



# Individual Differences in Altruism Slope

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## Abstract

Evolutionary models of altruism have led to several interesting lines of research. Studies have shown that altruism towards a target decreases as their genetic relatedness decreases (Madsen, et al., 2007), and the same holds for the social relatedness of the target (Jones & Rachlin, 2006). We call this decrease in altruism with increasing distance, social or genetic, the "altruism slope". We hypothesized that conservative values would lead an individual to have a steeper slope than a person with more liberal values. Participants from an online community sample (N = 251) were asked how much they would help each of seven targets ranging in psychological closeness from "their own child" to "a stranger in another country". We then examined the interaction between the altruism slope and an index of conservatism. The interaction was significant for care during illness ( $F(6, 232) = 2.57, p < .04$ ) and living organ donation ( $F(6, 232) = 2.81, p < .01$ ). Overall, the results supported our hypothesis.

## Individual Differences in Altruism Slope

- People are less altruistic towards recipients who are less closely related to them, both genetically and socially (Rachlin & Jones, 2008; Madsen, et al., 2007)
- We call this decline in altruism towards less related targets the "Altruism Slope"
- Altruism Slope is steeper for those who are less agreeable and more neurotic (Osinski, 2009).
- Political conservatism is also a potential moderator of altruism slope because those who are more politically conservative tend to put more emphasis on helping the in-group before others (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2008)

## Research Question:

**Do people with politically conservative attitudes have a steeper decline in altruism towards less related recipients?**

## Method

Participants were recruited from an online community sample (N = 251). Using a community sample allowed us to have more political diversity than would be expected in a sample of college students.

Subjects then completed a survey asking several questions about their willingness to help different people and a series of personality questionnaires. The helping questions used two different scenarios; donating an organ and caring for someone when they are ill. In each scenario we presented subjects with 7 possible recipients of altruism and asked them who they would be willing to help, with a yes or no answer.

Political conservatism was indexed using a composite of Right Wing Authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1998), the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (purity, ingroup, and authority subscales; Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), and Belief in a Just World (Lerner, 1980).

## Results

A GLM analysis showed a significant main effect of the recipient on willingness to help for both scenarios; organ donation,  $F(6, 232) = 219.93, p < .001$ , care during illness,  $F(6, 232) = 362.18, p < .001$ . The interaction with our index of conservatism was also significant for both scenarios; organ donation,  $F(6, 232) = 2.81, p < .01$ , and care during illness,  $F(6, 232) = 2.57, p < .05$ .

## References

Altemeyer, B. (1998). The other "authoritarian personality". *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 30, 47-92.

