the final sample was 33.64 ( $SD = 9.20$ ), and the mean organizational tenure was 11.40 years ( $SD = 10.05$ ). Participants in the final sample did not differ from the initial participant pool in any of the demographic measures collected in the initial survey or in trait narcissism.

### **Measures**

As discussed, data were collected in two phases. In the first phase, participants completed measures of overall narcissism and provided demographic information. In the second phase, participants completed daily measures of received help, prosocial motivation, enacted help, and enacted interpersonal deviance. The research model focused on how received help and prosocial motivation affected next-day enacted help and interpersonal deviance. All measures were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

### ***Narcissism***



To measure employee narcissism, we utilized the six-item version of the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ; Back et al., 2013). The NARQ is a newer measure of narcissism, intended to capture two interrelated dimensions of a narcissistic personality, namely admiration and rivalry. When compared against the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), the NARQ has been shown to have improved psychometric properties and greater predictive validity (Back et al., 2013). Sample items include, “I deserve to be seen as a great personality” (admiration), and “I react annoyed if another person steals the show from me” (rivalry). Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was calculated to examine the internal consistency of the items and supported high scale reliability ( $\alpha$  for narcissism = .77;  $\alpha$  for admiration = .72;  $\alpha$  for rivalry = .74).

### ***Received Help***

Received help was measured with six items from Dalal et al. (2009), whose scale was developed with a focus on interpersonal citizenship behaviors at the daily level. This scale was used in previous research and found to be valid and reliable (e.g., Clark et al., 2018; Koopman et al., 2016). Sample items include, “Today, a coworker went out of his/her way to be nice to me,” and, “Today, a coworker tried to help me” ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

### ***Prosocial Motivation***

Prosocial motivation was measured with four items from Grant (2008), adapted to reflect employee daily prosocial motivation. These measures demonstrated good validity and reliability in previous research (e.g., Grant & Berry, 2011; Grant & Mayer, 2009). A sample item is, “Today, I was motivated to do good for others through my work” ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

### ***Enacted Help***

Enacted help behaviors also were measured with six items from Dalal et al. (2009) and measured at the daily level. Sample items include, “Today, I went out of my way to be nice to a coworker,” and, “Today, I tried to help a coworker” ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

### ***Enacted Interpersonal Deviance***

Enacted interpersonal deviance was measured with six items from Dalal et al. (2009). This scale was used in previous research and found to be valid and reliable (e.g., Clark et al., 2018). Sample items include, “Today, I behaved in an unpleasant manner toward a coworker,” and, “Today, I spoke poorly about a coworker to others” ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

### ***Control Variables***

Following previous studies (e.g., Lanaj et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2013) and to address concerns of reverse causality, we controlled for baseline levels of our mediator and outcome variables on the previous day (when reports of the previous day were missing values, we controlled for baseline levels, using the reports of the most recent daily survey available). In addition, to mitigate concerns with common method bias due to the daily affect (Podsakoff et al., 2003), we controlled for daily felt positive affect by asking participants the extent to which they felt “joyful,” “happy,” and “delighted” on a given day (Watson & Clark, 1999;  $\alpha = .98$ ).

### ***Analytic Strategy***

Our analyses were conducted with the Mplus 8 statistical program (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). Taking into consideration the nested nature of our data, for which daily reports are nested within individuals, we conducted multilevel path analysis to examine the hypothesized model. This method supports a simultaneous examination of all paths of interest and allows us to estimate the covariances among random slopes for testing the indirect effects (Koopman et al., 2016; Lanaj et al., 2016; Uy et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013). The partial missing issue (e.g., some

cases' reports of outcomes were missing data) was handled with the full information maximum likelihood approach in Mplus (Newman, 2014).

To specify hypothesized within-person relationships, we modeled daily prosocial motivation as a function of daily received help. To reduce common method bias, we modeled employees' enacted help and interpersonal deviance the next day as a function of received help and prosocial motivation. All of these substantive relationships were specified as random slopes. Following previous ESM studies (Koopman et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2013), the impacts of the control variables (i.e., daily positive affect at the same day and the corresponding mediators and outcome variables during the previous day) were modeled with fixed slopes. Following the recommendation of Hofmann et al. (2000), all within-person level independent variables were centered at the person's mean (i.e., group-mean centering). This approach allows for the examination of unconfounded within-person effects by removing between-person variances.

