

**Individualism and Collectivism's Impact on Students' Academic Helping Interactions: An  
Integrative Review**

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### **Abstract**

In academic settings, help-seeking and help-giving are two learning behaviors that have been shown to support student interaction and success. However, existing conceptualizations of these behaviors often overlook the influence of a student's cultural context. Specifically, there remains a lack of clarity around how students' attitudes and behaviors related to academic help-seeking and help-giving may differ in predominantly individualist versus collectivist cultural contexts. To address this issue, an integrative review of 18 sources from PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar was conducted to examine individualism and collectivism's relationship to students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors. Results demonstrated that cultural orientation plays an important role in impacting students' willingness to seek and provide academic help, their motivations for participating in or avoiding helping interactions, as well as their preferred avenues for seeking and providing academic help. Ultimately, this review highlights the intertwined nature of culture and students' helping behaviors, as well as enhances existing understandings of how future research and educators can support students' help-seeking and help-giving behaviors in a culturally sensitive manner.

*Keywords:* help-seeking, help-giving, individualism, collectivism, culture, literature review

## 1 Introduction

*Help-seeking* and *help-giving*—the acts of requesting and providing support, respectively—are two complementary learning behaviors that support student success in academic settings (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981; Webb, 1989). Scholars in the fields of education and psychology have often framed academic helping behaviors as falling under a broader class of self-regulated learning strategies, or “personally initiated processes and responses designed to improve their ability and their environments for learning” (Zimmerman, 1990, p. 4). Within a self-regulated learning framework, help-seeking and help-giving interactions emerge from the student’s personal motivation to take responsibility for their own learning process and academic environment. In the case of help-seeking, the student acts as a self-regulated learner by exhibiting an awareness of their own academic struggles, determining that help is needed, and taking the initiative to obtain that help from others (Newman, 1994, 2002). In the case of help-giving, the student acts as a self-regulated learner by actively contributing to a learning environment where individuals can receive support from others (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003).

Although such conceptualizations of help-seeking and help-giving have been essential in furthering existing understandings of how students can take responsibility for their own learning, they are also limited by the fact that they primarily view academic helping interactions as self-initiated processes. Often missing from such conceptualizations of help-seeking and help-giving are a sense of how these behaviors may be influenced by one’s *cultural context*, or the shared assumptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes of individuals that guide human behavior and are transmitted through interaction with others (Triandis, 1995). Ultimately, it is critical to situate students’ learning behaviors within culture because all “mental life is lived with others, is shaped

to be communicated, and unfolds with the aid of cultural codes, traditions, and the like” (Bruner, 1996, p. xi).

Thus, the goal of the present literature review is to move the educational research community towards a culturally situated understanding of help-seeking and help-giving by considering how *individualism* and *collectivism*—two of the most studied cultural constructs in psychology and education (for a comprehensive review, see Oyserman et al., 2002)—may influence these behaviors in educational settings. By synthesizing existing literature on this topic, this work has the potential to inform existing conceptualizations of help-seeking and help-giving, as well as pave the way for future research seeking to understand these behaviors from a cultural perspective. Ultimately, this work can equip educators to support the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds by informing practices that encourage students from both predominantly individualist and collectivist cultural orientations to seek and give academic help.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

Although theorists have presented various conceptualizations of individualism and collectivism (e.g., Brewer & Chen, 2007; Greenfield, 1994; Triandis, 1995), this work is primarily informed by Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) self-construal theory, which has been highly influential and used to explain cross-cultural differences in human behavior in several domains, including education (Cross et al., 2011). Within this framework, a culture of *individualism* is a social pattern that involves “construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made meaningful primarily by reference to one’s own internal repertoire of thoughts, feelings, and action” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). On the other hand, a culture of *collectivism* corresponds to a social pattern that involves “seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one’s behavior is determined,

contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 227). Within an individualist cultural orientation, people tend to see themselves as separate from others, responsible for their own success, and motivated by personal goals and values. In contrast, within a collectivist cultural orientation, people tend to see themselves as part of a larger network of relationships, interdependent with others, and motivated by communal goals and values (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Triandis, 1995). The dominant cultural orientation in the United States (US) has been characterized as individualist, while many Asian, Latin, and African cultures have been characterized as collectivist (Greenfield, 1994).

Individualism and collectivism provide useful frameworks for understanding cultural differences in attitudes and behaviors related to education (Greenfield, 1994). For example, in Western contexts, education has historically been characterized as an independent endeavor that emphasizes competition, focuses on the development and assessment of individual skills, and de-emphasizes cooperation (Greenfield, 1994; Yamauchi, 1998). In contrast, a more collectivist perspective on schooling may emphasize activities that are more collaborative in nature (Yamauchi, 1998). However, the association between culture and educational practice is far from straightforward; for example, although Chinese society is generally characterized as highly collectivist and low on individualism (Oyserman et al., 2002), China’s education system often reflects a competitive culture that may seem to be more characteristic of an individualist orientation (Kai, 2012). Thus, educational settings may reflect a blend of individualist and collectivist tendencies that are both similar to and different from cultural norms observed in non-academic contexts.

Finally, although individualism and collectivism are helpful for understanding cross-cultural differences in human behavior, it is important to acknowledge the limits of using these terms to describe groups of individuals. In fact, it should be noted that all individuals are influenced by elements of both individualism and collectivism, and the degree to which one draws from each orientation at a given time often depends on a variety of factors related to one's specific context (Triandis, 1995). Additionally, within countries, there has been shown to be substantial variation in the degrees to which people adopt individualist and collectivist cultural orientations (Green et al., 2005), and this variability is only expected to increase as nations and communities around the world become more diverse (Oyserman, 2017). Thus, these constructs should not be used to homogenize entire nations or ethnic communities. Nevertheless, individualism and collectivism serve as useful starting points for conducting culturally sensitive research on learning, as these concepts have been instrumental in helping educators understand some of the shared beliefs and values that underly various patterns in human behavior.

### **3 Literature Review**

#### **3.1 Helping Behaviors in Academic Settings**

*Academic help-seeking*—the act of seeking support from others to fill a gap in knowledge or resolve an academic problem—is an interactive behavior that supports learning in a variety of contexts (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). Although academic help-seeking can take many forms (e.g., asking questions during class, e-mailing instructors, attending office hours, posting to a course forum, consulting a friend), and students vary in their preferences for different approaches to academic help-seeking (Reeves & Sperling, 2015), these behaviors have the shared characteristic of allowing learners to “call upon problem-solving resources external to themselves” (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985, p. 66). Past studies on K-12 and college students alike have found that academic

help-seeking is related to key learning outcomes, including higher grades, greater engagement, and lower levels of anxiety (Karabenick, 2003; Karabenick & Knapp, 1991; Marchand & Skinner, 2007; Newman, 1994). In a recent meta-analysis of 108 studies of postsecondary students' academic help-seeking behaviors, Fong et al. (2023) found an overall positive association between academic help-seeking and college achievement.

Although the act of seeking academic help yields opportunities for collaborative learning, a helping interaction remains incomplete without a response that allows the help-seeker to receive the support they need to address their concern(s). Thus, *academic help-giving*—the act of providing a response to a student's request for academic help (Webb, 1989)—is also key to learning. Existing research shows that when students have negative experiences with receiving academic help from others, they become discouraged from seeking further help in the future (Grayson et al., 1998; Mare & Sohbat, 2002). Additionally, students' perceptions of academic support from others have been shown to be related to academic achievement across a variety of age groups (e.g., adolescents, college students) and contexts (e.g., in-person vs. online course settings) (Chen, 2005; Chu et al., 2017). Moreover, studies have demonstrated that college students who spend more time receiving academic help in the form of support services (e.g., tutoring, learning assistance) are in turn more likely to have higher academic achievement and a greater likelihood of graduating (Grillo & Leist, 2013). Finally, there is also evidence that when one student provides help to another, both the help-seeker and the help-giver benefit (Fuchs et al., 1997). Webb and Mastergeorge (2003) explain:

Except in situations where a student already has expertise in all aspects of the group's task, peers working together can potentially benefit from both giving and receiving explanations. Students benefit from receiving explanations from peers who have more

knowledge, a better understanding, or a different perspective. They benefit from giving explanations that help them to clarify, correct, elaborate, or solidify their own understanding. (p. 77)

### **3.2 Variables Related to Academic Helping Behaviors**

Given the importance of academic help-seeking and help-giving for learning, there has been an interest among researchers in understanding the factors related to students' reasons for seeking, avoiding, providing, or withholding academic help. For example, research has shown that despite the demonstrated benefits of academic help-seeking, students who would benefit from seeking help often fail to do so due to perceived threats to academic self-efficacy; i.e., they see the act of seeking help as demonstrating academic incompetence, which may reflect poorly on their self-image (Newman, 1990; Ryan et al., 1998). Additionally, students also often refrain from seeking help out of a fear of burdening instructors or wasting their time (Grayson et al., 1998). Other student characteristics, such as overconfidence or a desire for independence, have similarly been shown to explain why students choose not to seek academic help (Black & Allen, 2019). In a recent systematic review of studies that examined variables related to academic help-seeking in the higher education context, Bornschlegl et al. (2020) found evidence that one's willingness to seek academic help may be most strongly related to their gender identity, the presence of stigma against help-seeking, their prior experiences with seeking academic help, their personal attitudes towards help-seeking, and their social environment.

