The Psychological Benefits of Receiving Real-Life Altruism

Edward Hoffman¹, Jenniffer Gonzalez-Mujica², Catalina Acosta-Orozco³, and William C. Compton⁴

Abstract
This study investigates the impact of receiving real-life altruism on such positive attitudinal aspects as empathy, optimism, and motivation to help others. A mixed convenience/snowball sample of 148 participants (79 men, 67 women, 2 gender unknown), responded to an online questionnaire. Most were between 21 and 40 years of age, and had at least a college degree; all but eight were born in Venezuela, and the remainder were from other Hispanic/Latino countries. Participants were asked to describe an experience in which they had received unexpected altruism and rate its impact on their subsequent view of life. They were also asked to rate its effect on their optimism about human nature, trust in social relationships, appreciation for life, sense of gratitude, self-esteem, sense of being valued by others, empathy for others, motivation to help others, energy and enthusiasm in general, and religious faith. A total of 64.2% reported an unexpected altruistic experience. Of those, almost 75% reported the experience changed their view of life at least “strongly” and only 4.2% stated that it had little or no effect. The intensity of their change in life view correlated significantly with all 10

¹Yeshiva University, New York, NY, USA
²Independent Practice, Barcelona, Spain
³Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia
⁴Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, USA

Corresponding Author:
Edward Hoffman, Department of Psychology, Yeshiva University, 500 West 185th Street, New York, NY 10002, USA.
Email: elhoffma@yu.edu
dependent variables except for gratitude. Women were significantly more likely to report that their experience boosted their gratitude for others, and participants whose altruistic experiences were attitudinally more life-changing were significantly more likely to indicate that religion was very important to them. The implications of these findings for understanding the psychological benefits of altruistic experience are discussed and avenues for future research are suggested.

Keywords
altruism, benevolence, helping behavior, humanistic psychology, Maslow, Sorokin

On a globe that daily witnesses countless acts of cruelty and conflict both large and small, our human capacity for altruism seems more important than ever. Not surprisingly, psychologists today are increasingly interested in understanding this vital caregiving phenomenon, certainly with the hope that such knowledge will lead to a more harmonious humanity. In recent years, researchers have increasingly examined the personality antecedents as well as correlates of such prosocial behaviors as volunteerism, mentoring, and compassionate caregiving. However, such interest is hardly new. More than 60 years ago, Maslow (1954) criticized the emphasis on sickness and pathology regarding human nature and declared that “kindness, generosity, benevolence, and charity have too little place in the social psychology textbooks” (p. 371). Asserting that psychology was fixated on the negative aspects of social exchange, he rhetorically asked, “Where are the researches on unselfishness?” (Maslow, 1954, p. 371).

As the 21st century moves through its second decade, Maslow’s challenge to our field remains highly relevant. Little empirical knowledge yet exists about socially benevolent behavior, especially from the standpoint of its recipients. For this reason, our investigation of altruistic experience in South America is guided precisely by Maslow’s humanistic vision.

**Altruism in Psychological Inquiry**

The term “altruism” derives from the Latin word “alter” (“other”), which literally translated means “other-ism.” The concept was brought into the social sciences by the French philosopher-sociologist August Comte in the mid-19th century as the antonym of selfishness; the Oxford English Dictionary’s first recorded date for its usage is 1853. Since then, the concept has remained part of international social and natural science terminology. In
Comte’s highly influential view, people have two distinct motives in life: egoism and altruism. Although Comte viewed most human behavior as self-serving, he regarded the unselfish desire to help others as a motivator too. Similar ideas were later advanced by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim in *The Division of Labor in Society*. In this 1893 work, he argued that altruism as well as egoism has always existed in human history, for community requires that individuals live together with some degree of mutual understanding and cooperation. Though Durkheim’s formulation carried considerable philosophical weight, he never defined altruism in measurable terms or sought to elucidate it empirically (Dubeski, 2001).