To specify the cross-level moderation effect theorized by Hypothesis 1, we followed the recommendation of Bauer et al. (2006) to regress the random slope between received help and prosocial motivation on the between-person level moderators of trait narcissism and two dimensions. To help with the interpretation of the results, we centered the moderators around the grand mean. To test simple slopes and plot the interaction, we used the methods of Preacher et al. (2006) to estimate slopes at higher (+1 *SD*) and lower (-1 *SD*) levels of narcissism and the two dimensions.

Finally, following the recommendations of Preacher et al. (2010), we used Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to test the indirect effects theorized by Hypotheses 1, 2, 4, and 5. This method calculates the products of two-stage estimates 20,000 times to build the 95% confidence intervals (CIs).

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for each of the variables at the between-person and within-person levels. Before testing the hypotheses, we conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the measurement model of the study. The hypothesized six-factor model (i.e., received help, prosocial motivation, enacted help, enacted interpersonal deviance, positive affect, and narcissism) demonstrated satisfactory fit ( $\chi^2 = 1600.11$ ,  $df = 684$ , CFI = .94, TLI = .93, SRMR<sub>within</sub> = .03, SRMR<sub>between</sub> = .08, RMSEA = .04, AIC = 40180.70). The six-factor model also demonstrated improved fit over more parsimonious models, such as a five-factor model that collapses prosocial motivation and positive affect ( $\chi^2 = 3768.08$ ,  $df = 693$ , CFI = .80, TLI = .78, SRMR<sub>between</sub> = .10, SRMR<sub>within</sub> = .10, RMSEA = .07, AIC = 43165.61). Then, we split the narcissism variable by specifying the two dimensions as two factors. The resulting seven-factor measurement model ( $\chi^2 = 1544.54$ ,  $df = 678$ , CFI = .94, TLI = .94, SRMR<sub>within</sub> = .03, SRMR<sub>between</sub> = .06, RMSEA = .04, AIC = 40125.89) is an even better fit to the data than is the six-factor model that collapses the two narcissism factors, suggesting that the two dimensions of narcissism are empirically distinguishable.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Thus, we tested the hypothesized model via multilevel path analysis. Table 2 presents the results of the multilevel path model with narcissism as the moderator, and Figure 1 provides a summary of the main relationships. For the testing of the extensions of Hypotheses 3–5, Table 3 and Figure 2 present the results of the multilevel path model with admiration and rivalry as dual moderators.

[Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here]

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here]

Hypothesis 1 predicted the mediation of prosocial motivation in the relationship between received help and enacted help at the daily level. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, received help was positively related to prosocial motivation ( $\gamma = .20, p < .01$ ) and prosocial motivation was positively related to next-day enacted help ( $\gamma = .27, p < .01$ ). We employed a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to test the indirect effect. The results supported the significance of the indirect effect with a 95% CI that does not include zero (indirect effect = .05, 95% CI = [.012, .108]). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted the mediation of prosocial motivation in the relationship between received help and enacted interpersonal deviance at the daily level. Prosocial motivation was found to be negatively related to next-day enacted interpersonal deviance ( $\gamma = -.10, p < .01$ ). The Monte Carlo simulation results also supported the indirect effect with a 95% CI that does not include zero (indirect effect = -.01, 95% CI = [-.036, -.006]). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a cross-level moderating effect of narcissism on the positive relationship between received help and prosocial motivation at the daily level. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, received help was positively related to prosocial motivation ( $\gamma = .20, p < .01$ ), and the random slope between received help and prosocial motivation varied as a function of employee narcissism ( $\gamma = -.13, p < .01$ ). Figure 3 presents the interaction plot. Simple slope tests indicated that the relationship between received help and prosocial motivation was significantly stronger among employees lower in trait narcissism (i.e., one *SD* below the average; slope = .33,  $p < .01$ ) than among employees higher in trait narcissism (i.e., one *SD* above the average; slope = .07, *ns*; difference in slopes = -.26,  $p < .01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

Hypothesis 3 (extension) further predicted the cross-level moderating effects of two dimensions of narcissism in the relationship between received help and prosocial motivation at the daily level. As shown in Table 3, we found support for a significant moderating effect of rivalry ( $\gamma = -.10, p < .05$ , but not for admiration ( $\gamma = -.03, ns$ ). Figure 4 presents the interaction plot for rivalry. Simple slope tests indicated that the relationship between received help and prosocial motivation was significantly stronger when rivalry was lower (i.e., one *SD* below the average; slope = .32,  $p < .01$ ) than when it was higher (i.e., one *SD* above the average; slope = .07, *ns*; difference in slopes = -.25,  $p < .05$ ).

