Introduction

Favor doings are universal to all human societies. When a petitioner asks someone to do something that the person is not obligated to do, it constitutes a favor request. It is apparent that in the social interaction of our daily life, the content of the favor may range from a trivial chore (i.e., buying a bottle of water) to an undertaking requiring great effort (i.e., substituting for work).

The Perspective of Social Exchange Theory

One of the simplest definitions of social exchange is involving two persons, each of whom provides benefits to the other, and contingent upon benefits from the other (Emerson, 1981, p.32). The postulation under theories of social exchange or reciprocity is based on the idea that when individuals receive a favor, they may experience a state of discomfort due to a sense of indebtedness and thus, force them to reciprocate the received benefit in order to restore the equilibrium of the interpersonal relationship (Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Greenberg, Block, & Silverman, 1971; Roloff, 1987).

Study of Greenberg & Frisch (1972) indicated that their subjects felt more obligated and indebted to the other when they received the deliberate-help (vs. accidental-help). Pruitt (1968) and Lin (2004) also found that the magnitude of reciprocation is a positive function of the amount the recipients received. As a result, the recipient's sense of obligation to repay the favor increases the possibility that the donor will be compensated, which thereby increases the likelihood of the donor rendering aid in the first place (Han, Li, & Hwang, 2005). The idea that an individual feels indebted when helped and that the donor expects future reciprocity implies that human beings are rational and will remember how much they have helped others, as well as how much others have helped them. Though some people may perform more favors to others and some may receive more from others. From the viewpoint of statistics, the amount of rendering and receiving favors in a population should be equivalent. Therefore, under an overall condition, the following hypothesis may be generated on the basis of social exchange theories:

S.E.H: People will remember as many episodes of *I-asked-other-for-help* favors as *other-asked-me-for help* favors.

The Perspective of Social Cognition

However, theories of social cognition propose that an individual is motivated to maintain a positive self-image (Brown & Gallagher, 1992; Kunda, 1990; Tesser, 1988; Wood, 1989; Wood & Taylor, 1991). A self-serving bias suggests that people's self-knowledge is malleable and that their motives and current beliefs may bias their construction of attributes such as the frequency of their past behaviors (e.g., Klein & Kunda, 1993; Ross, McFarland, & Fletcher, 1981) and their past performance levels (e.g., Conway & Ross, 1984). Thus, individuals may process information biasedly when their self-worth has been threatened in order to preserve their positive self-image (Brown, Collins & Schmidt, 1988; Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Liberman & Chaiken, 1992), so one may remember more positive issues about oneself than negative issues (Dunn, 1989; Klein & Kunda, 1993).

In line with the theories of social cognition, it is reasonable to assume that the experience of being asked for a favor might enhance one's self-image, as it implies that one is competent and capable of helping others. In contrast, when one has to ask others for especially a big favor, one may experience a negative feeling, because it implies that one has to depend on others to satisfy one's needs. According to the concepts of the self-serving bias, it is reasonable to predict that individuals may tend to ignore or distort the fact and therefore remember more incidents or episodes in which they helped others than those in which others helped them because asking others for help might be detrimental to positive self-image or self-esteem. Therefore, based on theories of social cognition, the following prediction can be made:

S.C.H: People will remember fewer episodes of *I-asked-other–for-help* than *other-asked-me-for-help*.

Reconciling Two Perspectives on the Topic of Favor-Doings

It is apparent that the prediction based on theories of social cognition is different from that arising from theories of social exchange. However, if we allow that people are rational and have a motivation to maintain a positive self-image, it is possible that both the theories of social exchange and social cognition may help to explain how an individual remembers episodes of performing and receiving favors. It might be that these two theories have different

domains of application in consideration of who is the favor doer (I vs. other) and the size of the favor (big vs. small) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Application of S.E. and S.C. to performing or receiving favors

Favor Doer / Size of Favor	Other-helped-me	I-helped-other
Big favor	S.C. (Area A)	S.E. > S.C. (Area B)
Small favor	S.C. > S.E. (Area C)	S.E. (Area D)

S.E. = the theories of social exchange; S.C. = the theories of social cognition
S.E. > S.C. means S.E. is more predictable than S.C.
S.C. > S.E. means S.C. is more predictable than S. E.