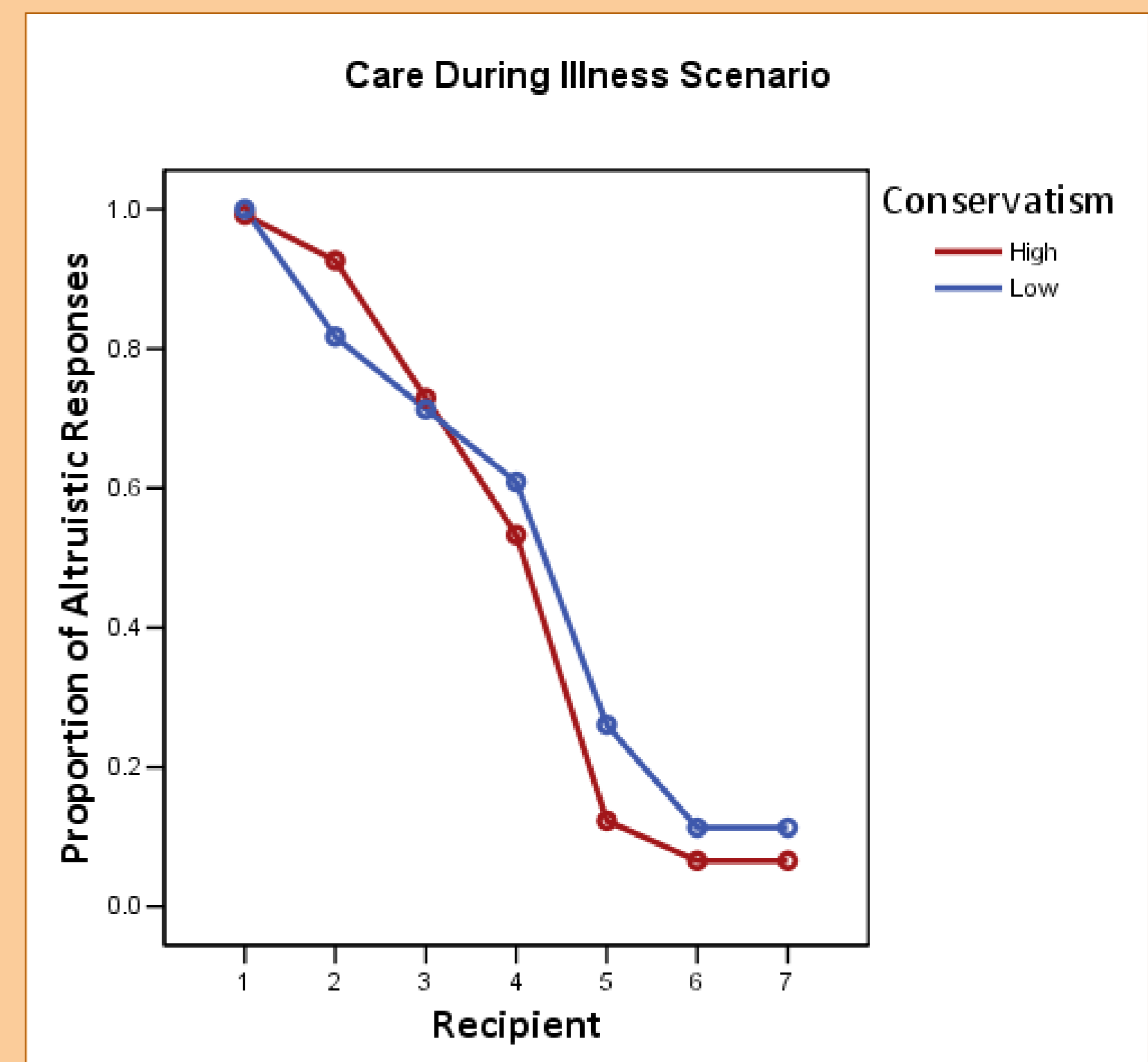
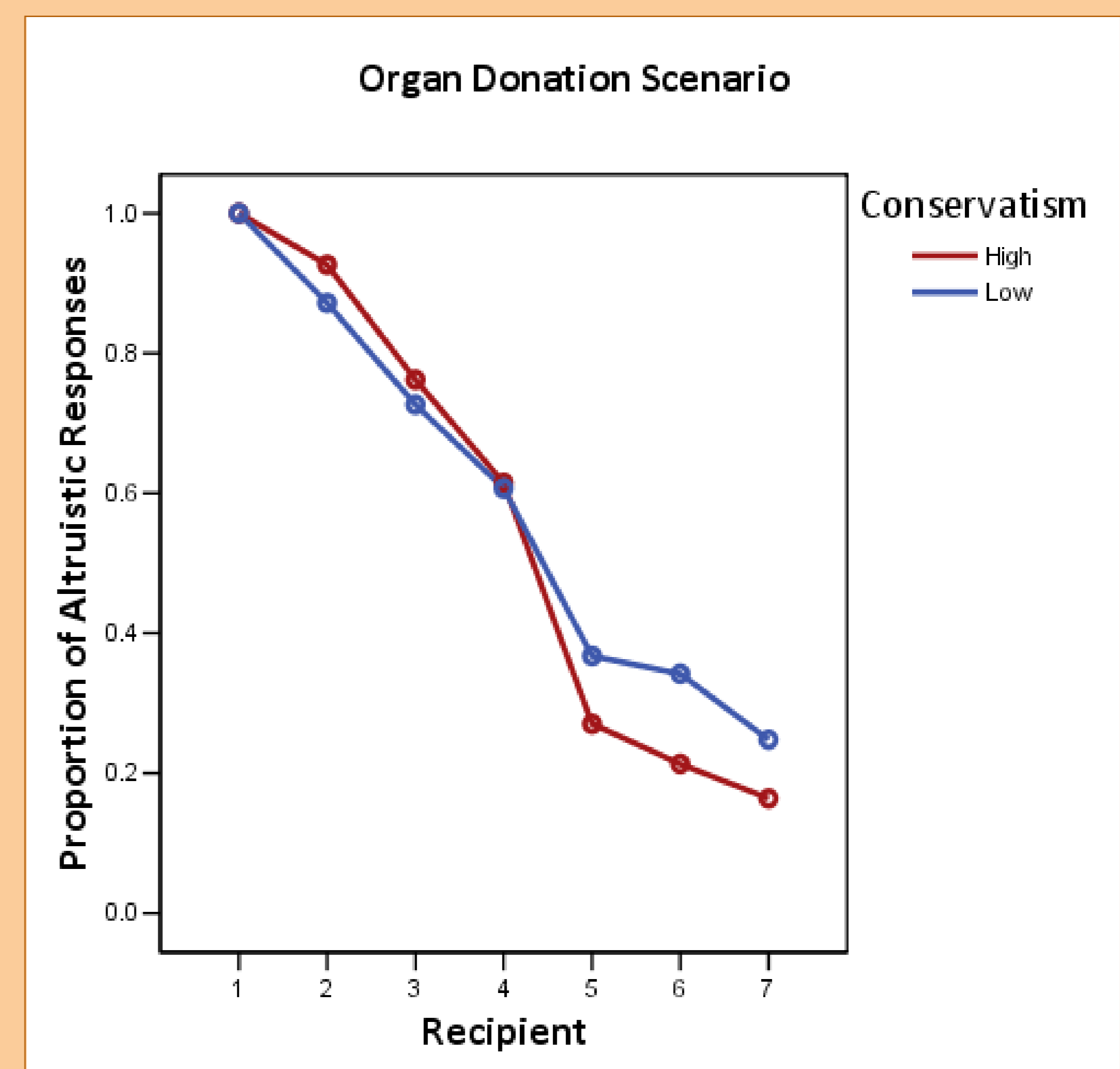
Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 1029-1046.

Jones, B. & Rachlin, H. (2006). Social discounting. *Psychological Science*, 17, 283-286.

## Example Question

Other than your spouse, who would you be willing to donate an organ to? For example one of your lungs or kidneys or some bone marrow. It would require serious surgery, but you can live without these organs.

1. One of your children?
2. A brother or sister?
3. One of your cousins?
4. Your best friend?
5. Someone you know, but you aren't very close?
6. A needy person in your country?
7. A needy person in another country?



## Conclusions

- Political conservatism moderates the effect of recipient on altruism.
- As the recipient of the altruistic behavior becomes more psychologically distant, people are less likely to say that they would provide help.
- This altruism slope is steeper for those with politically conservative attitudes.

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