Several decades later, altruism was catapulted into social scientific and popular interest by the scholarly activities of Pitirim Sorokin. A Russian émigré who helped build American sociology in the 1920s and 1930s, he became devoted to the study of altruism after the horrific death and destruction of World War II. Establishing the Harvard Research Center for Creative Altruism in the late 1940s, Sorokin hoped to spark intense academic study of altruism in the United States and abroad. In 1950, his book *Altruistic Love* highlighted the lives and practices of eminent altruists, including both Christian saints and American good neighbors. Among those Sorokin influenced was Maslow, who, in 1955, became a cofounder of Sorokin’s new Research Society for Creative Altruism. Maslow, who had studied directly with Alfred Adler in the 1930s, shared his mentor’s opinion that compassion, friendship, and cooperation were basic features of the healthy human personality, and was strongly interested in scientific research to support that view (Hoffman, 1999). Unfortunately, as Maslow soon discovered, Sorokin’s organization was poorly run and able to accomplish little. By 1970, both Sorokin and Maslow were dead, and psychological research on altruism languished for more than 20 years.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the empirical study of altruism revived as a result of two separate streams: the first involved “hero” research, focusing, for example, on the brave persons who saved European Jews from the Nazis during the World War II, and on famous exceptional altruists like Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa (Fogelman, 1994; Oliner & Oliner, 1988). Such studies were essentially anecdotal and had meager scientific grounding. Only one consistent finding was rooted in objective measurement, and that was that individuals with an “altruistic personality” tended to score higher on empathy and responsibility toward others (Oliner & Oliner, 1990).

The second stream came from the growing subfield of evolutionary psychology, as adherents (Boehm, 1999; Boone, 1998; McAndrew, 2002; McCullough, Kimeldorf, & Cohen, 2008; Nowak & Sigmund, 2005) argued
that cooperative and benevolent behaviors among individuals carried a significant advantage in natural selection for human group survival. For example, according to such scientists, the mother who sacrifices her life to save her children may actually be engaging in genetically adaptive behavior, as the copies of her genes that reside in them will in the long run lead to greater genetic fitness than if she alone had survived (McAndrew, 2002).

Although altruism has regained increased psychological attention, most related empirical investigations have focused experimentally on helping behaviors in the laboratory (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Danzis & Stone-Romero, 2009; Fowler & Christakis, 2010) or public settings (Fischer-Lokou, Lamy, & Gueguen, 2009; Lamy, Fischer-Lokou, & Gueguen, 2009). Typically, such studies have examined helping between complete strangers in brief, one-time interactions. Other studies have administered self-report surveys to various categories of individuals, such as ministers (DaSilva, 2008), nurses (Johnson, 2007), and medical, law, and business students (Coulter, Wilkes, & Der-Martirosian, 2007). While undeniably shedding some useful empirical light, the generalizability of these studies to situations of “real-life” altruism appears limited. As Yeung (2006, p. 22) astutely concluded in her review of social science research on altruism, “Our next step in altruistic research should involve exploration of everyday experiences and views of altruism through combining survey and qualitative data.”

In this light, Mastain (2006) conducted detailed interviews with three adults who had provided altruism in daily life that encompassed caregiving to strangers. She identified 15 constituent themes, such as empathy with the person in need and the conscious decision to act on the desire to help. In Japan, Oda et al. (2013) developed a self-report scale that assessed altruistic tendencies in everyday situations concerning family, friends and acquaintances, and strangers. The scale was positively correlated with emotional warmth and negatively correlated with emotional coldness. Women had higher altruism scores relating to family as well as friends and acquaintances, but no gender differences emerged concerning altruistic tendencies toward strangers. Mastain (personal communication, June 7, 2010) decried that no empirical research to date had examined real-life altruism from the standpoint of the recipient. Since then, however, two studies have been reported in the psychology literature. With a Brazilian sample, Hoffman, da Silveira, and Polydoro (2011) found that experiences involving emotional support were most common, followed in frequency by those involving financial aid. The altruistic deeds generally occurred during the recipients’ adulthood and involved a friend. Both men and women tended to experience altruism performed by someone of their own gender and who was older or possessed higher social status. In a study involving persons from the Dominican
Republic, Hoffman, Alfonso, and Compton (2014) found that recipients of altruism reported greater optimism and trust in humanity as a result of their experience, stronger empathy and closeness in their social relationships, and subsequent “pay-it-forward” behavior.