Past literature has also examined factors related to help-giving in classroom settings. For instance, Webb and Mastergeorge (2003) proposed that students are more likely to help one another effectively with classroom material when instructors lay out norms for expected help-giving behavior, model effective helping behavior, and create a classroom environment that



focuses on mastery goals (i.e., where the focus is on developing understanding of a topic) rather than performance goals (i.e., where the focus is on appearing competent). Similarly, Poortvliet and Darnon (2014) have demonstrated that students with mastery goals are more likely than students with performance goals to have positive attitudes towards helping others, perhaps because mastery goals encourage a non-competitive environment where one's focus is not on outperforming their peers.

### **3.3 Individualism, Collectivism, and Academic Helping Behaviors**

More recently, researchers have begun to consider how students' cultural contexts may shape their academic helping interactions (Ryan et al., 2009; Volet & Karabenick, 2006). Although scholars have suggested that individualism and collectivism may play important roles in academic help-seeking and help-giving (Nelson-Le Gall, 1985; Shwalb & Sukemune, 1998), there nevertheless remains a lack of clarity around how these cultural constructs shape students' approaches to these behaviors. In non-academic settings, individuals with predominantly collectivist cultural backgrounds have been found to exhibit a lower willingness to seek social support (Kim et al., 2006) and psychological help (Hao & Liang, 2007), possibly because a collectivist cultural orientation "discourage[s] emotional expressions in order to avoid disclosure of personal weakness and/or maintain harmony in family and society" (Han & Pong, 2015, p. 9). It is possible this negative association between collectivist values and emotional expression carries over to academic settings, as teachers in predominantly collectivist environments have been shown to value emotional self-control in their students (Louie et al., 2015). At the same time, however, research has shown that an over-emphasis on independence (a value normally associated with individualism) can discourage students from seeking academic support (Kennedy et al., 2009); and scholars have proposed that collectivism's emphasis on group interests may

actually encourage help-seeking as a way for individuals to “bring the self to a point that best serves the group in its goals” (Sandoval & Lee, 2006, p. 165).

Furthermore, research has relatively consistently shown that collectivist cultural values may encourage help-giving behaviors, generally (Bontempo et al., 1990; Kumru et al., 2004; Martí-Vilar et al., 2019; Moscardino et al., 2020), possibly due to collectivism’s emphasis on interdependence and prioritizing the welfare of others in the group. Although one may expect for this trend to hold in academic environments, Balkaya et al. (2018) found that students from more collectivist backgrounds may exhibit withdrawn behaviors in classroom settings, due to the emphasis placed on modesty in some predominantly collectivist cultures. It is possible this tendency toward withdrawn behavior may be related to a lower willingness to voluntarily provide help to others in classroom group settings, specifically.

#### **4 Aims and Scope of the Review**

Overall, there is a need for research that places academic help-seeking and help-giving in a cultural context. Although existing literature reviews on the topic of academic help-seeking have acknowledged the role that cultural background may play in influencing one’s willingness to seek academic help (Bornschlegl et al., 2020; Fong et al., 2023), these papers have not directly examined individualism and collectivism as variables that may influence helping behaviors. For example, Fong et al. (2023) observed that across multiple studies, national context has been found to moderate the association between help-seeking and academic achievement for postsecondary students. The authors noted that this finding could be attributed to cultural background, as students operating from a predominantly collectivist cultural context may approach academic help-seeking differently from students operating from a predominantly individualist cultural context. Ultimately, the authors concluded that further inquiry into the

associations between individualism, collectivism, and help-seeking is warranted, as “students’ levels of interdependence were not explicitly measured in this synthesis” (Fong et al., 2023, p. 13). Thus, the present literature review aims to address this gap by directly examining how individualism and collectivism influence students’ attitudes and behaviors towards academic help-seeking and help-giving.

Additionally, this review is appropriate because individualism and collectivism are among the most extensively researched cultural patterns in the fields of social and cultural psychology (Brewer & Chen, 2007), and the past few decades have seen a rise in the number of research articles focused on academic help-seeking in particular (Fong et al., 2023). Moreover, to my knowledge, there has been no review of literature on students’ academic help-giving interactions in the past decade. It is important to examine help-seeking and help-giving together because these behaviors are intertwined. Research has shown that individuals who receive greater social support may be more willing to engage in prosocial behaviors themselves (Esparza-Reig et al., 2022); thus, individuals’ experiences with seeking support may be closely related to their attitudes towards providing similar support to others. Furthermore, across past studies researching these constructs of interest, scholars have used a variety of terms and phrases to describe both academic helping behaviors (e.g., *help-seeking*, *help-giving*, *academic support*, *question asking*) and individualism-collectivism (e.g., *idiocentrism*, *allocentrism*, *self-construal*, *independence*, *interdependence*). For these reasons, to determine what insights we can draw from existing literature to guide future research in this area, there is a need for a paper that synthesizes these works within a single review.

Furthermore, there is a need for a review that synthesizes findings from studies employing diverse methodological approaches. Across past studies, researchers have used a

variety of methods to investigate students' attitudes and behaviors related to academic help-seeking and help-giving, including both self-report measures (e.g., questionnaires gauging students' tendencies to seek and/or give academic help) and behavioral indicators (i.e., observations of students' actual help-seeking and/or help-giving behaviors). Each of these approaches offers valuable insights into students' academic helping interactions. For instance, self-report measures are well-positioned to capture students' overall willingness to engage in these behaviors, as well as highlight inner mental states. Conversely, behavioral indicators have the advantage of showing how students use specific learning strategies in authentic environments (Rovers et al., 2019).

The goal of the present research is to summarize past empirical literature on this topic to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors can be placed in a cultural context. The research questions (RQs) guiding this review are as follows:

1. RQ1: How does an individualist or collectivist cultural orientation influence students' attitudes and behaviors related to help-seeking in academic contexts?
2. RQ2: How does an individualist or collectivist cultural orientation influence students' attitudes and behaviors related to help-giving in academic contexts?

## **5 Methods**

The present research involved an integrative review of empirical research on individualism and collectivism's relationship to students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors. The integrative review is a research approach that "generates new knowledge about a topic by reviewing, critiquing, and synthesizing representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (Torraco,

2016, p. 62). Integrative reviews are well-equipped to synthesize findings from sources that implement a range of study designs, in contrast to more specialized approaches to reviewing literature (e.g., meta-analyses, systematic reviews) (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Integrative reviews also allow for nuanced interpretations of existing evidence that go beyond mere description (Elsbach & Knippenberg, 2020). Following a framework outlined by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), the literature review procedure occurred across three stages: literature search, data evaluation, and data analysis.

### **5.1 Literature Search**

To reduce study selection bias, inclusion criteria and analysis methods were established prior to conducting a literature search (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The inclusion criteria were as follows:

1. Included papers must have addressed one or more RQs by examining the association between (a) an individualist and/or collectivist cultural orientation and (b) students' helping behaviors related to learning in academic settings (i.e., academic help-seeking and/or academic help-giving). Papers that examined unrelated cultural influences on academic helping behaviors (e.g., cultural congruity) or help-seeking/help-giving in exclusively non-academic contexts (e.g., psychological help-seeking) were excluded. Papers that examined help-seeking or help-giving behaviors in both academic and non-academic contexts were permitted to be included in this review.
2. Only peer-reviewed papers available in the English language were considered. Specifically, to ensure the rigor and quality of the selected studies, the search strategy was designed to retrieve publications from peer-reviewed, scholarly journals.
3. Only original empirical works were considered; i.e., literature reviews were excluded.

4. To obtain a comprehensive overview of existing empirical work relevant to the RQs, both quantitative and qualitative study designs were considered.
5. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' help-seeking and help-giving interactions, papers employing both self-report measures (e.g., questionnaires, interviews) and behavioral indicators (e.g., tutoring sign-ups) of these behaviors were considered.
6. To capture all empirical works that address the RQs, no date restrictions were placed on this review.

Following the PRISMA framework, the literature search occurred across four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Moher et al., 2009). Studies were identified by searching PsycINFO, a database of literature in the field of psychology; and ERIC, a database of literature in the field of education. An initial generic search of these databases was conducted to identify relevant keywords used to describe help-seeking, help-giving, individualism, and collectivism. For example, a search of *help-giving* demonstrated that existing literature on helping behavior often frames help-giving in terms of individuals' prosocial tendencies; thus, *prosocial* was included as a search term in the review.

Keywords corresponding to three main categories—individualism and collectivism (the cultural constructs of interest), help-seeking and help-giving (the learning behaviors of interest), and education (the context of interest)—were identified (Table 1). These keywords were then used to conduct a full search of these databases on January 24, 2023. When searching, keywords within each category were combined using an “OR” operator, and keyword categories were combined using an “AND” operator. Titles, abstracts, and keywords were searched to identify sources for the review.