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Hypothesis 4 predicted a cross-level moderating effect of trait narcissism on the indirect relationship between received help and employees' next-day enacted help via prosocial motivation at the daily level. The results based on the Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications supported the significance of moderated mediation effect (moderated mediation index = -.04, 95% CI = [-.082, -.004]). Specifically, the positive indirect effect was significantly stronger among employees lower in trait narcissism (indirect effect = .09, 95% CI = [.020, .179]) than among employees higher in trait narcissism (indirect effect = .02, 95% CI = [-.020, .065]; difference in indirect effects = -.07, 95% CI = [-.164, -.008]). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported, as employees lower in trait narcissism increased their next-day enacted help in response to received help via increased prosocial motivation, whereas employees higher in trait narcissism did not.

Hypothesis 4 (extension) further predicted the conditional indirect effects of received help on employees' next-day enacted help via prosocial motivation at the daily level, depending

on the admiration and rivalry dimensions of narcissism. We found a significant effect for rivalry (moderated mediation index =  $-.03$ , 95% CI =  $[-.064, -.001]$ ) but not for admiration (moderated mediation index =  $-.01$ , 95% CI =  $[-.045, .021]$ ). The positive indirect effect of received help on next-day enacted help via prosocial motivation was significantly stronger when rivalry was lower (indirect effect =  $.08$ , 95% CI =  $[.017, .167]$ ) than when it was higher (indirect effect =  $.02$ , 95% CI =  $[-.019, .073]$ ; difference in indirect effects =  $-.07$ , 95% CI =  $[-.158, -.001]$ ).

Hypothesis 5 posited a cross-level moderating effect of narcissism on the indirect relationship of received help and employees' next-day enacted interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation at the daily level. The results supported this moderated mediation effect (moderated mediation index =  $.01$ , 95% CI =  $[.003, .030]$ ). Specifically, the negative indirect effect was significantly stronger among employees lower in trait narcissism (indirect effect =  $-.03$ , 95% CI =  $[-.058, -.011]$ ) than among employees higher in trait narcissism (indirect effect =  $-.01$ , 95% CI =  $[-.023, .006]$ ; difference in indirect effects =  $.02$ , 95% CI =  $[.005, .051]$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported, as employees lower in trait narcissism reduced their next-day enacted interpersonal deviance in response to received help via increased prosocial motivation, and employees higher in trait narcissism showed no such effect.

Hypothesis 5 (extension) further predicted the conditional indirect effects of received help on employees' next-day enacted interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation at the daily level, depending on the rivalry and admiration dimensions of narcissism. The results supported a significant effect for rivalry (moderated mediation index =  $.01$ , 95% CI =  $[.0004, .023]$ ) but not for admiration (moderated mediation index =  $.002$ , 95% CI =  $[-.010, .013]$ ). The negative indirect effect of received help on next-day interpersonal deviance via prosocial motivation was significantly stronger when rivalry was lower (indirect effect =  $-.03$ , 95% CI =  $[-.058, -.009]$ )

than when it was higher (indirect effect =  $-.01$ , 95% CI =  $[-.023, .007]$ ; difference in indirect effects =  $.02$ , 95% CI =  $[.001, .056]$ ).