**The Venezuelan Context**

Venezuela, named the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in 1999, is located on the northern coast of South America. The country comprises a continental mainland and numerous islands in the Caribbean Sea. The majority of Venezuela’s approximately 28.95 million residents are concentrated in the north, especially in the largest city of Caracas, numbering about 2.11 million. Based on Hofstede’s cultural comparison work (Hofstede, 2003; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), Venezuela has the following rankings: power distance = 81, individualism = 12, masculinity = 73, uncertainty avoidance = 76, long-term orientation = 16, and indulgence = 100. These rankings indicate that Venezuela ranks cross-culturally high on accepting power inequalities among people, extremely low on individualism (in favor of collectivism), high on the masculinity-linked traits of status and competition (rather than caregiving), high on uncertainty avoidance (rather than tolerating emotional ambiguity), very low on long-term orientation (indicating meager future planning), and extremely high on indulgence (associated with leisure rather than work orientation).

To trace the history or delineate the parameters of Venezuela’s current economic–political situation is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that with an estimated 27,875 homicides in 2015 (Observatory of Venezuelan Violence as cited in McDonnell, 2016) or about 90 per 100,000 people, the country ranks alongside gang-ridden El Salvador and Honduras as the world’s most homicidal nation. In comparison, the United States’ homicide rate is about 5 per 100,000. As McDonnell (2016) noted, “While most crime victims are poor, they also include members of the middle and upper classes, and scores of police and military personnel are killed each year, sometimes for their weapons.” For many Venezuelans, their country’s massive violent crime is attributable to corrupt law enforcement, governmental indifference, proliferating arms, and a deteriorating economy. In 2013, Cesar Chavez’s 14-year rule as Venezuela’s controversial president ended with his death from cancer. That same year, his personally chosen successor Nicolas Maduro was elected president over an increasingly destitute nation in which mob violence and paramilitary governmental death squads, imprisonment of political oppositional figures, and severe shortages of both food and medical supplies may eventually spiral into civil war.
Against this volatile social backdrop, we decided to investigate experiences of real-life altruism. That is, in a country where social trust is fraying to the breaking point, our goal was to examine how individuals were affected by their experience of being a recipient of unexpected benevolent behavior. This topic was especially salient for the second author (a native Venezuelan) of this article, who has suffered the murder of several acquaintances included a medical student killed during a paramilitary attack on the Central University of Caracas in 2013.

Hypotheses. Based on our review of the literature and familiarity with conditions in Venezuela, we had five hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** The experience of receiving unexpected altruism would significantly increase self-reported trust in human kindness.

**Hypothesis 2:** This experience would significantly increase self-reported empathy for others.

**Hypothesis 3:** The experience would significantly increase self-reported motivation to help others.

**Hypothesis 4:** The experience would significantly increase self-reported sense of gratitude.

**Hypothesis 5:** Women would report that their experience increased their sense of gratitude significantly more than would men.

Method

**Instrument**

We utilized the questionnaire developed by Hoffman et al. (2014). It has three parts. Part 1 elicits demographic information, encompassing the participant’s gender, age range, educational level, religious affiliation if any, how important is religion to the participant on a 3-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not important*; 2 = *somewhat important*; 3 = *very important*), country of birth, and country of current residence. Part 2 asks whether the participant has ever had an experience in which someone unexpectedly acted altruistically toward him or her, and then to describe this experience including his or her age when it occurred, the gender of the initiator, the relationship between the initiator and the recipient, and whether the initiator was younger or older than the recipient. It next asks the participant to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale the intensity with which the experience affected or changed his or her view or attitude toward life (1 = *not at all*; 2 = *a little*; 3 = *moderately*; 4 = *strongly*; 5 =...
greatly). Part 3 asks the participant to rate separately on 10 independently scored 3-point Likert-type scales (1 = not at all; 2 = a little; 3 = a large amount), the extent to which the experience increased his or her optimism, trust in social relationships, appreciation for life, sense of gratitude, self-esteem, sense of being valued by others, empathy for others, motivation to help other persons, energy and enthusiasm in general, and religious faith. Each of the 10 scales yields a mean score utilized in statistical analysis.