**Table 1** *Keywords in literature search*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Individualism and collectivism	Collectivis*, individualis*, idiocentr*, allocentr*, independence, interdependence, self-construal, ingroup, outgroup
Help-seeking and help-giving	Help-seek*, “help seek*,” “seek* help,” “ask for help,” “ask* question,” “question asking,” help-giv*, “help giv*,” “giv* help,” “helping behavio*r,” “academic support,” prosocial, “collaborative learning,” “cooperative learning”
Educational context	student*, school*, education*, academic, classroom

*Note.* An asterisk (\*) was used to search for multiple related terms with different word endings and spellings (e.g., “help-seeker” and “help-seeking,” “helping behavior” and “helping behaviour”). Quotation marks (“ ”) were used to search for exact matches of the quoted phrase.

After removing duplicates ( $N = 83$ ), 586 records were identified through database searching. Next, Google Scholar was searched to identify articles that may not have found through initial database searches. Ten additional records were identified in this manner. The title and abstract of each potentially relevant record were then screened to identify sources where the authors did not investigate individualism or collectivism’s association with students’ academic helping behaviors (e.g., the source exclusively focused on students’ psychological help-seeking behaviors). At this step, 528 records were excluded. In cases where the applicability of the source to the RQs was unclear from the title and abstract alone (e.g., the scope of the help-seeking or help-giving behaviors under investigation was not made explicit), the source was not excluded at this step of the screening process. Finally, the full texts of the remaining 68 records were examined for adherence to the eligibility criteria. Ultimately, 18 articles meeting the eligibility criteria were included in this review.

The discrepancy between the number of records identified in the initial search and the number of records included in this review can be explained by two main factors. First, the initial search was purposefully broad. To avoid excluding relevant literature, the literature search included several search terms that have previously been used in connection to helping behaviors (e.g., *collaborative learning*, *cooperative learning*) and individualism-collectivism (e.g., *independence*, *interdependence*) in the literature; this search approach yielded many records that examined research phenomena irrelevant to the RQs (e.g., cooperative learning generally, without a focus on cultural background or helping behaviors specifically). Second, many of the records identified through database searching did not examine students' help-seeking and help-giving behaviors in academic contexts. These records were excluded from this review.

Fig. 1 displays the stages of the literature search procedure in a PRISMA flowchart (Moher et al., 2009).

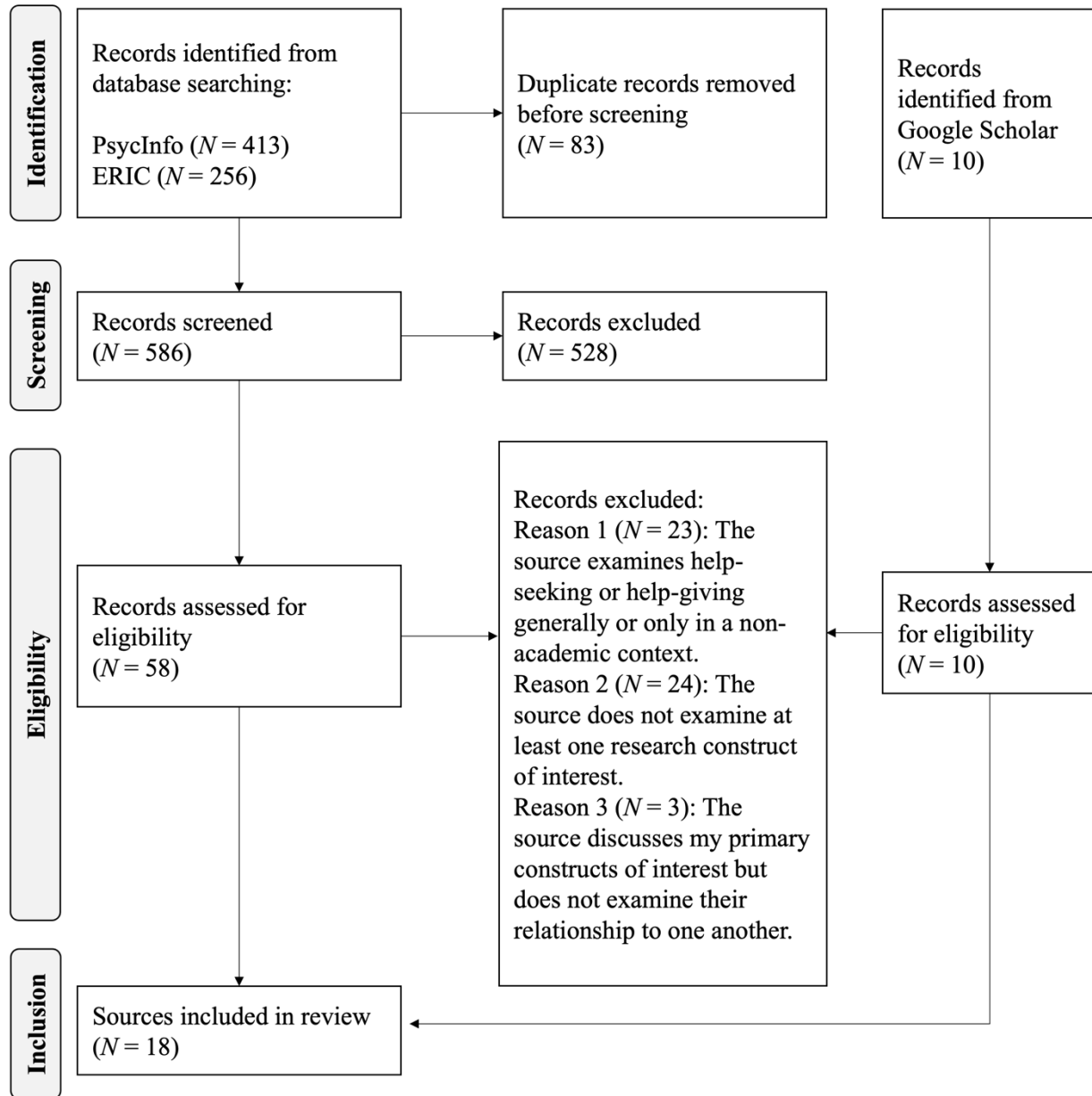
## 5.2 Data Evaluation

The Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used to assess the methodological quality of all included sources (Hong, Fàbregues et al., 2018; Hong, Pluye, et al., 2018). The MMAT is a useful tool for integrative reviews because it allows researchers to evaluate the quality of empirical studies encompassing a range of study designs, including qualitative studies, randomized experiments, non-randomized experiments, quantitative descriptive studies, and mixed methods studies. Example appraisal items include: “Are the findings adequately derived from the data?” and “Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the questions?”. In accordance with recommendations outlined by the creators of the MMAT, the methodological quality of each source was not reduced to a numeric score because doing so would have obscured nuances in where specific studies experienced limitations in methodological quality (Hong,



Fàbregues, et al., 2018). Alternatively, the methodological limitations associated with each included source were noted and considered during analysis.

**Fig. 1** Literature search flowchart



Furthermore, studies were not excluded based on methodological quality because there is no accepted standard for acceptable quality for integrative reviews (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

Ultimately, the data evaluation stage served the integrative review process in two main ways.

First, the appraisal process allowed me to assess, based on methodological limitations, the relative quality of existing evidence contributing to each RQ. Second, the appraisal process allowed me to determine whether discrepancies in multiple studies' findings could be attributed to the relative methodological quality of the studies in question.

### **5.3 Data Analysis**

Following Whitemore and Knaf's (2005) guidelines, the data analysis procedure was modeled after Miles and Huberman's (1994) constant comparison approach to categorizing, extracting, and coding data. Data analysis occurred across the following stages: reduction and display, comparison, and conclusion drawing.

#### ***5.3.1 Data Reduction and Display***

During the data reduction and display stages, a review matrix was created. The review matrix is a table that summarizes the essential information from the included sources relevant to one's RQs of interest (Dwyer, 2020). To create the review matrix, the full texts of each included source were analyzed, and information was abstracted on the following for each research study:

1. The source's author(s) and year;
2. The source's academic helping focus (i.e., help-seeking, help-giving, or both);
3. The source's methodological approach(es) (i.e., qualitative, quantitative randomized experiment, quantitative non-randomized experiment, quantitative descriptive, or mixed methods);
4. The source's study sample;
5. The source's findings relevant to the RQs; and
6. The source's methodological limitation(s), from the MMAT.

This information was organized and displayed in the form of a table, which supported the subsequent stages of analysis. The Appendix contains the full review matrix summarizing the sources included in this review.

### ***5.3.2 Data Comparison***

During the data comparison stage, the review matrix was used to observe and describe the primary themes, patterns, and relationships across studies that address the RQs (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). These themes and patterns were synthesized into a table that summarizes the most essential findings relevant to the RQs. During this stage, each study's methodological limitations were also considered when resolving conflicting findings. The outcomes of the data comparison stage are described in the Results section of this review.

### ***5.3.3 Conclusion Drawing***

During the conclusion drawing stage, the data analysis process moved “from the description of patterns and relationships to higher levels of abstraction, subsuming the particulars into the general” (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005, p. 551). The findings were situated within existing theoretical and empirical literature, and implications for theory, future research, and classroom practice were considered. The outcomes of the conclusion drawing stage are described in the Discussion section of this paper.

## **6 Results**

Out of the 18 sources examining individualism and collectivism's association with academic helping behaviors, 11 focused solely on academic help-seeking (thus addressing RQ1), six focused solely on academic help-giving (thus addressing RQ2), and one study (Luo et al., 2013) investigated both academic help-seeking and academic help-giving (thus addressing both RQs).

