

Altruism: A02 Essay Skills



This activity will help you to:

- Write commentary to explain the implications of a range of research
- Use evidence effectively to support or challenge a theory
- Comment critically on the validity of psychological research
- Draw together evidence and commentary to effectively evaluate psychological theories)

We have looked at two theories of altruistic behaviour:

- Arousal-Cost-Reward** – suggests that altruism is motivated by the desire to obtain material, personal or social rewards.
- Empathy-Altruism** – suggests that altruism is motivated by empathic concern for others.

On the sheet that accompanies this, there are a number of studies described. Some of these are more relevant to the ACR model, some to the EA model.

The following activities relate to the essay question:

‘Outline and evaluate two explanations of altruistic behaviour (24)’.

Things you **must** do:

- Cut out the studies to separate them.
- Read the evidence and divide it into two piles, according to the theory you think each piece best goes with.
- Arrange the evidence into a suitable order for using it to evaluate the two theories of altruism we have considered.
- For each piece of evidence, write a few sentences of commentary explaining
 - (1) *Whether* the evidence supports or challenges the theory you are using it to evaluate.
 - (2) *Why* the evidence does this.

NB: You do not have to use all the evidence.

Things you **could** do:

- For each theory, write a further paragraph examining the strengths and weaknesses of the research studies you have used.
- Explain whether the weaknesses of any research studies affect how well they support/challenge a theory.
- Write a short conclusion in which you explain which of the two theories is the better explanation of altruism. Justify your conclusion.

Oliner & Oliner (1988; interview study) interviewed people who had tried to help Jews escape persecution in Nazi-occupied Europe. They found that 37% of them were motivated by concern for the welfare of the people they were helping, whilst 52% were motivated by the need for social approval and to conform to social norms of helping.

Piliavin et al (1969; field experiment) got an actor to collapse in a subway car. He was more likely to be helped if he was smartly dressed, and less likely to be helped if he was shabbily dressed and smelt of alcohol. He was least likely to be helped if there was blood coming from his mouth.

Batson et al (1981; lab study) gave participants the opportunity to take electric shocks in the place of a victim ('Elaine'). Participants who were first asked to imagine what the Elaine was feeling were more likely to volunteer to take her place.

Darley and Batson (1973; field experiment) asked theology students to give a lecture on 'Being a Good Samaritan'. They were told that they were either early or late for the lecture. On the way they passed an actor slumped in a doorway. Participants who believed they were late were far less likely to stop and help him.

Cialdini et al (1987; lab study) found that highly empathic individuals were less likely to help others if they were offered money.

Burnstein et al (1994; lab study) asked people to put in rank order of preference the people they would save first from a fire. Participants showed a preference for younger relatives over older non-relatives.

Levine et al (2001; field experiment) invited Manchester United and Liverpool fans to be interviewed at a university. On their way, participants observed an actor fall and injure himself. They were more likely to help him if he was wearing their team's shirt.