Sample and Data Collection

The second author of this study used a mixed convenience/snowball sample in recruiting participants to respond to our online questionnaire. She sent the questionnaire to approximately 250 persons, comprising friends and colleagues, and both groups’ acquaintances. In addition, the second author posted the questionnaire link on Facebook, where it was accessed by various individuals. They were advised that participation was wholly voluntary and anonymous.

Participants

A total of 148 persons (79 men, 67 women, 2 gender unknown) responded to the questionnaire. In terms of chronological age, our sample was quite varied. A total of 59 (40.4%) were between 21 and 30 years of age, 35 (24.0%) were between 31 and 40 years. A total of 16 (11.0%) were between 41 and 50 years, 20 (13.7%) were between 51 and 60 years, and 16 (11.0%) were older than 60 years. Our sample was well-educated, with 74 participants (50.7%) possessing postundergraduate education, 24 (16.4%) with a university degree, 27 (18.5%) with some university education, 16 (11.0%) with a high school diploma, and 5 (3.4%) with less than a high school diploma. In terms of religious affiliation, 88 were self-described as Catholic, 28 as Protestant, 15 as Jewish, 3 as Buddhist, 2 as Hindu, 1 as Muslim, 1 as “other,” and 8 as “none.” Concerning the importance of religion for themselves, 67 participants (45.9%) reported that it was not important, 43 (29.5%) stated that it was somewhat important, and 36 (24.7%) said that it was very important.

Results

A total of 95 (64.2%) participants indicated “yes” to Question 1, that is, whether they had experienced an unexpected act of altruism toward them.
Those checking “yes” tended to be women ($\chi^2 = .22.68, p < .01$), more educated ($r = .40, p < .000$), and older ($r = .34, p < .000$), and with religion less important to them ($r = .53, p < .000$). Question 2 asked participants to describe their experience of unexpected altruism; their answers will be highlighted in the Discussion section. Question 3 asked, “On a scale of 1 to 5, describe the intensity with which this experience affected or changed your view or attitude toward life.” The mean score was 4.2 with 74.7% of participants indicating either “strong” or “greatly.”

There were no significant gender differences with regard to the 10 dependent variables except for gratitude, which is reported under Hypothesis 5 below. Age was not significantly correlated with change in view or attitude about life after an experience of unexpected altruism. Participants who had more education were likely to report significantly higher optimism about human nature ($r = .28, p < .007$), appreciation for life ($r = .26, p < .022$), sense of gratitude ($r = .35, p < .001$), energy and enthusiasm in general ($r = .23, p < .03$), and religious faith ($r = .23, p < .025$) after experiencing unexpected altruism.