Most sources only included participants based in the US (Chang, 2015; Chang et al., 2020; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Hwang & Kim, 2007; Janoff-Bulman & Leggatt, 2002; Luo et al., 2013; Petrella & Gore, 2013; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003; Zusho & Barnett, 2011). Two sources compared the help-seeking behaviors of students in the US to those of students based in East Asian countries (Crystal et al., 2008; Hwang et al., 2003). The remaining sources recruited participants from a range of countries and regions, including Belgium (Cao et al., 2021), China (Cerna & Pavliushchenko, 2015; Mok et al., 2008), Israel (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017; Bouton et al., 2021; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014), Macau (Mok et al., 2008), the Netherlands (Popov et al., 2014), and Taiwan (Mok et al., 2008). Four sources focused on secondary students' help-seeking or help-giving behaviors (Crystal et al., 2008; Mok et al., 2008; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003; Zusho & Barnett, 2011), while the remaining 14 sources investigated these behaviors in the postsecondary student population. Thus, findings should be interpreted with the understanding that postsecondary students, as well as students residing within the US, were overrepresented.

Additionally, out of the 18 sources included in this review, six did not employ direct measures for assessing individualism and collectivism (Cerna & Pavliushchenko, 2015; Crystal et al., 2008; Janoff-Bulman & Leggatt, 2002; Mok et al., 2008; Popov et al., 2014; Zusho & Barnett, 2011); instead, they relied solely on national or ethnic background as proxies for cultural orientation. This methodological choice introduced shared limitations, including (a) a potential oversight of the substantial cultural diversity within nations and ethnic communities (Green et al., 2005); and (b) a tendency to treat individualism and collectivism as discrete and mutually exclusive categories (i.e., a person can be individualist or collectivist, but not both). Although these studies contributed valuable insights to the RQs of interest, their findings should be

interpreted with the understanding that their methodological approach may have obscured the ways in which individualism and collectivism can simultaneously and independently influence human behavior to varying degrees. A full breakdown of each study’s chosen method for measuring and/or assessing cultural orientation is provided in the Appendix.

Insights relevant to the two RQs were grouped into three main themes: (1) the frequency of students’ academic help-seeking or help-giving behaviors in individualist and collectivist contexts, (2) motivators for and barriers to academic help-seeking or help-giving in individualist and collectivist contexts, and (3) individualism and collectivism’s association with students’ preferred sources of help-seeking or targets of help-giving. In the following sections, I describe observed patterns and relationships for each theme within the context of each RQ. The findings of this review are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2** *Summary of integrative review findings*

<b>Helping behavior</b>	<b>Summary of findings on frequency of the behavior</b>	<b>Summary of findings on motivators for and barriers to the behavior</b>	<b>Summary of findings on preferred sources and targets of the behavior</b>
Academic help-seeking	There is inconsistent evidence on the frequency of academic help-seeking in different cultural contexts. Different studies have reported that compared to an individualist orientation, a collectivist orientation could be associated with equally frequent (Crystal et al., 2008; Luo et al., 2013; Zusho & Barnett, 2011), less frequent (Cerna & Pavliushchenko, 2015; Covarrubias et al., 2019; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014), or more frequent	Within a collectivist orientation, concerns about losing face and burdening others may discourage help-seeking (Chang, 2015; Chang et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2003; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014; Mok et al., 2008; Popov et al., 2014). Within an individualist orientation, an emphasis on personal achievement can either hinder or motivate help-seeking, and a desire to gain face may encourage question-	A collectivist orientation is generally associated with a preference for seeking help from peers of a similar cultural background who can relate to one’s experiences (Cao et al., 2021; Chang, 2015; Crystal et al., 2008; Hwang et al., 2003).

Helping behavior	Summary of findings on frequency of the behavior	Summary of findings on motivators for and barriers to the behavior	Summary of findings on preferred sources and targets of the behavior
Academic help-giving	<p>(Komissarouk &amp; Nadler, 2014) academic help-seeking.</p> <p>A collectivist cultural orientation promotes academic help-giving (Asterhan &amp; Bouton, 2017; Bouton et al., 2021; Hwang &amp; Kim, 2007; Petrella &amp; Gore, 2013; Rothstein-Fisch et al., 2003). Adherence to an individualist cultural orientation may not be associated with an overall lower willingness to provide academic help (Asterhan &amp; Bouton, 2017; Bouton et al., 2021).</p>	<p>asking in class (Hwang et al., 2003; Komissarouk &amp; Nadler, 2014).</p> <p>Within a collectivist orientation, academic help-giving may be rooted in one’s values and sense of obligation to others (Hwang &amp; Kim, 2007). Within an individualist orientation, academic help-giving may be rooted in a desire for personal success (Asterhan &amp; Bouton, 2017).</p>	<p>A collectivist orientation may be associated with a willingness to provide help to those in medium-close relationships (Janoff-Bulman &amp; Leggatt, 2002).</p>

**6.1 RQ1: How Does an Individualist or Collectivist Cultural Orientation Influence Students’ Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Help-Seeking in Academic Contexts?**

**6.1.1 Frequency of Help-Seeking Behaviors in Individualist and Collectivist Contexts**

There was mixed evidence regarding the overall frequency with which students seek help for academic problems within an individualist versus collectivist cultural orientation. Four studies compared the self-reported or actual academic help-seeking behaviors of students from predominantly collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, China) with those of students from predominantly individualist cultures (e.g., US). Three of these studies found non-significant differences in students’ willingness to seek help for academic problems based on ethnic or national background (Crystal et al., 2008; Luo et al., 2013; Zusho & Barnett, 2011). In contrast,

one study found via classroom observations and interviews that international students from predominantly individualist cultures were more likely than international students from predominantly collectivist cultures to seek help by asking questions and requesting feedback on assignments (Cerna & Pavliushchenko, 2015). However, this latter finding should be interpreted with caution, as the authors note that within their sample, “most high-performing students [were] from ... individualist countries” (Cerna & Pavliushchenko, 2015, p. 48); thus, it is possible the effect of national background was conflated with the effect of being a high-performing student in their investigation.

Although some of these sources suggested that students across cultures may exhibit similar degrees of willingness to seek academic help, these studies have shared limitations. First, in each of the aforementioned studies, the authors could only establish a correlation between cultural background and help-seeking behavior; i.e., it remains unclear whether and how individualism, collectivism, and academic help-seeking were causally linked. Second, when analyzing the association between culture and help-seeking behavior, the authors of these studies used national or ethnic background as proxies for cultural orientation.

Two sources addressed these methodological concerns by implementing experimental interventions designed to elicit a collectivist cultural orientation. These sources’ interventions involved delivering messages that emphasize the importance of familial and communal goals (Covarrubias et al., 2019) or having participants reflect on what makes them connected to others (Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). However, their findings were inconsistent, with one intervention resulting in increased preferences for seeking help (Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014) and the other resulting in decreased academic help-seeking behaviors for women specifically (Covarrubias et al., 2019). To complicate matters further, Komissarouk and Nadler (2014) performed a follow-up

survey study that yielded findings that diverged from those observed in their experiment, where participants' self-reported adherence to an interdependent view of the self was associated with a greater tendency to avoid seeking help. Thus, even when individualism and collectivism were independently measured and/or an experimental design was used, findings regarding the overall frequency of students' academic help-seeking behaviors in different cultural contexts remained inconclusive.

### ***6.1.2 Motivators for and Barriers to Seeking Academic Help***

Several studies examined how elements of individualism and collectivism could impact one's motivation to seek academic help. First, consistent support was found for the notion that within a collectivist cultural orientation, concerns about burdening others often act as barriers to help-seeking in academic settings. When Mok et al. (2008) asked Chinese secondary students to indicate their level of agreement to various statements related to the costs of seeking academic help, they found that students were most likely to endorse statements suggesting that seeking academic help is a burden to the help-giver (e.g., "Seeking advice from others is a kind of disturbance to them" [p. 203]). Additionally, two qualitative studies conducted by Chang and colleagues demonstrated that collectivist concerns about burdening others consistently discouraged students from seeking help for academic stressors (Chang, 2015; Chang et al., 2020). Moreover, Popov et al. (2014) found that in collaborative learning environments, students from predominantly collectivist countries emphasized using polite words and phrases to ask questions, so that others would feel comfortable. In contrast, students from predominantly individualist countries preferred to be specific and direct. This finding lends further support to the notion that in a collectivist cultural orientation, a heightened concern for burdening others influences when and how one decides to seek academic help. However, it is important to note



that the two quantitative studies informing this finding did not directly measure students' adherence to a collectivist cultural orientation (Mok et al., 2008; Popov et al., 2014).