Studies have shown that individuals will devalue the importance of a dimension in which their self-worth is threatened (Tesser, 1988; Tesser & Campell, 1982), because knowing that they themselves are inferior to others can be distressing (Brown & Gallagher, 1992; Klein & Kunda, 1993). However, when people's self-worth is bolstered, they may become less interested in self-enhancing through distorting their social judgment (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Tesser & Cornell, 1991). Following this logic, when one has to ask for a favor that costs the donor a great deal (Area A), s/he may experience a state of psychological stress, since it implies that s/he is unable to satisfy personal needs and has to depend on others. In order to maintain a positive self-image, a self-serving bias may operate to override processes of social exchange by ignoring or distorting the fact that one has asked for big help. On the contrary, if one is asked for a big favor from others (Area B), one's self-esteem might be enhanced because it implies that one is competent and capable of helping others; therefore, one might not need to boast the costs of the favor s/he performs to others to enhance oneself more. Instead, the norm of reciprocity for social exchange might be activated whereby the donor might expect some future repayment since the favor costs a large amount. It might imply that theories of social exchange might be more predictable than that of social cognition while explaining how an individual remembers episodes of performing effort favors to others.

However, when the requested favor is small or trivial, the receiver may remember the episodes, since, after all, an individual has been socialized to reciprocate the received benefits (social exchange). Moreover, when the favor is not a threat to self-worth, people may motivate to remember more favors from others for the sake that it might imply that they are decent people to conform to the social norms of remembering others' benefits to them (Area C). On the other hand, if a small favor is requested, the cognitive element of remembering the

favor might not hold as the favor might be too trivial to have any implication for one's self-esteem. In addition though the donor may expect to be compensated in the future, the repayment would likely be as trivial as the original favor that might not be strong enough to motivate the donor to keep these episodes well in mind (Area D).

Thus, integrating theories of social exchange and social cognition regarding to the issues of performing and receiving favors suggests that when the favors request great effort, people will retrieve fewer episodes of asking helps from others since their self-worth might be threatened. However, it will be less possible that people will ignore their costed favors to others, for they may be expecting future reciprocity. As comparing costed to trivial favors people received from others, the function of social cognition might be opposite. People may be more willing to remember others' small favors instead of ignoring them because it may imply that they are decent people to conform to the social norm of reciprocity. Therefore, the main purpose of this study will test the following hypotheses:

H1: When the favor is big, people will retrieve fewer episodes of *I-asked-other-for-help* than *other-asked-me-for-help*.

H2: When the favor is trivial, people will retrieve more episodes of *I-asked-other-for-help* than *other-asked-me-for-help*.

H3: People will retrieve more episodes of *I-asked-other-for-help* for a trivial favor than for a big favor.

H4: People will retrieve more episodes of *other-asked-me-for-help* for a big favor than for a trivial favor.

Method

1. Research instruments

To test the hypotheses, the Twenty Statement Test (TST) was modified asking participants to report favors they had performed for and received from others during the past two weeks. Previous studies indicate that the TST is a good instrument for measuring a respondent's spontaneous self-concept by completing a series of twenty sentences that start with "I am….." (Cousins, 1989; Hong & Chiu, 2001; Ip & Bond, 1995). It is reasonable to assume that a TST could be modified to measure the participant's spontaneous memory of favors by completing similar sentences. Therefore, the original TST was modified by

changing instructions from "I am….." to "I asked others to help me…… (Type 1)" and "Others asked me to help him/her…...(Type 2)." Each scale contained only ten sentences in order to minimize the effects of fatigue or boredom on participants (see Hong & Chiu, 2001; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995 for similar methodological considerations). However, participants who felt that there were more than 10 episodes they could recall were encouraged to write them down in the blank area provided on the measure. Those who could not recall 10 episodes were told that it was fine to leave spaces empty.

The participants filled out the questionnaire in one of their psychology classes. In order to prevent the participants from figuring out the purpose of this study and potentially skewing their answers, they were told that this study was designed to investigate the content of favors they received or performed in their daily lives, and were debriefed when they finished the questionnaire.

For the sake of comparing the frequency and content of favors retrieved by spontaneous memory between *I-helped-other* and *other-helped-me* episodes, participants were asked to fill out both Type 1 and Type 2 scales (within-subjects). For the purpose of controlling the ordering effect of scales (Type 1 and Type 2), two versions of the questionnaires were made (between-subjects): Version A: Filling out Type 1 first and then Type 2; Version B: the order of Type 1 and 2 was reversed. These two versions of questionnaire were randomly assigned to participants.

2. Participants

One hundred and thirty-two students from a community college for adults in Taiwan served as participants in this study. All of the participants were female and most of them were kindergarten or preschool teachers (94.7%). The mean age of the participants was 32.09 years (SD = 5.97) with a range from 20 to 49. They were randomly assigned to fill in either Version A or B of the questionnaire (64 for Version A and 68 for Version B).

3. Coding of spontaneous memories of favors

Because the content of the favors varied from trivial to requiring great effort, in order to classify these favors participants retrieved. We tried to include as many dimensions as possible by the nature of the costs involved in the requested favor, such as time, effort, or physical or mental energy (see the following paragraph for those categories). After the categories were constructed, two graduate students who were unaware of the hypotheses were asked to code all the retrieved favors independently. The inter-coder agreement for sorting

responses to the categories was acceptable ($K = 0.91$). Disagreements between the two coders were resolved by discussion with the author. Those responses on which no agreement could be reached were classified to category 8 (unable to be coded). The following eight codes were generated:

1. Something easy to do/without effort: buying lunch, beverage, newspaper, copying (e.g., "I asked my schoolmate to bring me a lunch box when he went to the convenience store.")
2. Borrowing small items: CD, books, umbrella, clothes (e.g., "I asked my classmate to lend me her umbrella.")
3. Favor requiring time: drive him/her to a bus stop or home (e.g., "My colleague asked me to drive her home.")
4. Favor requiring time plus physical effort: cleaning room, washing clothes, accompanying him/her shopping (e.g., "My colleague asked me to accompany her shopping.")
5. Favor requiring time plus mental energy: teaching a computer program, solving computer or Internet problems, discussing/doing an assignment, designing a teaching program/material, decorating the classroom (e.g., "I asked my colleague to help me design the teaching program for my class.")
6. Favor requiring time plus physical effort plus mental energy: substituting at work, handling an exhibition, arranging the program for a special activity (e.g., "My colleague asked me to substitute for her at work on my day off.")
7. Borrowing money: Any episode involving borrowing money, no matter how much it was, was coded in this category. In fact, most of the cases reported did not mention the exact amount of the money. (e.g., "My friend asked me to lend him some money.")
8. Unable to be coded: taking him/her out for fun, handling something, introducing girl/boy friends, finding a job (e.g., "My friend asked me to help her find a job.")

Results

Only 1.3% of the Type 1 responses (*I-asked-other-to-help*) and 2.8% of the Type 2 responses (*other-asked-me-to-help*) were not possible to code. The frequency and percentage of responses in each category for both Types (1 & 2) was calculated as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Total frequencies and proportions of responses of Type 1 and 2

Categories of Favor	Types of Help	
	I-asked-other	*Other-asked-me*
1. Something easy to do	225 (48.9%)	213 (34.5%)
2. Borrowing small items	26 (5.7%)	23 (3.7%)
3. Favor requiring time	88 (19.1%)	135 (21.8%)
4. Time plus physical effort	12 (2.6%)	11 (1.8%)
5. Time plus mental energy	86 (18.7%)	161 (26.1%)
6. Time, physical and mental energy	13 (2.8%)	38 (6.2%)
7. Borrowing money	4 (0.9%)	19 (3.1%)
8. Unable to be coded	6 (1.3%)	17 (2.8%)
Total:	460 (100%)	617 (100%)

It was noted that the content of the favor might vary from trivial to something requiring great effort. In order to simplify our analysis, Category 1 (Something easy to do) and 2 (Borrowing small items) were combined as "Small Favors." Since these favors requiring relatively small or even no effort. From Category 3 to 6 (which requiring time, physical effort and/or mental energy) were combined as "Big Favors". For the favor doer did pay some costs (time, physical or mental energy) when performing these favors. Most participants did not mention the amount of money they lent or borrowed. Given that any amount of money might have different meanings for different people, it was very hard to say if borrowing money were a trivial favor or represented a great cost. Therefore, this category of responses and the category of *Unable to be coded* were combined as "Others". The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Combined frequencies and proportions of responses of Type 1 and 2

Categories of Favor	Types of Help	
	I-asked-other	*Other-asked-me*
Small Favor	251 (54.6%)	236 (38.3%)
Big Favor	199 (43.2%)	345 (55.9%)
Others	10 (2.2%)	36 (5.8%)
Total:	460 (100%)	617 (100%)

A 2 (Version: Type 1 first vs. Type 2 first) X 2 (Type of Help: *I-asked-other-to-help* vs. *other-asked-me-to-help*) X 3 (Category of Favor: Small, Big, Others) ANOVA was conducted to test the hypotheses with the last two factors as within-subjects factors. The main and

interaction effects of Version were not significant which suggested that the results of the current research were not caused by the order of instruction types (*I-asked-other-to-help* first vs. *other-asked-me-to-help* first).

The main effect of Type of Help (*I-asked-other-to-help* vs. *other-asked-me-to-help*) was significant ($F_{(1, 131)} = 68.23$, $p < .001$), that the participants retrieved more episodes of *I-helped-other* than *other-helped-me* favors (see Figure 1). The factor of Category of Favor also had a significant main effect ($F_{(2, 262)} = 61.17$, $p < .001$). Tests of within-subjects contrasts showed that the effect was mostly caused by the extremely small amount of Others (favor) level ($F_{(1, 131)} = 150.08$, $p < .001$). The frequency of mentioned Small and Big Favor episodes were not significantly different ($F_{(1, 131)} = 2.44$, $p > .05$). However, the interaction effect between Type of Help and Category of Favor was significant ($F_{(2, 262)} = 41.36$, $p < .001$). Since the Small and Big favors were the main concern of this study, only these two levels of Category of Favors were compared in the post hoc analyses to test the hypotheses.

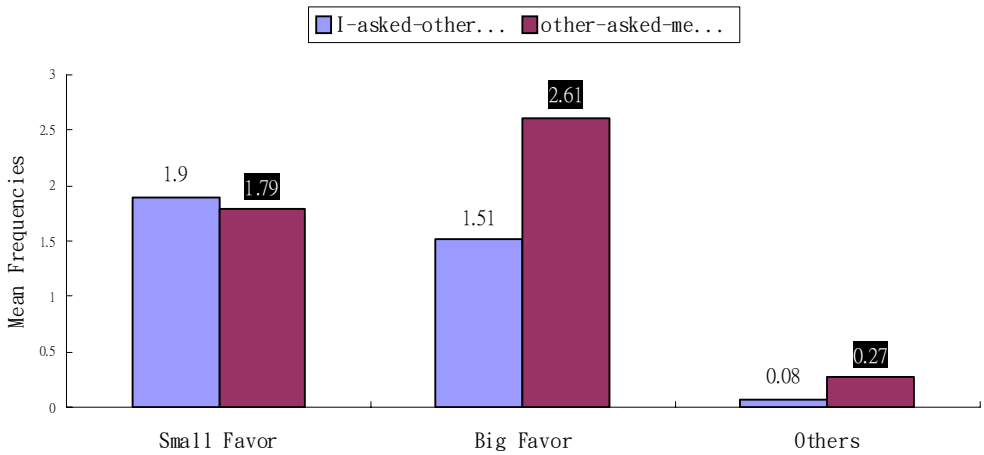

Figure 1. Mean frequency of participants' retrieved favors

With regard to H1: When the favor is big, people will retrieve fewer episodes of *I-asked-other-for-help* than *other-asked-me-for-help*. The hypothesis was tested by examining the effect of *I-asked-other-for-help* (M = 1.51) vs. *other-asked-me-for-help* (M = 2.61) at Big Favor level, and it was found that Dunn $t = -8.19 > t_{131(0.0125)} = 2.51$. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

For H2: People would retrieve more episodes of *I-asked-other-for-help* than *other-asked-me-for-help* for trivial favors. The effect of *I-asked-other-for-help* (M = 1.9) vs.

other-asked-me-for-help (M = 1.79) at the Small Favor level was also tested by Dunn t-test = 0.82 < $t_{131(0.0125)}$ = 2.51. Although the participants did retrieve more episodes of *I-asked-other* than *other-asked-me* for small favors, the difference was not statistically significant and the hypothesis was not supported.

For H3: People would retrieve more episodes of *I-asked-other* for a trivial favor than for a big favor. The difference between retrieved Small Favor (M = 1.9) and Big Favors (M = 1.51) at *I-asked-other-to-help* level was tested, and it was found that Dunn t = 2.90 > $t_{131(0.0125)}$ = 2.51. The hypothesis was supported.

For H4: People would retrieve more episodes of *other-asked-me* for a big favor than for a trivial favor. The difference between Small Favor (M = 1.79) and Big Favor (M = 2.61) at the level of *other-asked-me-to-help* was tested, and Dunn t = -6.11 > $t_{131(0.0125)}$ = 2.51. The hypothesis was supported.

Discussion

The results that participants were likely to recall more episodes of performing favors that required effort for other people than when others helped them could be explained by the reconciling concept of theories of social exchange and social cognition. Though the participants did retrieve more episodes of receiving trivial favors from others than they performed for others, the difference did not reach a significant level, thus hypothesis 2 was not support. However, if the ratio of *I-asked-other-to-help* and *other-asked-me-to-help* episodes of small favors was compared, it was found that participants did retrieve different ratios between these two types of small favors (54.6% vs. 38.3%, $\chi^2 = 58.12$, $p < .001$).

As previous studies indicated that TST was a good instrument for measuring one's spontaneous self-concept (Cousins, 1989; Hong & Chiu, 2001), the modified TST in this study was able to examine participants' spontaneous reaction upon overall experienced favor-doings and was a suitable instrument for examining the hypotheses. Generally speaking, the results that the participants were likely to recall more episodes of performing effort favors for other people than when others helped them could be explained by the reconciling concept of theories of social exchange and social cognition. Though one may exclaim that the same phenomena could be explained by theories of social cognition solely that the participant might distort or ignore a memory of the favor since one's positive self-image may have been harmed.

If this is the story, the interaction effect between Type of Help (*I-asked-other-to-help* vs. *other-asked-me-to-help*) and Category of Favor (Small vs. Big) should not have been significant. Because participants should have retrieved more episodes of *other-asked-me-to-help*, no matter the favors were big or small. By the way, studies have shown that people were less motivated to self-aggrandize by distorting their social judgments when their self-worth was not threatened (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Brown & Gallagher, 1992; Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995). Therefore, we might explain the phenomenon of big favors more reasonably by the reconciling concept that when it was an *I-asked-other* favor, the participant might distort or ignore a memory of the favor to enhance his self-image; when it was an *other-asked-me* favor, the participant might remember his favor to others because it costed him some effort and he would expect for future reciprocity.

This study did not examine participants' mutual favor-doings performed in a specific dyad, in which they performed and received favors from a specific target. For example, if a big favor was performed by an intimate family member, the recipient might not feel threatened as when the favor was from a friend. However, some studies have found that when the interacting target was clear, the situation might become more unambiguous and the participants would be more rational (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989; Felson, 1981). Further studies may be needed to test if specify the interacting target might partial out the effect of self-serving bias in participants' spontaneous memories of favor-doing experience.

One might attribute the findings of this study to the effect of self-reference that one might clearly know the favor they performed but was not always aware of others' help to them. Therefore, one could retrieve more *other-asked-me-for-help* (I performed) favors than *I-asked-other-for-help* (others performed). If this is the case, people should have retrieved similar number of big and trivial favors they performed to others. Instead of this, an interesting overall picture of this study emerged in which participants recalled most of the *I-asked-other-for-help* favors from others were trivial, whereas most *other-asked-me-for-help* favors required efforts. However, it should be noted that how does a self-serving bias mechanism work for forgetting or distorting relative memories still need further researches to investigate. From the results of this study, we could only conclude that when the favor was big, participants did retrieve more episodes of other-asked-me-for-help favors than that of I-asked-other-for-help.

One limitation of this study is that participants of this study were all female. Thus the

extent of favors in this study might be restricted in this regard. For example, men may have a very different experience of performing and receiving favors than women. It would be worthwhile to conduct further research to examine whether similar patterns of spontaneous memory of I-helped-other and other-helped-me favors can be observed in other gender or social environments. Furthermore, though we had tried to classified the favors participants retrieved into big (effort) versus small (effortless) favors as objective as possible, still, could it reflect how the participants evaluated these favors in our study remained unknown. Further study may ask the participants to scale the costs of the favors they performed or received directly. In addition, because the history of favors with the requester and donor was not considered in this study, care should be taken in generalizing current findings.

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