### **Discussion**

In a daily ESM study of 129 employees' experiences, motivation, and behavior over the course of two weeks, we examined the research questions of why and when employees tend to prosocially react to coworkers' help at the daily level. Integrating individuals' other-oriented motives with self-oriented traits, the results indicated that state prosocial motivation induced by received help on a given day was related to employees' exhibiting more helping behaviors and fewer interpersonal deviant behaviors on a subsequent day. In addition, only employees lower in trait narcissism experienced an increased state of prosocial motivation when they received daily help, thus tending to pay it forward, whereas employees higher in narcissism did not. Further analyses suggested that the boundary effects of narcissism were driven mainly by the antagonistic self-protective motives captured by the narcissistic rivalry but not the component of narcissistic admiration.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

Our research contributes to the literature on helping behaviors first by examining how received help influences employees at a daily level. In comparison to studies that focus on why employees help others and on determining antecedents to helping behaviors, there is less research on how individuals react to others' help, especially on an intra-individual level (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2012). Our research extends the research on received help by focusing on the prosocial responses to others' help at a daily level. The results demonstrate that received help on a given day has a positive impact in terms of enhancing recipients' prosocial responses, reflected not only in the increased enactment of helping but also in the absence of interpersonal



harming. This finding provides direct evidence that the helping behaviors can benefit individual recipients on a daily basis and can foster more prosocial behaviors that will eventually benefit organizations.

Second, drawing from the prosocial motivation literature, we contribute to the research on daily received help by uncovering the mechanisms of prosocial motivation states. Our results indicate that employees tend to experience greater prosocial motivation states when they receive help from their peers on a given day, in part, because received help provides employees an opportunity to see their potential for prosocial impact and increases their felt commitment to their coworkers (Grant, 2007). By doing so, we echo and extend the research of Halbesleben and Wheeler (2012), who found a “reciprocal resource gain spiral” among coworkers. In addition, although prosocial motivation has been conceptualized as both an individual difference trait and an intra-individual state, very few field studies have examined the shifts in prosocial motivation as a state (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Grant & Berg, 2011). Adopting a daily ESM approach, our research contributes to the literature on prosocial motivation by demonstrating that the prosocial motivation state varies in a meaningful way across days, such that it is affected, in part, by the help that employees receive from their peers and has downstream influences on individuals’ daily enactment of help and interpersonal deviance. In this way, we also contribute to a broader call for daily-level examinations of employee motivation (Judge et al., 2014) and recommend future research on the antecedents and consequences of state-level motivation as well as its differences from the stable trait-like motivation.

Third, incorporating the literature of narcissism, our research has implications for the boundary condition of the prosociality-enhancing impact of daily received help. As narcissism is characterized by high self-orientation in terms of assertive self-enhancement and antagonistic

self-protection (Back et al., 2013), it can prohibit other-oriented motives and responses after one receives help. In the analyses of dual dimensions of narcissism, this effect is uniquely driven by the rivalry dimension of narcissism, consistent with the idea that employees who are more narcissistic are less likely to recognize the value of benefiting others or to feel committed to coworkers after receiving help on a given day. Instead, they are more likely to see and interpret coworkers' help to be threats to their ego and competency. Further, the moderating effect of the admiration dimension is not significant, perhaps because others' help can partly contribute to the enhanced feelings of being admired and welcomed. Because the self-focused admiration is not threatened, it does not conflict with the emergence of the other-oriented motives (Grant & Berg, 2011). The inconsistent results in regard to the moderating effects of admiration and rivalry confirm Back et al.'s (2013) notion that these two dimensions represent differentiated cognitive, affective-motivational, and behavioral pathways when employees who are more narcissistic maintain a grandiose self. As such, future research needs to be based on a more nuanced theoretical rationale when examining the effects of narcissism.

In terms of practical implications, our research suggests several best practices. At a general level, organizations should be mindful of the positive crossover effects that helping behaviors can create. More specifically, organizations should be aware that helping, when received, can enhance other employees' daily prosocial motivation. This enhanced prosocial motivation has implications for downstream enacted help and interpersonal deviance. More broadly, our research suggests that organizations might be able to cultivate daily prosocial motivation as an organizational norm, with implications for prosocial cultures and climates that can emerge (Ostroff et al., 2003). At the same time, organizations must be mindful of their employees' narcissism. If left unchecked, narcissism can nullify many of the positive effects of