Additionally, multiple studies examined the degree to which maintaining *face*, or “social acceptance or recognition in group situations” (Hwang et al., 2003, p. 74), may act as a barrier to help-seeking within predominantly collectivist cultures (Chang, 2015; Chang et al., 2020; Hwang et al., 2003; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014; Mok et al., 2008). It has been proposed that compared to students in predominantly individualist cultural contexts, those in predominantly collectivist contexts may be more concerned about losing face; this is because a loss of social acceptance or recognition could potentially compromise one's relationships with others (Chang, 2015). Consequently, students from collectivist cultures who fear losing face may avoid seeking academic help because they wish to avoid the shame of appearing incompetent in classroom settings (Chang, 2015; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). While interviewing undergraduate students on their experiences with various stressors in college, Chang (2015) found that Asian American students were especially likely to avoid seeking help due to a fear of losing face that is rooted in relational concerns:

For Asian American participants, self-reliance tended to stem from concerns about maintaining positive perceptions that family and friends have of them and from familial emphasis on the small magnitude of their problems relative to what their parents have endured. This motivation to be self-reliant originated from face loss concerns. Asian American participants discussed wanting to avoid feeling shame or embarrassment in front of others, which they believed would occur if they were perceived as incapable of dealing with their problems. Accordingly, face loss concerns made them hesitant to seek support, to avoid appearing weak or disappointing others. (p. 10)

However, there was also evidence that face loss concerns may not always be a significant barrier to academic help-seeking in collectivist contexts. For example, Chang (2015) found that compared to her Asian American participants, her Latino American participants placed less emphasis on the importance of maintaining face in social settings, despite also generally operating within a predominantly collectivist cultural perspective. Also, Hwang et al. (2003) found that across multiple cultural contexts (US, Singapore, and Hong Kong), students' self-reported adherence to a collectivist cultural orientation was not consistently associated with greater face loss concerns, and in all contexts, greater face loss concerns predicted a lower willingness to ask questions in class. In other words, face loss concerns did not appear to be more salient or linked more strongly to help-seeking tendencies in one cultural context versus another (Hwang et al., 2003). Similarly, Mok et al. (2008) found that Chinese students in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan tended to disagree with statements suggesting that seeking academic help is associated with losing face (e.g., "Seeking help on problems that I don't know how to solve makes others look down on me" [p. 203]).

It is possible to reconcile the above findings by considering their respective scope. While Chang (2015) highlighted face loss concerns within a specific ethnic group (i.e., Asian Americans) residing within the US, Hwang et al. (2003) and Mok et al. (2008) examined academic help-seeking across a broader spectrum of countries and cultures. Thus, although the latter two studies show that face loss concerns may not be a major barrier to academic help-seeking in all predominantly collectivist cultures, Chang's (2015) findings demonstrate that maintaining face may have heightened importance in specific cultural contexts where there is an emphasis on maintaining a positive social standing in the eyes of others.

Compared to the research conducted on collectivism and help-seeking, there has been limited investigation into how an individualist cultural orientation can act as a barrier to or motivator for academic help-seeking. Nevertheless, insights could still be drawn from existing work. As previously mentioned, two studies conducted by Komissarouk and Nadler (2014) did not find a consistent association between an individualist cultural orientation and a tendency to avoid seeking academic help. However, the authors found a consistent association between individualism and *autonomous* help-seeking behavior (also referred to as *instrumental* help-seeking behavior in existing literature, Nelson-Le Gall, 1981), where participants preferred to ask for help so that they could learn how to fix their problems themselves. In contrast, collectivism was more frequently associated with *dependent* help-seeking behavior (also referred to as *executive* help-seeking behavior in existing literature, Nelson-Le Gall, 1981), where participants preferred to ask for help so that the help-giver could fix a problem on their behalf. Furthermore, the association between individualism and autonomous help-seeking was mediated by a self-reported emphasis on pursuing one's own goals and ideals, and the association between collectivism and dependent help-seeking behavior was mediated by a self-reported emphasis on avoiding losses and fulfilling one's obligations. Overall, Komissarouk and Nadler's (2014) findings suggest that within an individualist cultural orientation, students may be motivated to seek or avoid help based on their perception of how relying on others will enable them to achieve their academic goals independently. In comparison, within a collectivist cultural orientation, students may be motivated to seek or avoid help based on their perception of whether relying on others will provide them with the full solution to their problem.

There was also evidence that within an individualist cultural orientation, a desire to gain face (where one actively seeks opportunities to improve their social standing in the eyes of

others) may serve as motivation to seek help in classroom settings. Hwang et al. (2003) found that individualism was associated with a desire to gain face in social settings, and this desire to gain face was in turn found to be associated with more questions asked in class in the US. The authors thus proposed that the opportunity to demonstrate one's competence to others through question-asking may serve as further motivation to seek help in some individualist contexts:

How could questioning behaviors lead to gaining face? One possibility is that questioning behaviors provided opportunities for individuals to show their depth of knowledge through profound questions that others may not have thought of. In so doing, students who raise these questions may gain the admiration of others for their deep knowledge. (p. 87)

### ***6.1.3 Preferred Sources of Academic Help***

There was consistent evidence that students belonging to national or ethnic communities with a predominantly collectivist cultural orientation generally prefer to seek help from peers. Two qualitative studies indicated that Chinese, Asian American, and Latino American students commonly described themselves as preferring to seek academic help from peers who are of a similar cultural background or who can relate to their experiences (Chang, 2015; Cao et al., 2021). For instance, one Latino American participant in Chang's (2015) interview study mentioned, "It also definitely helps for me to even talk to friends when I'm going through academic stress, because a lot of the time, especially the friends who are here at college, we're going through the same situation" (p. 11).

Additionally, Crystal et al. (2008) found that Japanese students were more likely than American students to rely on their peers for help with homework. However, the authors used national background as a proxy for cultural orientation; consequently, the implications of this

specific finding for RQ1 should be approached with caution. Nevertheless, Hwang et al. (2003) found that a preference for peer help may be linked to concerns about losing face in certain collectivist contexts: they found that in Singapore, students with greater as opposed to fewer face loss concerns were more likely to report seeking academic help from their peers outside of class. Thus, face loss concerns may motivate students to seek help from informal sources, such as their peers.

## **6.2 RQ2: How Does an Individualist or Collectivist Cultural Orientation Influence Students' Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Help-Giving in Academic Contexts?**

### ***6.2.1 Frequency of Help-Giving Behaviors in Individualist and Collectivist Contexts***

There was consistent evidence that a collectivist cultural orientation encourages students to give academic help to others. Four survey studies measuring students' self-reported cultural orientation found that higher levels of collectivism were related to more frequent school-related knowledge sharing, including peer help-giving (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017; Bouton et al., 2021), more positive attitudes towards knowledge sharing (Hwang & Kim, 2007), and a greater consideration for other students' academic difficulties (Petrella & Gore, 2013). Additionally, in a qualitative study, Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2003) observed that students from predominantly immigrant Latino classrooms exhibited a greater tendency to help others with their academic work when they were encouraged by their teachers to think and act collectively. Although one study (Luo et al., 2013) found that Chinese students and American students were equally likely to provide help on a cooperative learning activity, its findings should be interpreted with caution in light of methodological limitations. Notably, the authors did not directly examine the association between participants' self-reported cultural orientation and helping behaviors, as well

as had a small sample size that may have been underpowered to detect group differences in the frequency of students' helping behaviors.

Finally, although the included studies generally found that collectivism encourages academic help-giving, the reverse was not true for individualism; i.e., in two studies where the authors assessed participants' self-reported adherence to an individualist cultural orientation, as well its relation to school-related knowledge sharing (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017; Bouton et al., 2021), no significant overall association between individualism and help-giving frequency was observed.

### ***6.2.2 Motivators for and Barriers to Giving Academic Help***

Although few studies have examined students' motivations for providing academic help in individualist and collectivist contexts, there was some evidence that within a collectivist cultural orientation, academic help-giving may be rooted in one's values and sense of obligation to others. Conversely, within an individualist cultural orientation, academic help-giving may be rooted in a desire for personal success. For instance, Hwang and Kim (2007) found that within a collectivist framework, the act of sharing school-related knowledge with others was viewed as consistent with one's values and valuable for preserving relationships. Thus, in a predominantly collectivist cultural orientation, the decision to help others may emerge from a heightened sense of obligation to members of one's group.

In contrast, Asterhan and Bouton (2017) found that an individualist orientation was associated with a greater perception of social pressure to share knowledge with other students. Furthermore, in scenarios where helping others was expected to result in that help being reciprocated in the future, an individualist orientation was associated with a greater willingness to share school-related knowledge. On the other hand, in scenarios where helping others was not

expected to result in that help being reciprocated in the future, an individualist orientation was associated with a lower willingness to share knowledge (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017). Thus, in a predominantly individualist cultural context, the decision to help others may emerge from both a sense of social pressure and the belief that helping others may contribute to one's own academic success.

### ***6.2.3 Preferred Targets of Academic Help-Giving***

Only one study included in this review directly examined cultural differences in students' preferred targets for academic help-giving. Janoff-Bulman and Leggatt (2002) surveyed Latino and Anglo undergraduate students on their attitudes towards helping individuals in different problem scenarios, including those related to academic difficulties. Both groups reported a strong sense of obligation to their closest relationships and no sense of obligation to more distant ones. However, for problem scenarios involving medium-close relationships (i.e., family and friends who were not immediate members or close friends), Latino students were more likely than Anglo students to give help, believe they should help, want to help, associate help-giving with positive emotions, and associate not helping with negative emotions. Thus, a collectivist cultural orientation may be associated with a greater willingness to provide academic help in medium-close relationships, specifically. However, Janoff-Bulman and Leggatt (2002) used ethnic background as a proxy for cultural orientation and included problem scenarios that were both academic and non-academic in nature. Given these limitations, further research is needed to determine how a student's cultural orientation shapes whom they are willing to help in different situations.

## **7 Discussion**

The influence of students' cultural contexts on their self-regulated learning behaviors, including help-seeking and help-giving, remains a relatively unexplored area of research. The goal of this integrative review was to develop a holistic understanding of what existing empirical research can tell us about how individualism and collectivism inform students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors. An examination of 18 sources revealed that individualist and collectivist cultural orientations may play important roles in shaping students' willingness to seek and provide academic help, their motivations for engaging in or avoiding helping interactions, as well as their preferred sources of help-seeking and targets for help-giving. Ultimately, this study makes a novel contribution to the literature by highlighting how helping behaviors can be situated within culture in academic settings.

A notable finding of this review was the inconsistent results regarding the frequency of students' academic help-seeking behaviors in individualist and collectivist cultural contexts. Such inconsistencies may exist because both cultural orientations involve elements that could either encourage and or discourage academic help-seeking behaviors. For instance, within a collectivist orientation, students may avoid engaging in behaviors that could cause them to burden others, due to collectivism's emphasis on honoring group expectations and preserving group harmony (Chang, 2015). Thus, a fear of burdening others is an element of a collectivist orientation that may discourage disclosure of one's academic difficulties out of consideration for the group's views and interests. On the other hand, students operating within a predominantly collectivist orientation may still seek academic help if supported by those from a similar cultural background or those who have faced similar problems in the past. Furthermore, a desire for independent, personal achievement (i.e., the sense that one's goals should be achieved on one's own) may discourage help-seeking for those within an individualist cultural orientation. At the



same time, individualism may create a desire to achieve mastery of course material and gain face, both of which could encourage students to reach out to others for support.

This interpretation is consistent with previous theoretical work proposing that individualism and collectivism are multifaceted social patterns that influence human behavior in diverse ways. For example, Brewer and Chen (2007) have proposed that individualism and collectivism can each be defined in terms of three elements: one's view of the self, beliefs about agency, and personal values. It is possible these different elements impact help-seeking behaviors in different ways. For example, collectivist personal values (e.g., one's sense of obligation to others in the group) may result in a consideration for others that discourages students from seeking support, if help-seeking is seen as a disturbance to others. At the same time, a collectivist agency belief (e.g., the belief that one achieves one's goals through interdependence and collective effort) may encourage students to seek help from peers of a similar background. In contrast, an individualist agency belief (e.g., the belief that one achieves one's goals independently) may discourage academic help-seeking, while individualist personal values (e.g., an emphasis on individual academic achievement) may encourage academic help-seeking, if help-seeking is seen as instrumental to success. However, further research is needed to understand how the different elements of individualism and collectivism impact students' help-seeking behaviors.

Furthermore, existing research has drawn a distinction between instrumental and executive help-seeking, where the former involves seeking enough help to solve a problem or achieve a goal independently, and the latter involves seeking help so that the help-giver can solve a problem or achieve a goal on one's behalf (Nelson-Le Gall, 1981). Instrumental and executive help-seeking have been shown to be positively and negatively associated with academic

achievement, respectively, in prior research (Fong et al., 2023). In this regard, Komissarouk and Nadler (2014) found that an individualist cultural orientation may be associated with a greater motivation to seek instrumental help, due to an emphasis placed on achieving one's goals independently. In contrast, a collectivist cultural orientation may be associated with a greater motivation to seek executive help, due to an emphasis placed on the importance of making secure decisions and maintaining face. However, it is important to note that most studies included in this review did not explore the distinction between instrumental and executive help-seeking. Thus, further research is needed to understand how cultural influences shape the types of help students are motivated to seek in academic settings.

In contrast to the findings regarding the frequency of students' academic help-seeking behaviors in different cultural contexts, there was relatively consistent evidence that a collectivist cultural orientation is generally associated with a willingness and desire to provide academic help. It is possible this is the case because in collectivist contexts, help-giving behaviors are viewed as representative of one's other-oriented values and are valuable for preserving relationships. This review lends support to a substantial body of research showing that collectivist cultural values generally encourage prosocial helping behaviors, likely due to collectivism's heightened concern for the welfare of the group (Bontempo et al., 1990; Kumru et al., 2004; Martí-Vilar et al., 2019; Moscardino et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the included studies did not consistently associate individualism with either more or less frequent academic help-giving behaviors. One study (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017) found that an individualist cultural orientation was positively associated with a willingness to share school-related knowledge with others only in scenarios where academic help-giving was expected to be reciprocated in the future. This finding aligns with theories proposing that in

individualist cultures, “the emphasis is on rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining a relationship” (Triandis, 1995, p. 44). That is, students with a predominantly individualist cultural orientation may not be inherently predisposed to provide or withhold academic help to/from their peers. Rather, their motivation to provide help may depend on the degree to which they expect help-giving to be beneficial for their own learning and success.

Moreover, there was some evidence that students from predominantly collectivist cultures may exhibit a preference for seeking help from peers of a similar background who can share their experiences. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting how one’s attitudes towards academic help-seeking are influenced by one’s perceived cultural similarity to potential sources of support (Volet & Karabenick, 2006). For instance, students have been shown to prefer to seek and receive academic help from individuals of a similar cultural background, “given that rewarding interactions are experienced as a function of the substantive amount of shared social knowledge, which increases the ease with which the student interactions occur” (Volet & Karabenick, 2006, p. 141). Thus, perceived cultural congruity with potential help-givers may play an important role in students’ willingness to seek academic help in collectivist contexts.

There was limited evidence on students’ preferred targets for giving academic help. However, one study (Janoff-Bulman & Leggatt, 2002) suggested that compared to an individualist cultural orientation, a collectivist cultural orientation may correspond to a greater willingness to provide help to non-immediate family members and friends in medium-close relationships. This finding aligns with Triandis’s (1995) conceptualization of collectivism as a social pattern that involves pronounced commitment to an *ingroup*, or groups of individuals “about whose welfare a person is concerned, with whom that person is willing to cooperate

without demanding equitable returns, and separation from whom leads to anxiety” (p. 9). Ingroups commonly include one’s family members, friends, and members of social groups to which one belongs; in contrast, *outgroups* include individuals about whose welfare a person is not concerned (e.g., those with whom one is in a distant relationship), regardless of whether one has a predominantly individualist or collectivist orientation. Collectivism’s pronounced sense of connection and obligation to one’s ingroup may explain why it is associated with a greater willingness to help those in medium-close relationships or rely on peers of a similar background; i.e., these individuals may be especially likely to be included in one’s definition of an ingroup (e.g., by virtue of sharing a personal relationship or cultural identity) within a collectivist cultural orientation.

### **7.1 Implications for Theory**

This work contributes to theory by highlighting the importance of viewing learning behaviors such as help-seeking and help-giving through a sociocultural lens. As previously mentioned, most existing conceptualizations of academic helping behaviors have framed the individual student as the ultimate source of one’s decision to seek or give help. Within such frameworks, contextual factors such as culture, classroom climate, and peer relationships may support or hinder help-seeking or help-giving, but ultimately the decision to seek or give help remains the student’s responsibility and emerges from their personal motivation to engage in these behaviors. This focus on the “self” may persist because psychological and educational research generally tend to operate from a Western, individualist view of learning, which “privileges the purported psychological interiors of individuals as the primary causes of individuals’ experiences and actions” (Martin, 2014, p. 169). Nevertheless, this review has demonstrated that helping behaviors likely emerge not just from the individual, but also from the

shared values, assumptions, and beliefs of cultures. Hence, in alignment with Nelson-Le Gall and Resnick (1998), it is likely that helping interactions should be conceptualized as socially negotiated rather than purely individual processes:

The learning that occurs in classrooms is not merely an individual accomplishment supported by the social context; it is also the result of a continuous and dynamic negotiation between the student and the social environment ... Although help seeking has been characterized as personal effort subordinated to the goal of extending one's knowledge and skill, it still depends on the negotiated and coordinated participation of others in pursuing that goal. (p. 48)

## 7.2 Recommendations for Research

Based on the findings of this review, I provide the following recommendations for future researchers:

- 1. Future research should further examine the specific elements of collectivism and individualism that may act as motivators for or barriers to academic help-seeking and help-giving.** This review has demonstrated that there are inconsistencies in past studies' findings regarding the association between cultural background and helping behaviors (especially help-seeking). Such inconsistencies may arise because individualism and collectivism are complex social patterns that can simultaneously encourage and discourage academic help-seeking and help-giving. Additionally, research shows that every individual, irrespective of their cultural context, navigates conflicting desires to express their individual identity and belong to a collective; i.e., even cultures perceived as highly individualist or collectivist may include elements of the opposite orientation (Tripathi, 2019). Thus, further research is needed to unpack the ways these

complex cultural constructs influence one's willingness to seek or give academic help. In particular, it is recommended that educational researchers conduct more qualitative studies on this topic (e.g., interviews with students about their help-seeking and help-giving experiences). Such work is well-positioned to: (a) recognize the nuance and diversity in students' cultural values, (b) explore in detail the extent to which students see their cultural values as influencing their academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors, and (c) identify potential cultural influences on help-seeking and help-giving that may not have emerged from previous work (which could provide a basis for theory-building and future quantitative work in this field).