Our first hypothesis was that the experience of receiving unexpected altruism would significantly increase self-reported trust in human kindness. The correlation between the intensity of the effect of an altruistic act and trust in human kindness was significant ($r = .30, p < .003$). Thus, the first hypothesis was supported. The second hypothesis was that being the recipient of such altruism would significantly increase self-reported empathy for others. The correlation between the intensity of the effect of an altruistic act and empathy was significant ($r = .34, p < .001$). Thus, the second hypothesis was supported. The third hypothesis was that being the recipient of unexpected altruism would significantly increase self-reported motivation to help others. The correlation between the intensity of the effect of an altruistic act and motivation to help others was significant ($r = .41, p < .000$). Thus, the third hypothesis was supported. The fourth hypothesis was that being the recipient of unexpected altruism would significantly increase self-reported gratitude. The correlation between the intensity of the effect of an altruistic act and gratitude was not significant ($r = .15, p < .155$). Thus, the fourth hypothesis was not supported. This result may reflect the fact that virtually all recipients of altruism in our sample indicated that their sense of gratitude was “very strongly” boosted by the experience, and hence, almost no statistical variability existed. The fifth hypothesis was that women would report that their altruistic experience increased their gratitude for others significantly more than would men. Women were indeed more likely than men to report that experiencing altruism increased their sense of gratitude ($r = .26, p < .000$).
Thus, the fifth hypothesis was supported. Finally, higher intensity of the effect from an unexpected altruistic experience was significantly correlated with upward change in optimism about human nature ($r = .55$, $p < .000$), appreciation for life ($r = .32$, $p < .002$), self-esteem ($r = .48$, $p < .000$), feeling valued by other ($r = .37$, $p < .000$), energy and enthusiasm in general ($r = .35$, $p < .001$), and religious faith ($r = .56$, $p < .000$; see Table 1).

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Discussion

Though the importance of investigating altruism to improve social relations and reduce interpersonal conflict has been identified for more than 60 years (see Maslow, 1954; Sorokin, 1950), meager research has been conducted on “real-world” experiences in this domain. Rather, experimental studies involving brief, low-level encounters as well as attitudinal questionnaires by occupation have predominated in the research literature. In addition, most investigations on altruism have examined the psychological benefits to its initiators, such as the “helper’s high,” rather than to its recipients. Yet both theoretical and empirical studies have suggested, at least indirectly, that the experience of receiving benevolence from others may carry significant psychological benefits (Barr, 2014; Janoff-Bulman, 1989; Poulin & Silver, 2008; Rogers, 1961). For this reason, we examined experiences of unexpected altruism in a country with one of the world’s highest violent crime rates, rampant corruption, and widespread breakdown of civil institutions (Observatory of Venezuelan Violence as cited in McDonnell, 2016).

Our findings clearly showed that the experience of receiving altruism had a potent emotional and attitudinal impact. Supporting our first three hypotheses, the intensity of participants’ experience of altruism significantly increased their self-reported confidence in human kindness, empathy for others, and motivation to help others. In addition, participants’ appreciation for life, self-esteem, sense of being valued by others, energy and enthusiasm in general, and religious faith were all significantly bolstered too. Nearly 75% of participants who reported an altruistic experience said the experience “strongly” or “very strongly” affected their view of life, and only 4.2% stated that it had “little” or “no effect.” These findings are consistent with previous research on the psychological benefits of receiving altruism (Hoffman et al., 2010; Hoffman et al., 2014), but also suggest a more pervasive effect.

It is interesting to note that participants whose altruistic experiences were attitudinally more life-changing were significantly more likely to indicate that religion was very important to them. Possibly, prior religiosity had a “snowball” effect, inducing those who already viewed human life benevolently to become even stronger in their faith after experiencing altruism. It is also plausible that having received unexpected altruism in a country with pervasive criminal violence and civil breakdown, participants became more religious as a result. Both interpretations, of course, may be relevant. However, in view of the fact that self-reported intensity of altruistic experience was significantly linked to increased faith, our second interpretation seems more likely. As we predicted based on gender differences with regard to gratitude, women were significantly more likely to report that their
experience of altruism boosted their gratitude for others as compared with men. This was the sole gender difference to emerge in our study, and supports the notion that men and women differ not only in their verbal expression of gratitude (Yoosefvand & Raskeh, 2014) but in how they experience it as well (Chang, Tsui-Shan, Teng, Berki, & Chen, 2013; Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2009). Thus, our fifth hypothesis was supported.