daily received help. Fortunately, a growing stream of research suggests that narcissism is somewhat malleable (Giacomin & Jordan, 2016), suggesting that organizations can, for instance, craft norms that emphasize humility over narcissism (Owens et al., 2015) and, thus, counteract narcissism's negative effects on daily interpersonal interactions.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions of our research, it is subject to several limitations that, nevertheless, provide promising avenues for future research. The first limitation of our research is the focus on narcissism as the primary determinant of when daily received help sparks prosocial motivation, as the prosocial motivation perspective suggests more opportunities for examining the boundary conditions of the effects of received help. For instance, organizations that emphasize competition over cooperation among employees might find a weak impact of received help on prosocial motivation. Conversely, other factors, such as the relational work design that provides more opportunities for beneficiary contacts, might strengthen the capacity of helping behaviors to spark recipients' prosociality (Grant, 2007). We thus advocate future research to continue the investigation on potential boundary conditions of the prosocial reactions to received help. Relatedly, narcissism has "sibling constructs", such as self-esteem (Lawson & Robins, 2021), which is conceptually overlapped with narcissism and could share a similar moderation role as narcissism in the relationship between received help and prosocial motivation. While our study did not measure self-esteem and could not provide an empirical test, future research is needed to explore the extent to which those sibling constructs can have similar or distinct effects in altering individuals' reactions to others' help.

An additional limitation of our research is the scope of consequences that it considered. In this study, we focused on employees' daily enacted help and interpersonal deviance as the

principal consequences of prosocial motivation states. Nonetheless, a broad range of consequences and boundaries of those consequences could also be considered. For example, Bolino and Grant (2016) argue that there are more forms of prosocial behaviors than helping behaviors, including knowledge sharing, mentoring, and compassion. In addition, previous research links prosocial motivation to increased task performance (Grant & Sumanth, 2009) and corporate volunteerism (Hu et al., 2016). Likewise, the effects of prosocial motivation can be dampened by impression management motives (Takeuchi et al., 2015) but has synergistic effects with intrinsic motivation (Grant, 2008). All of these studies point to promising and generative avenues for future research.

Further, although this research focuses on the underlying mechanism of prosocial motivation for the effect of daily received help on prosocial responses, there are other potential mechanisms worthy of examination, for example, the felt momentary obligation to exchange (Liao et al., 2020). Interestingly, the research of Liao et al. (2020) suggests that a high social exchange relationship quality may weaken the relationship between receiving others' episodic benefits and the momentary sense of obligation to reciprocate, as employees tend to focus on open-ended, long-term, and trustful reciprocity with the exchange partner. As our study design did not focus on dyadic exchange partners, we could not examine how social exchange and prosocial motivation interactively determine individuals' prosocial responses to coworkers' help. Specifically, our measurement of enacted help and deviance did not specify the targets of those behaviors, so it is possible that the focal employees engaged in those behaviors due to their obligation to reciprocate with a particular exchange partner. We thus recommend that future studies make use of dyad samples to explore this possibility and examine the mechanisms of prosocial motivation and social exchange simultaneously.

Another potential alternative explanation is that coworkers' help may prime the recipients with a prosocial goal or concept, thus inducing their subsequent prosocial responses (Chen et al., 2021; Förster et al., 2007; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Gollwitzer et al., 2011). As one of anonymous reviewers astutely indicated, this priming effect could be very likely to happen in a short term, such as the daily context. However, without experimental design and manipulation check, we cannot know whether this priming effect really happens in our current study. Future research can design studies like field experiments to examine whether received help can prime recipients to act prosocially. Relatedly, the current study is also lack of temporal precision about the timing (i.e., when the prosocial responses will appear after receiving help) and the duration (i.e., how long the prosociality-enhancing impact of received help will last) of the hypothesized effects. Recent scholars also point out the scarcity of temporal theories which can help researchers construct more precise hypotheses regarding individual behaviors and interactions (George & Jones, 2000; Methot et al., 2017; Shipp & Cole, 2015). While the current research design exclusively focused on a daily context which might not fully capture the temporal processes of reactions to received help, future research is needed to advance temporal theories which can provide clearer guidelines about how the impact of received help emerges and evolves. In addition, although the purpose of this research is to examine the within-person and daily-level relationship between received help and prosocial reactions, our findings could be generalized to the between-person level. Future research can examine whether frequent help from coworkers can give rise to an employee's stable prosocial motivation and behaviors.

From a methodological perspective, our study design also involves several limitations. First, following past daily ESM research (e.g., Fehr et al., 2017), we relied on employees' self-assessments of the help that they received and the self-conducted help and deviance at the daily

level. Although recent methodological work supports this approach (Uy et al., 2017), future research would benefit from triangulating such self-reported data with coworker-reported interpersonal behaviors. Second, our daily design does not allow for more fine-grained analyses of the ebb and flow of prosocial motivation. For instance, it is unclear precisely how long the motivational benefits of received help last in the course of a given day. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal design to explore the growth patterns of prosocial motivation and behaviors after receiving help. Third, like most narcissism research, our research used self-reported narcissism traits, which may have created a question of whether narcissistic individuals tend to detect and report fewer helping behaviors that they received from others. Future empirical research may be required to further distinguish the bias in acknowledging others' help from the tendency to react to it. Finally, it is important to note that our research was conducted in a single company of the manufacturing industry in China. This leaves open the question of how organizational, industrial, and national contexts might alter our findings according to factors such as organizational structure, market competition, individualism-collectivism culture, and cultural tightness-looseness (Gelfand et al., 2011).

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Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among the Study Variables*

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	Within- person <i>SD</i>	Between- person <i>SD</i>	Within- person variance (%)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Within-person level													
1. Received help (day <i>t</i> )	1,047	5.73	0.60	0.91	30%	(.97)	.77**	.89**	-.58**	.82**	-.08	.12	-.24**
2. Prosocial motivation (day <i>t</i> )	1,047	5.86	0.55	0.84	30%	.31**	(.95)	.85**	-.54**	.75**	-.09	.03	-.17
3. Enacted help (day <i>t</i> +1)	915	5.89	0.62	0.81	37%	.09**	.10**	(.97)	-.62**	.78**	-.08	.11	-.24**
4. Enacted interpersonal deviance (day <i>t</i> +1)	915	1.57	0.50	0.68	35%	-.08**	-.06	-.24**	(.96)	-.48**	.14	.08	.16
5. Positive affect (day <i>t</i> )	1,047	5.68	0.63	1.08	26%	.38**	.33**	.13**	-.06*	(.98)	-.14	.03	-.26**
Between-person level													
6. Narcissism	129	3.26	—	1.01	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.77)	.83**	.85**
7. Narcissism-admiration	129	3.56	—	1.16	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.72)	.42**
8. Narcissism-rivalry	129	2.97	—	1.23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(.74)

*Note.* Within-person level correlations are below the diagonal, between-person level correlations are above the diagonal, and reliabilities are on the diagonal. For within-person level variables, reliabilities are averaged across 10 days. The percentage of within-person variance was calculated as the ratio of within-person variance to the composite of within-person variance and between-person variance.

\*\**p* < .01

Table 2

*Path Model Results for the Moderating Role of Narcissism in the Relationship of Received Help with Enacted Help and Enacted Interpersonal Deviance via Prosocial Motivation*

Predictor	Mediator: Prosocial motivation (day $t$ )		Outcome: Enacted help (day $t+1$ )		Outcome: Enacted interpersonal deviance (day $t+1$ )	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	5.84**	.08	4.29**	.61	2.12**	.28
Level-1 control						
Prosocial motivation (day $t-1$ )	.05	.04				
Enacted help (day $t$ )			.00	.10		
Enacted interpersonal deviance (day $t$ )					-.02	.05
Positive affect (day $t$ )	.18**	.05				
Positive affect (day $t+1$ )			.37**	.06	-.25**	.05
Level-1 predictor						
Received help (day $t$ )	.20**	.05	-.02	.05	-.02	.04
Prosocial motivation (day $t$ )			.27**	.10	-.10**	.03
Level-2 predictor						
Narcissism	-.08	.08				
Cross-level interaction						
Narcissism $\times$ received help	-.13**	.05				

*Note.* Level 1  $n = 915-1047$ ; Level 2  $n = 129$ . Unstandardized coefficients (*Bs*) are reported. Partial missing values are handled by the maximum likelihood method. Level 1 controls and received help are person-mean centered. Narcissism is grand-mean centered.

\*\* $p < .01$

Table 3

*Path Model Results for the Dual Moderators of Narcissism-Admiration and Rivalry in the Relationship of Received Help with Enacted Help and Enacted Interpersonal Deviance via Prosocial Motivation*

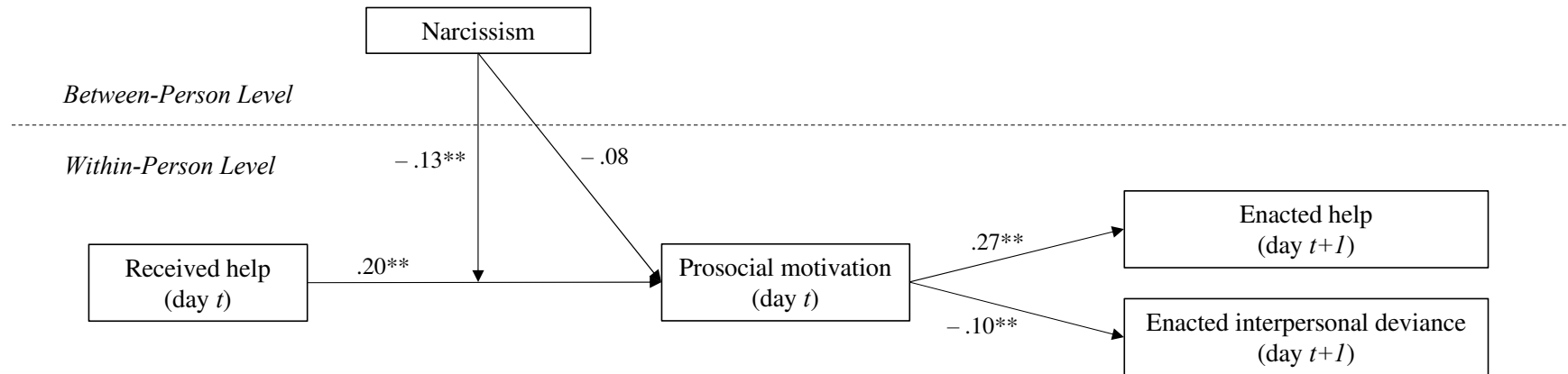
Predictor	Mediator: Prosocial motivation (day $t$ )		Outcome: Enacted help (day $t+1$ )		Outcome: Enacted interpersonal deviance (day $t+1$ )	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	5.84**	.08	4.33**	.61	2.10**	.28
Level 1 control						
Prosocial motivation (day $t-1$ )	.05	.04				
Enacted help (day $t$ )			.00	.10		
Enacted interpersonal deviance (day $t$ )					.02	.05
Positive affect (day $t$ )	.17**	.05				
Positive affect (day $t+1$ )			.37**	.06	-.25**	.05
Level 1 predictors						
Received help (day $t$ )	.19**	.05	-.02	.05	-.02	.04
Prosocial motivation (day $t$ )			.27**	.10	-.09**	.03
Level 2 predictor						
Narcissism-admiration	.07	.07				
Narcissism-rivalry	-.15*	.06				
Cross-level interaction						
Narcissism-admiration $\times$ received help	-.03	.06				
Narcissism-rivalry $\times$ received help	-.10*	.05				

*Note.* Level 1  $n = 915-1047$ ; Level 2  $n = 129$ . Partial missing values are handled by the maximum likelihood method. Unstandardized coefficients (*Bs*) are reported. Level 1 controls and received help are person-mean centered. The two dimensions of narcissism are grand-mean centered.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Figure 1

Key Path Results with Narcissism as the Moderator

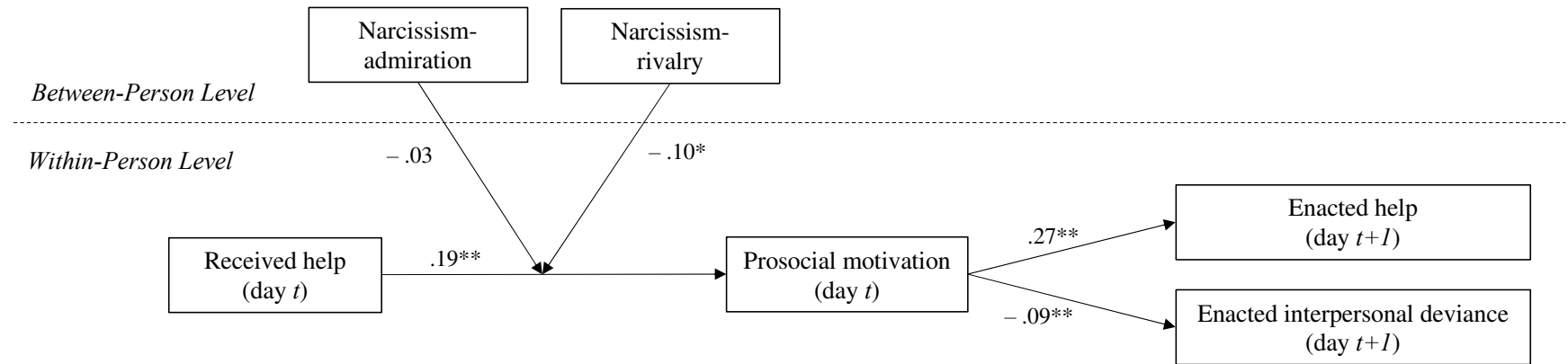


*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Control variables and main effects of received help on ultimate outcomes are omitted for parsimony.  
 $**p < .01$



Figure 2

*Key Path Results with Dual Moderators of Narcissism-Admiration and Rivalry*



*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported. Control variables and main effects of received help on ultimate outcomes are omitted for parsimony.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Figure 3

*Cross-Level Moderating Effect of Narcissism on the Relationship between Received Help and Prosocial Motivation*

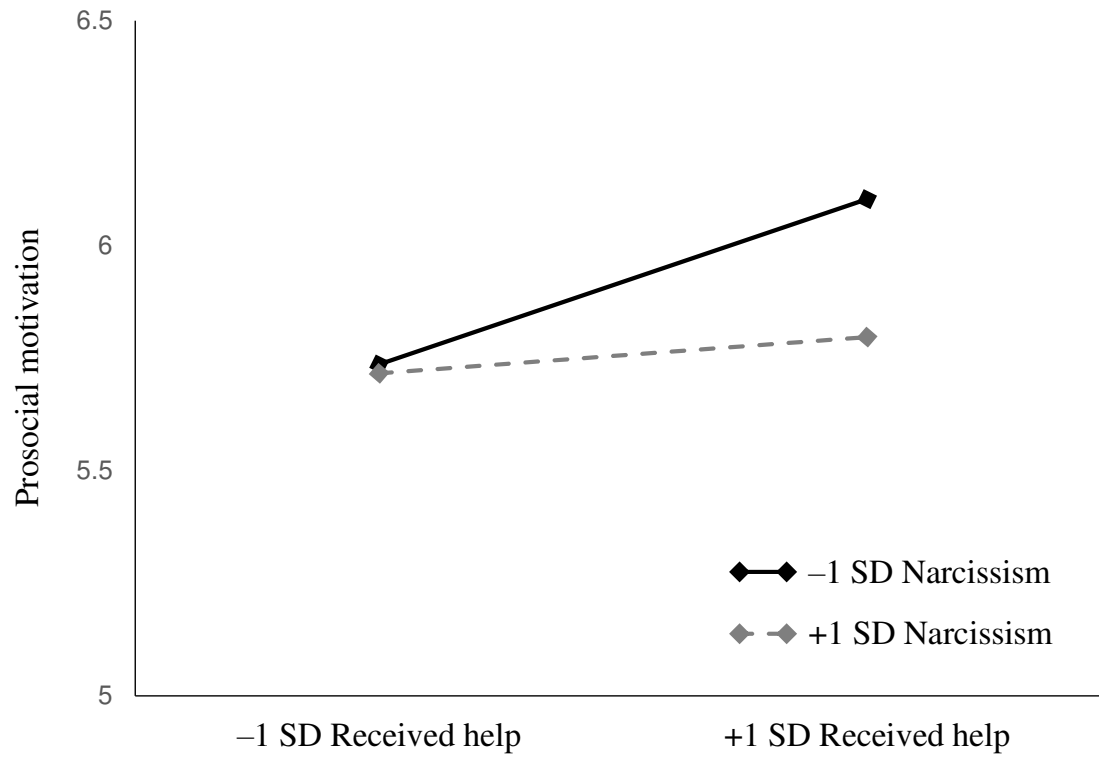


Figure 4

*Cross-Level Moderating Effect of Narcissism-Rivalry on the Relationship between Received Help and Prosocial Motivation*