- 2. When assessing participants' cultural orientation, researchers should not only rely on participants' demographic characteristics, but also directly evaluate their adherence to both individualist and collectivist cultural orientations.** Several studies included in this review used participants' national or ethnic backgrounds as proxies for their cultural orientation. To account for the cultural diversity present within nations and ethnic communities, future researchers should assess participants' cultural values directly (e.g., via a survey instrument or interview questions) when placing learning behaviors in a cultural context. This approach will allow researchers to capture meaningful differences in cultural orientation both across groups with shared demographic characteristics, as well as within these groups on an individual level.
- 3. Researchers should give more attention to how help-seeking and help-giving manifest within an individualist cultural orientation, specifically.** Among the included studies, there was a general bias towards investigating how collectivism, rather individualism, is related to students' helping behaviors. Although studies have examined

how collectivism can act as a barrier to help-seeking or motivate help-giving, relatively few studies in comparison have examined how individualism relates to these phenomena. Similar to how White racial identity remains understudied in research on race/ethnicity because it is seen as the norm in the US (Wong & Cho, 2005), individualism may remain understudied in this research area due to its prevalence in Western contexts. Ultimately, a full understanding of how culture shapes students' academic helping behaviors requires that scholars investigate these behaviors in the context of both individualist and collectivist orientations. Overall, more research is needed to understand how individualism as a unique cultural perspective shapes one's attitudes and perspectives towards help-seeking and help-giving.

4. **Overall, more research on academic help-giving from a cultural perspective is needed.** Compared to academic help-seeking, academic help-giving is an understudied learning behavior in the field of education (Huang & Law, 2022). This review found this trend to be true, given that just seven included sources investigated students' help-giving behaviors. Additionally, although the finding that collectivism is related to more frequent help-giving was relatively well-supported, findings related to the remaining themes for RQ2 had limited relevant sources to support their conclusions. Thus, researchers should give increased attention to how individualism and collectivism may influence one's attitudes and behaviors towards academic help-giving in different scenarios.

### 7.3 Recommendations for Practice

Further research in this area is needed to come to more meaningful conclusions about how students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors can be best supported in different cultural contexts. Nevertheless, this review has demonstrated that individualism and

collectivism are cultural values that exert influence on students' helping interactions in academic settings. Thus, to support students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds adequately, educators should develop classroom practices that encourage help-seeking and help-giving for students operating from both predominantly individualist and collectivist cultural orientations. Specifically, based on the findings of this review, I provide the following recommendations for practice:

1. **To encourage students with a predominantly individualist perspective to seek help from others, educators should emphasize the practical benefits of academic help-seeking to their students.** Early on in a school year or course, educators could explain to their students that drawing from the expertise of others will ultimately assist them in completing their work independently. To encourage help-seeking, educators could also model effective help-giving for their students and teach them to provide effective help to others. Through this process, students could witness firsthand how seeking help from others enables them to receive support and insight that are beneficial for their learning.
2. **To encourage students with a predominantly collectivist perspective to seek help from others, educators should address students' potential concerns about burdening others or losing face.** Educators could help students overcome these concerns both: (a) explicitly, by explaining the importance of help-seeking to their students; and (b) implicitly, by reacting positively to students' questions and taking the time to address them. If feasible, educators may also consider dedicating class time to meeting individually with students and addressing their questions and concerns so that students do not feel like a disturbance to their class. In higher education settings, faculty and staff could develop academic support services that will allow students to receive help from



those of a similar cultural background (e.g., peer tutoring programs targeted towards international students who may be minorities at their institutions).

3. **To encourage students with a predominantly individualist perspective to give help to others, educators should demonstrate to their students how giving help contributes to the help-giver's success.** This review demonstrated that students with a predominantly individualist orientation may be more inclined to offer help when doing so is expected to lead to a future benefit, as opposed to when offering help is not expected to lead to such a benefit. Therefore, educators could explain to their students that by helping others, students can in turn help strengthen their own understanding of class material and identify gaps in their knowledge (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). Educators could also consider providing spaces for students to experience the benefits of giving help firsthand, e.g., by implementing collaborative learning activities where students work in small groups and are required to explain content to their peers.
4. **To motivate students with a predominantly collectivist perspective to give help to others, educators should incorporate practices that prioritize the welfare and success of the entire class.** For example, Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2003) described the experience of an elementary teacher who used a “star chart” to reward the overall achievement of the class, rather than any single individual; i.e., when students solved math problems as a group, stars would be added to the chart to reflect their collective achievement. As a result, “the children, empowered by their own tendency to think and act collectively, had a high level of motivation for group success that transcended their need for individual success while simultaneously supporting the cultural value of helping others” (p. 133). Thus, to facilitate help-giving, educators could implement similar

practices that encourage students to approach learning in a collectivist manner, such as utilizing group assignments that require collaboration and are graded as a whole.

Finally, when considering implications of this work for practice, it is crucial to recognize the value and worth of both cultural perspectives—individualism and collectivism—in classroom settings. That is, educators should not aim to silence or amplify certain cultural perspectives to promote desired learning behaviors (e.g., help-seeking or help-giving) in their students. Rather, with the knowledge that each student brings a unique cultural perspective to the classroom, educators should strive to foster behaviors like help-seeking and help-giving in a manner that validates and is sensitive to the diversity of beliefs, assumptions, and values represented in their student body.

## **8 Limitations**

This review faces multiple limitations. First, only peer-reviewed and published sources were considered for this review to ensure a baseline level of methodological rigor. However, by only including published works, it is possible that the conclusions of this review were influenced by publication bias, or the tendency among journals to publish results that are statistically significant (Dalton et al., 2016). Future researchers may consider performing a similar review on this topic that incorporates non-peer-reviewed sources such as conference abstracts, dissertations, or reports. Second, several included sources examined differences in students' help-seeking and help-giving behaviors by national or ethnic background. There may be other sources that have investigated similar cross-national or cross-ethnic differences in helping behaviors, albeit without framing them in terms of individualism, collectivism, or culture more broadly. These sources may not have been found via the literature search strategy. Finally, as previously mentioned, postsecondary students and students based in the US were overrepresented in the data

set. Thus, the conclusions of this review may have limited generalizability to non-postsecondary students and settings outside the US.

### **9 Conclusion**

This investigation shed light on how individualism and collectivism can influence students' academic help-seeking and help-giving behaviors. These influences include students' reasons for engaging in or avoiding helping interactions, their preferred avenues for seeking support, and those whom they choose to help. However, this review also highlighted the need for further research to better understand the mechanisms through which individualism and collectivism influence students' help-seeking and help-giving interactions. Ultimately, by placing these behaviors in a cultural context, educators can create academically supportive environments that are inclusive of a diversity of cultural backgrounds.

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## Appendix

Table 3 Sources included in integrative review

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
Luo et al. (2013)	Help-seeking, help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	<i>N</i> = 20 students at a university in the US (50% from China, 50% from the US)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- During a cooperative motor skill learning activity, there were no significant differences between Chinese and American participants' number of questions asked or number of answers given.</li> <li>- Chinese participants were more collectivist and less individualist than American participants on Wagner's (1995) Questionnaire of Individualism-Collectivism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The study's small sample size limits the generalizability of its quantitative findings.</li> <li>- The authors did not directly examine the association between participants' self-reported cultural orientation and help-seeking/giving behaviors.</li> </ul>
Cao et al. (2021)	Help-seeking	Qualitative	<i>N</i> = 18 Chinese international students at one of three universities in Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants expressed a willingness to take actions (including seeking support) to confront competency-related academic problems.</li> <li>- Co-national friends were participants' most cited sources of support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants were recruited via convenience sampling through social media, which may have resulted in a biased sample.</li> </ul>

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Cerna and Pavliushchenko (2015)</b>	Help-seeking	Qualitative	<i>N</i> = 174 international students from 38 different countries at a university in China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most high-performing students were from individualist countries, and these students were more likely to ask questions about course content, request feedback on assignments, and talk about course content with other students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The authors' research questions were not made explicit.</li> <li>- The authors did not directly measure participants' cultural orientation (national background was used as a proxy for culture).</li> <li>- The effect of culture may have been conflated with the effect of being a high-performing student.</li> </ul>
<b>Chang (2015)</b>	Help-seeking	Qualitative	<i>N</i> = 58 Latino and Asian American undergraduate students at a university in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants generally described themselves as refraining from seeking support when faced with various stressors.</li> <li>- Asian American participants emphasized concerns associated with losing face, while Latino American participants emphasized the importance of preserving in-group harmony.</li> <li>- Both groups preferred to seek support from those who have been in similar situations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The study scope may have been overly broad: the author examined participants' experiences with seeking support for financial and psychological issues, in addition to academic ones (however, participants reported that academic stressors were the most prevalent type).</li> </ul>

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Chang et al. (2020)</b>	Help-seeking	Mixed methods	<i>N</i> = 11 first-generation college students at a university in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants described themselves as preferring to be self-reliant, rather than imposing problems on others.</li> <li>- Ethnic minorities were more likely than White participants to emphasize the importance of self-reliance.</li> <li>- Ethnic minorities scored higher on vertical collectivism (which emphasizes an obligation to family) than White participants on the Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Triandis &amp; Gelfand, 1998).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The study's small sample size limits the generalizability of its quantitative findings.</li> <li>- The study scope may have been overly broad: the authors examined participants' experiences with seeking support for financial and psychological issues, in addition to academic ones.</li> </ul>
<b>Covarrubias et al. (2019) [Study 1]</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative randomized experiment	<i>N</i> = 468 undergraduate students enrolled in a large introductory biology class at a public university in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture-matching messages highlighting the importance of interdependence resulted fewer tutoring sign-ups for women. These messages had no effect on the number of tutoring sign-ups for men.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The sample was not representative of the target population (second-year students were overrepresented).</li> <li>- The authors did not perform a manipulation check to determine whether the culture-matching messages resulted in an interdependent orientation.</li> </ul>

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Covarrubias et al. (2019)</b> <i>[Study 2]</i>	Help-seeking	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 430$ students from the same class as Study 1	- Women were more likely than other groups to perceive peer interactions as competitive.	- The authors did not perform analyses to verify that perceptions of peer interactions explained a negative association between interdependence and help-seeking.
<b>Crystal et al. (2008)</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 2,141$ sixth, eighth, and tenth graders attending public schools in Japan ( $N = 919$ ) and the US ( $N = 1,222$ )	- American and Japanese students were equally likely to rely on themselves when faced with a homework problem. - More American students relied on family to help with homework, while more Japanese students relied on peers to help with homework.	- The authors did not directly measure participants' cultural orientation (national background was used as a proxy for culture).
<b>Hwang et al. (2003)</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 650$ undergraduate business students at universities in the US ( $N = 253$ ), Hong Kong ( $N = 266$ ), and Singapore ( $N = 131$ )	- Participants from Singapore were more collectivist and less individualist than participants from both the US and Hong Kong on Wagner's (1995) measure of individualism-collectivism. - In all countries, a fear of losing face was negatively associated with asking questions. - In the US, a desire to gain face was associated with asking questions in class.	- The study samples were not representative of the target populations, as all participants were business students.

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Komissarouk and Nadler (2014) [Study 1]</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative randomized experiment	<i>N</i> = 83 undergraduate psychology students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a university in Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Singapore, a fear of losing face associated with checking with classmates outside of class.</li> <li>- After participants completed a task designed to activate an interdependent or independent self-construal, the interdependent condition was associated with more dependent help-seeking preferences (i.e., asking so that help-giver will fix the problem), and the independent condition was associated with more autonomous help-seeking preferences (i.e., asking to learn how to fix the problem).</li> <li>- The independent condition was associated with a greater preference for receiving no help.</li> </ul>	- Participants were recruited via convenience sampling.

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Komissarouk and Nadler (2014) [Study 3]</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 193$ undergraduate psychology students at a university in Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants completed Singelis's (1994) Self-Construct Scale. An independent self-construct predicted a promotion focus (which stresses the pursuit of goals/ideals), which in turn predicted a preference for autonomous help-seeking.</li> <li>- An interdependent self-construct predicted a prevention focus (which stresses avoiding losses and fulfilling obligations), which in turn predicted a preference for dependent help-seeking and help avoidance.</li> </ul>	- Participants were recruited via convenience sampling.
<b>Mok et al. (2008)</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 17,673$ secondary students from Hong Kong ( $N = 11,294$ ), Macau ( $N = 2,119$ ), and Taiwan ( $N = 4,260$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ~80% of Chinese students indicated they had recently sought academic help.</li> <li>- Chinese students generally endorsed seeking academic help to gain deeper understanding of material.</li> <li>- Chinese students indicated that concerns about disturbing others may act as a deterrent to seeking help.</li> </ul>	- The authors did not directly assess participants' cultural orientation; i.e., the participants were generally described as being from a Chinese cultural background.

<b>Author(s) and year</b>	<b>Helping focus</b>	<b>Study design</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Finding(s) relevant to research question</b>	<b>Methodological limitations</b>
<b>Popov et al. (2014)</b>	Help-seeking	Mixed methods	<i>N</i> = 120 graduate or final-year undergraduate students at a university in the Netherlands ( <i>N</i> = 76 students completed the questionnaire, <i>N</i> = 58 students participated in the study interview)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students from countries deemed collectivist had a significantly higher opinion of computer-supported collaborative learning, compared to students from countries deemed individualist.</li> <li>- Students from collectivist countries more frequently reported that they tried to choose polite words and phrases when asking questions so that others would feel comfortable. In contrast, students from individualist countries valued being specific and direct with their questions to others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The authors did not directly measure participants' cultural orientation (national background was used as a proxy for culture).</li> <li>- The study had a somewhat small sample size, which limits the generalizability of the authors' quantitative findings.</li> </ul>
<b>Zusho and Barnett (2011)</b>	Help-seeking	Quantitative descriptive	<i>N</i> = 293 high school students at a small, private, all-female school in a city in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There were no observed differences in the frequency of students' academic help-seeking behaviors (self-reported or actual) based on ethnicity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The authors did not directly measure participants' cultural orientation (ethnicity was used as a proxy for culture, with the understanding that Hispanic cultures tend to be more collectivist than non-Hispanic cultures).</li> </ul>



Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Asterhan and Bouton (2017)</b> <i>[Study 2]</i>	Help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	<i>N</i> = 515 ethnically Jewish adolescents in Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A collectivist cultural orientation on Singelis et al.'s (1995) measure of individualism-collectivism was associated with more school-related knowledge sharing on social network sites.</li> <li>- Individualism was not associated with less school-related knowledge sharing.</li> <li>- Individualism was associated with more regret over sharing knowledge, more perceived pressure to share knowledge, and more sharing that involves copied assignments.</li> <li>- When helping others was expected to result in one being helped in the future, individualism was associated with more sharing. When helping others was not expected to result in one being helped in the future, individualism was associated with less sharing.</li> </ul>	- The study scope may have been overly broad: the authors grouped online peer help-giving in with other kinds of school-related knowledge sharing (e.g., sharing notes) when performing analyses.

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Bouton et al. (2021) [Study 1]</b>	Help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 57$ undergraduate students at a university in Israel who were self-reported “prominent sharers” of school-related knowledge in social network study groups (out of a sample of $N = 264$ students who originally participated in the study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A collectivist value orientation on Singelis et al.’s (1995) measure of individualism-collectivism was associated with greater overall school-related knowledge sharing.</li> <li>- In non-competitive study programs, individualism-collectivism did not predict school-related knowledge sharing.</li> <li>- In competitive study programs, both collectivism and individualism had positive associations with sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- These analyses were restricted to participants classified as “prominent sharers” of school-related knowledge.</li> <li>- Participants were recruited via convenience sampling.</li> </ul>
<b>Bouton et al. (2021) [Study 2]</b>	Help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 425$ students at a teacher college in Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A collectivist value orientation was associated with more frequent school-related knowledge sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants were recruited via convenience sampling.</li> <li>- Female students were overrepresented in the study sample.</li> </ul>

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Hwang and Kim (2007)</b>	Help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	<i>N</i> = 411 undergraduate business students enrolled at a university in the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participants scoring higher on collectivism on a measure from Dorfman and Howell (1988) and McCoy et al. (2005) had more positive attitudes towards sharing school-related knowledge with other students by e-mail.</li> <li>- Internalization and identification were found to be affective commitments that fully mediated the association between collectivism and attitudes towards knowledge sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The authors did not treat collectivism and individualism as independent constructs; a low score on their measure of collectivism was interpreted as corresponding to an individualist cultural orientation.</li> </ul>
<b>Janoff-Bulman and Leggatt (2002)</b>	Help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	<i>N</i> = 120 undergraduate students at a university in the US (50% Latino, 50% Anglo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For hypothetical problem scenarios involving medium-close relationships, Latinos were more likely than Anglos to help, believed more strongly that they should help, were more likely to want to help, believed that they would have more positive feelings if they did help, and believed that they would have more negative feelings if they did not help.</li> <li>- Both groups felt strongly obligated to their closest relationships and no sense of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The study scope may have been overly broad: the authors examined problem scenarios spanning a range of issues, not just academic ones.</li> <li>- The authors did not directly measure cultural orientation (ethnicity was used as a proxy for cultural background).</li> </ul>

Author(s) and year	Helping focus	Study design	Sample	Finding(s) relevant to research question	Methodological limitations
<b>Petrella and Gore (2013)</b>	Help-giving	Quantitative descriptive	$N = 2,566$ undergraduate students enrolled at a university in the US	obligation to distant relationships. - A relational self-construal on Cross et al.'s (2000) Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale positively predicted consideration for other students (i.e., helping other students with their homework, note taking, or studying).	- Participants were recruited via convenience sampling.
<b>Rothstein-Fisch et al. (2003)</b>	Help-giving	Qualitative	$N = 7$ elementary teachers in the US who taught at schools with >95% immigrant Latino students	- Classroom observations and interviews showed that Latino children, when empowered in their cultural tendency to think and act collectively, exhibited a greater tendency to help others.	- The paper included limited discussion of how observation and interview data were analyzed.

*Note.* Sources are arranged first by helping focus (help-seeking and help-giving, followed by help-seeking alone, followed by help-giving alone) and then alphabetically by first author. For sources with multiple studies, only the study/studies that addressed a RQ of interest were included in this table.