It is also worth noting that the experience of receiving real-life altruism significantly bolstered participants’ self-reported energy and enthusiasm. That an increased benevolent worldview had a positive impact on individual vitality should not be surprising, in light of research linking cynicism with a variety of both mental and physical difficulties including depression, dementia, and cardiovascular impairment (Barefoot et al., 1998; Barney et al., 1999; Lavretsky & Irwin, 2007; Neuvonen et al., 2014; Ranjit et al., 2007). To be constantly suspicious and wary of others takes a mental and physical toll, and if such vigilance is significantly lowered, it makes sense that recipients of altruism would report greater energy and enthusiasm. Our finding has particular relevance for older adults, for whom the link between worldview (whether benevolent or cynical) and health status is strongest (Neuvonen et al., 2014; Poulin & Silver, 2008).

In describing their experiences of receiving altruism, participants most frequently expressed the emotion of gratitude. For example, a woman in her 30s recounted that

Some years ago, I got sick and my younger sister took care of my children and me. For a month, she lived with us and took charge of everything including cooking and cleaning. I am very thankful for her actions.

And a woman in her 50s recalled that

Six years ago, my daughter was running in an open space and fell. She injured her head and was bleeding. The first person who passed by was a woman my age. She helped and calmed me, called a taxi for me, and even paid the driver. She solved everything for me without receiving any compensation except for my gratitude.
Despite such vivid statements of gratitude, it was the only one of the 10 dependent variables not significantly related to the intensity of the altruistic experience as self-reported by participants. In our view, this result appears due to the fact that 95.7% of recipients of altruism in our sample indicated that their sense of gratitude was “very strongly” boosted by the experience. Thus, due to lack of statistical variability with regard to the gratitude variable, our fourth hypothesis was not supported.

Other participants described experiences that bolstered their trust in human nature. For example, a woman in her 20s recollected that

A few years ago, I was brutally raped by thugs at a medical center where I was working. Several hours later, some nurses arrived. They took care of me and comforted me. They healed me wounds and behaved like mothers to me. I owe them my life.

A man in his 20s related that

Several months ago, I was in a bakery and tried using my credit card to pay for my breakfast. My card was rejected by the machine and I had no cash with me. A somewhat older woman behind me offered to give me the money. Initially I refused to accept it, but finally I did so. She refused to allow me to pay her back, saying, “This could happen to me, there’s no problem,” and then went away. This event had a great impact on me. It allowed me to remember that there are good people in the world.

Still other participants reported that their experience bolstered their religious faith. One man in his 20s stated,

Three years ago, I was lost into drugs. I committed many terrible sins until I met a pastor about 55 years old who told me about the word of God. Because of him, I realized my mistakes and I turned to God. I’m a new man, every day I preach the word of God.

And a woman in her 50s recounted that

Two years ago, the Venezuelan government appropriated my house. I was left in the street without anyone because my daughter had been murdered the previous year. My sister and brother-in-law paid for my airplane ticket so I could live with them in Spain. This was a great blessing after so much suffering.

In view of our findings that receiving unexpected altruism appears highly beneficial psychologically, we believe these have applicability in coaching
and mental health intervention. For example, practitioners could encourage clients to recall experiences in their lives when they were treated with exceptional kindness or generosity, and in this way, strengthen their clients’ capacity to adopt a benevolent worldview. Such an approach might be especially useful in helping clients identify past altruistic behaviors performed on their behalf by family members, since from our clinical experience, many persons take these acts for granted. Late in Maslow’s life, he decried the growing tendency in American society to interpret others’ motives and conduct from the most negative possible perspective, which he called “down-leveling.” In his prescient view, this tendency (termed social cynicism by social scientists today) is a metapathology with detrimental consequences both for its individual adherents and society as a whole (Maslow, 1971). In this light, the encouragement of clients to recall family members’ acts of kindness and also attribute more benign motives to their varied behaviors might be termed “up-leveling.” As clinicians, we cannot easily create new experiences of unexpected altruism for clients, but we can certainly help them recognize experiences they may have forgotten, overlooked, or misinterpreted.

Several limitations exist in generalizing from our findings regarding the psychological impact of receiving unexpected altruism. Our participants comprised mainly a convenience sample combined with persons who responded to our online posting about the study. For several reasons, therefore, they may not have not been representative of Venezuelans in general. First, our sample was much better educated than the general population. That is, 67.1% of participants had at least a college degree in a country where only 28.9% of post-secondary students currently attend college (UNESCO, n.d. 9). Second, our sample comprised adults who were relatively young; 40.4% were between the ages of 21 and 30 years, and nearly 64% were younger than 41 years. Though predominantly Catholic, only 24.7% of participants stated that religion was very important to them. Thus, it is quite possible that Venezuelans who were less educated and/or older, as well as more strongly religious, would have responded differently. Because our questionnaire was presented solely online, it is also difficult to generalize to the 43% of adult Venezuelans who lack the financial or logistical resources to access the Internet (Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad, 2015). Perhaps most important, a strikingly high percentage (28%) of participants who reported an act of altruism indicated that they had been a victim of violent crime. For this reason, their reactions to unexpected kindness may not be typical of people who live in more placid, if not salutary, milieus around the world. Thus, we recommend that future studies of real-life experiences of altruism be conducted with recipients of altruism who are less educated,
as well as those who are chronologically older, less affluent, and living in milieus less marked by criminal violence and civil breakdown.

Despite its limitations, we believe that our study reveals that the experience of receiving unexpected altruism brings a host of psychological benefits. These include enhanced optimism about human nature and appreciation for life, a greater sense of being valued by others, greater empathy and motivation to help others, more energy and enthusiasm in general, and increased religious faith. Indeed, nearly 30% of all participants reported that the experience “very strongly” affected their view of life. In light of research on the health consequences of possessing a benevolent versus cynical worldview (Barefoot et al., 1998; Barney et al., 1999; Lavretsky & Irwin, 2007; Neuvonen et al., 2014; Post, 2007; Ranjit et al., 2007), we can think of very few interpersonal experiences that yield such powerful payoffs emotionally, attitudinally, and even physically.

More than 70 years ago, Maslow (1943) pioneered in explicating the importance of one’s worldview in determining individual behavior. Against the backdrop of World War II, he sharply differentiated persons with an authoritarian worldview, and who therefore identify “kindness with weakness” (p. 407)) and seek power over others, from those with a democratic worldview and who focus instead on “social problems, intellectual problems [and] problems of the real world” (p. 405)). For psychologists today in a vastly different global era, among our greatest tasks is still to help people view each other more benevolently. Our study suggests that the experience of being a recipient of altruism is highly relevant to this goal.

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References


Author Biographies

Edward Hoffman, PhD, is an adjunct associate psychology professor at Yeshiva University and maintains a full-time private practice in New York City as a licensed psychologist. He serves on the editorial boards of the Journal of Humanistic Psychology and the Indian Journal of Positive Psychology. He is the author of major biographies of Alfred Adler and Abraham Maslow, and his research interests include peak experiences and positive self-regulation, especially in cross-cultural context. His latest book is titled Paths of Happiness: 50 Ways to Add Joy to Your Life Every Day (Chronicle Books).

Jennifer Gonzalez-Mujica, MA, is an independent clinical psychologist in Barcelona, Spain, who is currently collaborating on various mental health projects relating to empowerment, leadership, and multicultural programs for students. Her primary research interest is positive psychology and well-being.
Catalina Acosta-Orozco is a senior medical student at La Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia. She has been certificated to participate in a year-long program of international university leadership (AUSJAL). During her university years, she served in a Colombian institutional group to prevent child abuse. She has also performed volunteer work in one of Bogota’s poorest neighborhoods, where she developed various social projects. In 2015, she coauthored two research articles in College Student Journal, comprising the first published studies involving metaphor analysis with the Colombian population.

William C. Compton, PhD, is a professor emeritus of psychology at Middle Tennessee State University. His primary research interest is in the psychology of well-being with an emphasis on meditation and transpersonal psychology. He is the author of An Introduction to Positive Psychology, Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Flourishing (with Edward Hoffman), and Eastern Psychology: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism.