Understanding Trajectories of Youth Volunteering: Pandemic Dilemmas, Volunteer Persistence, Institutional Transitions, and Moral Domain Reasoning

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Abstract

Although past research has examined patterns of volunteering over the life course, little research has examined trajectories of youth volunteering, notably *how* youth volunteer behaviour may change over time, *why* some youth persist as volunteers, and the role of moral and other judgments in youths' real-life decisions about volunteer engagement. To examine patterns of youth volunteering, this thesis developed a novel *volunteer trajectory model* (Chapter 2) and applied the model to examine trajectories of youth volunteering following a disruptive event (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic; Chapters 3 and 5) and institutional transitions (i.e., high school to university; Chapters 4 and 5). To further understand volunteering trajectories, this thesis also integrated and applied ideas from moral developmental theory to examine how youth justify their real-life decisions about volunteering over time (Chapters 3 and 4).

This dissertation is structured in six chapters. The general introduction (Chapter 1) situates the research in the youth volunteering and moral development literatures. Chapter 2 presents the volunteer trajectory model. Chapter 3 is a mixed method study that examined trajectories of youth volunteering and volunteer decisions during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 4 is a qualitative interview study that explored the persistence of youth volunteering from a moral developmental perspective. Chapter 5 is a mixed method study that examined youths' volunteering trajectories through institutional transitions, their experiences with compulsory community service, and the impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering. Together, these studies contribute a novel approach to understanding youth volunteering by examining real-world trajectories of volunteering and volunteering decisions from a moral developmental perspective (discussed in Chapter 6).

Keywords: volunteering, trajectories, youth, moral development

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Statement of Co-Authorship

This thesis is comprised of three studies approved by the University of Ottawa's Office of Research Ethics and Integrity. I (Emma Grant) was the Principal Investigator for all three studies. I led all aspects of the research, including conducting literature reviews, developing research questions, submitting ethics approvals, managing survey data collection, conducting interviews, performing quantitative and qualitative data analysis, and writing the manuscripts. All aspects of this research were supervised by and developed in collaboration with my PhD supervisor, Dr. Stuart Hammond, who provided guidance and assisted in study development, data analysis, manuscript preparation, and revisions.

Chapter 3 of this thesis was published in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* (Grant et al., 2024). For this study, I developed the research questions, collected and analyzed the data, wrote the manuscript, and submitted the manuscript for publication. Co-authors of this paper include Jillian French and Marija Bolic, who contributed to this study as undergraduate students, and my supervisor, Dr. Stuart Hammond. Jillian French assisted with the qualitative data analysis and revised the final manuscript. Marija Bolic assisted with the categorization of students' volunteering trajectories and revised the final manuscript. Dr. Stuart Hammond collaborated on the development of the trajectory model, data analysis, and writing and revising the manuscript.

For the studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5, I developed the research questions, conducted the qualitative interviews, transcribed and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscripts. Dr. Stuart Hammond contributed to study development, reviewing the themes, and revising the written manuscripts. Abigail Trzebiatowski contributed to revising the preliminary themes in Chapter 4.

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Preface

This thesis is the culmination of the research I conducted during my doctoral studies, which experienced profound disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The onset of the pandemic directly impacted me and the youth whose volunteering I was studying, which resulted in an important shift in the direction of my research and the structure of this thesis. For clarity, the studies included in this thesis will not be presented in the order they were conducted. However, the trajectory of this research will be described briefly in this preface.

Initially, I was interested in exploring Blasi's (1983, 2004) developmental hypothesis which proposed that moral motivations may change as a function of experience, in this case moral development may occur through experience with community service. This interest also stemmed from my own experiences as a volunteer, as well as being raised in a family and community that valued community engagement. Specifically, while I was completing Ontario's high school community service requirement, I noticed that some students embraced the opportunity to engage in their communities, they participated in meaningful community-based activities and continued to volunteer well beyond the 40-hour requirement. In comparison, other students struggled to fulfill the requirement and were largely disengaged. Therefore, initially, I was interested in exploring whether compulsory community service initiatives are effective for enhancing youth moral and civic engagement, alongside why some students persist as volunteers, while others struggle to engage, and the implications of these early experiences with volunteering for future civic and community engagement.

Therefore, my first study (presented in Chapter 5) was designed to explore undergraduate students' experiences with Ontario's high school community service requirement and the transition to elective volunteering in university. Specifically, this interview study intended to

examine whether the quality of students' mandatory service experiences was associated with their decisions to volunteer in university to develop a deeper understanding of why some students continue volunteering while others choose to stop. Data collection for this study began in-person in February 2020, however, the study was quickly put on hold following the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020. Due to public health restrictions implemented in response to the pandemic, Ontario's high school community service requirement was waived for high school students graduating in the 2019-20 school year and reduced to 20 hours for students graduating in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021).

Following this disruption, the study was adapted to be conducted online via Zoom videoconference during the Fall 2020 term. Although I continued to interview participants in September and October 2020, the future of the high school community service requirement was uncertain. At the time, university courses were also delivered entirely online, and the future of students' university careers was unclear. Therefore, given the uncertainties and unprecedented nature of this time period, discussions of students' current and intended volunteering was more difficult, largely hypothetical, and thus less meaningful. Despite the disruptions caused by the onset of the pandemic, the data collected for this study was reframed as an opportunity to examine trajectories of youth volunteering through institutional transitions (i.e., high school to university) through the lens of a volunteer trajectory model (described below) and explore qualitative themes surrounding students' experiences with mandatory service (presented in Chapter 5). Preliminary findings of this work were presented at the Association for Moral Education (2020) and the Canadian Psychological Association (2024) annual conferences.

Due to the uncertainties caused by the pandemic, I pivoted to conduct a larger scale mixed method study to examine the impact of COVID-19 on youth volunteering (presented in

Chapter 3). Data collection for this study took place between October 2020 and April 2021. Through this study I developed a novel volunteer trajectory model (presented in Chapter 2) to explore trajectories of youth volunteering during the pandemic. The trajectory model builds on previous volunteering trajectory research and proposes four categories of volunteers (persistent, emergent, and former volunteers, and persistent non-volunteers) that can be used to understand changes to and continuity of volunteering in response to events or transitions. This study then applied ideas from social domain theory (Turiel, 1983, 2006) to examine how youth justified their decisions about volunteering during the pandemic. This study has been published in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* (Grant et al., 2024) and parts of this work were presented at the Association for Moral Education (2021), Development 2022 (2022), Jean Piaget Society (2024), and the Canadian Psychological Association (2024) annual conferences. As described above, the volunteer trajectory model was also retroactively applied to the data collected in my first study to examine students' volunteering trajectories through the transitions to high school and university and the onset of the pandemic (presented in Chapter 5).

My final study (presented in Chapter 4) brought together the trajectory perspective and questions about moral development through experiences with community service to examine the persistence of youth volunteering. This qualitative interview study integrated perspectives from moral developmental theory (social domain theory and moral self theory) and examined undergraduate students' volunteer experiences, motives, and decisions over time. Although data collection for this study took place between February and July 2024, aspects of students' past volunteer experiences may have also been disrupted by the pandemic. Preliminary findings of this work were presented at the Jean Piaget Society (2024 and 2026) annual conferences.

Chapter 1:

General Introduction

General Introduction

Volunteer behaviour has been an area of scholarly interest for decades, as researchers have been interested in understanding how and why people give their time to benefit others. Research on volunteering trajectories (i.e., patterns of volunteering over time) suggests that volunteer behaviours may change over the life course (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018). Historically, most of this research has focused on patterns of volunteering in adulthood, and therefore, less is known about trajectories of youth volunteering. However, understanding youth volunteering trajectories may be especially important as there are unique opportunities, benefits, motives, and barriers associated with youth volunteering (described in this chapter), which may shape their volunteer behaviours and decisions, and thereby overall volunteering trajectories. Furthermore, although volunteering is a form of moral engagement, defined by its benefits to others (e.g., Stukas et al., 2015), little research has used a moral developmental perspective to examine the role of moral and other judgments in youths' real-life decisions about volunteering.

Therefore, this thesis was driven by two primary objectives. **Objective 1** was to examine trajectories (or patterns) of youth volunteering over time. This thesis introduces a novel volunteer trajectory model (presented in Chapter 2) and applies the model to examine trajectories of youth volunteering following a disruptive event (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic; presented in Chapters 3 and 5) and institutional transitions (i.e., high school to university; presented in Chapters 4 and 5). **Objective 2** was to use theoretical approaches from moral developmental theory to examine how youth use moral and other reasons to justify their real-life decisions to continue, start, or stop volunteering over time (presented in Chapters 3 and 4).

In line with these broader objectives, this introductory chapter is structured in two parts. First, I provide a brief overview of research on youth volunteering, including definitions of

volunteering, volunteering trajectories, opportunities for and benefits of youth engagement, and motives and barriers associated with youth volunteering. In the second section, I introduce the theoretical background of this thesis, situate volunteering within moral developmental research traditions, and offer a brief overview of social domain theory (Turiel, 2006), moral self theory (Blasi, 2004), and perspectives on real-life moral reasoning (e.g., Walker, 2014).

Research on Volunteerism and Youth Volunteering

What is Volunteering?

Research on *volunteerism* (the act of volunteering) has been widespread across research disciplines, and perhaps for that reason, there is little consensus on an operational definition of volunteering. Within the social sciences, psychologists, sociologists, economists, and political scientists have used distinct disciplinary perspectives to examine volunteering in various social contexts, which contributes to diverse understandings of what constitutes a volunteer behaviour (Hustinx et al., 2010; Wilson, 2012). Over the years, several scholars have endeavoured to develop comprehensive definitions of volunteering, many of which share similar key components (e.g., Cnaan et al., 1996; Musick & Wilson, 2007; Penner, 2002; Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wilson, 2000). Almost 30 years ago, Cnaan et al. (1996) conducted a content analysis of widely used definitions of volunteering and found that all definitions discussed four dimensions: (a) the voluntary nature of the behaviour, (b) the nature of the compensation, (c) the structure or organizational context, and (d) the intended beneficiaries. The authors suggest that definitions of volunteering exist on a continuum, where "pure volunteering" is defined as a behaviour that is performed by choice, without financial compensation, in the context of a formal organization, and is intended to benefit others. More recent definitions reflect similar key characteristics and describe volunteering as an unpaid and voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others (Musick &

Wilson, 2007; Snyder & Omoto, 2008; Wilson, 2000). Although beyond the scope of this thesis, volunteering also has cultural dimensions that apply to industrialized societies (see Lancy, 2018).

Many conceptualizations of volunteer behaviour tend to overlook several forms of youth volunteering. Typically, definitions of volunteering, and volunteering research more generally, have focused on *formal volunteering* (i.e., volunteering with a formal organization, where the organization guides the activities of the volunteer; Smith et al., 2016). In comparison, *informal volunteering* (i.e., volunteering outside of a formal organization; e.g., grocery shopping for an elderly neighbour) is often overlooked due to the everyday nature of unorganized and informal helping behaviours (Einolf et al., 2016; Lee & Brudney, 2012; Smith et al., 2016). However, recent data from Statistics Canada (2021) indicates that 76% of youth aged 15 to 24 engaged in informal volunteering in 2018. These findings suggest that informal volunteer activities may be an important aspect of youth volunteering.

Some researchers have also specified that volunteer behaviours are planned, deliberate, and occur over a longer period of time (e.g., months or years; Penner, 2002; Snyder & Omoto, 2008). However, this perspective excludes spontaneous, occasional, and short-term volunteering. Smith et al. (2010) compared the volunteer behaviours of over four thousand university students from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand and found that occasional volunteering was the most frequently reported form of student engagement in each country. Further, spontaneous (or emergent) volunteering often occurs in response to emergencies (e.g., Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Whittaker et al., 2015) and was also an important form of youth engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic (explored further in Chapter 3).

Historically, there has also been some debate about whether volunteer behaviours must be entirely voluntary to qualify. While many definitions of volunteering posit that the decision to

volunteer should be of one's own volition (e.g., Musick & Wilson, 2007), others recognize that volunteer engagement, especially among youth, may first take place due to social obligations or formal requirements (e.g., mandatory community service; Henderson et al., 2007). In fact, previous research suggests that many people start volunteering because they were asked to engage (Stukas et al., 2015; Vézina & Crompton, 2012). Therefore, excluding engagement that stems from compulsory contexts may overlook an important aspect of youth volunteering.

This thesis explores youth volunteering from a developmental psychology perspective and draws on literature that situates volunteering as a *prosocial behaviour* (i.e., voluntary behaviour intended to help others; Eisenberg et al., 2015) and a form of *civic engagement* (i.e., actions that contribute to communities; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009; Wray-Lake, 2023).[1] Drawing on previous definitions (e.g., Musick & Wilson, 2007; Wilson, 2000), for the purpose of this thesis, volunteering is characterized as a prosocial behaviour intended to benefit others without direct financial compensation to the volunteer. Consistent with past volunteering research, this thesis focuses primarily on examining volunteer behaviours that are performed by choice in the context of a formal organization. However, informal volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic will be examined in Chapters 3 and 5, and youths' experiences with Ontario's mandatory community service requirement will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

Youth Volunteering in Canada

According to data from the *General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, in 2018, over 24 million Canadians aged 15 and older reported engaging in formal or informal volunteering (Hahmann, 2021). Overall, youth aged 15 to 24 years reported the

[1] Similar to volunteering, civic engagement is recognized as a multidimensional construct without a widely agreed upon definition. However, many conceptualizations of civic engagement situate volunteering as a form of active citizenship alongside other civic behaviours including political involvement, collective action, and social change (see Adler & Goggin, 2005; Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2009; Wray-Lake, 2023; Wray-Lake, Metzger, et al., 2017).

highest rate of formal volunteerism (52%) and the highest rate of combined formal and informal volunteering (86%) compared to all other age groups (Statistics Canada, 2021). However, this age group classification does not capture the possibility that volunteer engagement shifts throughout this developmental period. The transition between adolescence and young adulthood, sometimes called *emerging adulthood* and typically spanning ages 18 to 29, is characterized as a critical period for identity exploration, personal development, social engagement, and moral growth (Arnett, 2016, 2018, 2024). Further, during this period, youth typically transition out of high school and into other educational or vocational settings (Arnett, 2024; Hill & Hammond, 2023). These transitions may influence the opportunities youth have to engage, their reasons for volunteering, and their volunteer behaviours. Previous Statistics Canada data indicated that, in 2013, 66% of Canadian adolescents aged 15 to 19 years reported formal volunteer engagement (Turcotte, 2015). While some of that volunteering is associated with mandatory community service in high schools (described below), the rate of volunteering dropped to 42% among Canadians aged 20 to 24. Why do some youth persist as volunteers while others fail to engage, and how can examining youths' volunteering trajectories, experiences, and decisions contribute to our understanding of how and why youth volunteer behaviour may change over time?

Trajectories of Volunteering Over the Life Course

A small number of volunteering researchers have examined trajectories (or patterns) of volunteer engagement over the life course. From a trajectory perspective, volunteer behaviours may start, stop, and restart over time for various reasons. Historically, much of this research has focused on exploring patterns of volunteering in adulthood, where idiosyncratic and normative life events may have an impact on volunteering decisions (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Nesbit, 2012; Niebuur et al., 2022). For example, Niebuur et al. (2022) analyzed

longitudinal survey data from a sample of over ninety thousand Dutch adults and found that the transition out of paid employment (e.g., retirement) was associated with increased volunteer engagement, while transitions to marriage, parenthood, and new employment were associated with volunteer cessation. To further understand volunteering trajectories, Hogg (2016) and Metcalfe (2018) proposed a series of categories to illustrate when, how, and why people move in and out of volunteering over the life course. This research was used to inform the volunteer trajectory model presented in this thesis and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 2.

A few past studies have examined trajectories of civic and community engagement in adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Malin et al., 2017; Planty et al., 2006; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake, Schulenberg, et al., 2017). Overall, these studies found a decrease in community service and prosocial helping as youth transitioned from adolescence to young adulthood (Planty et al., 2006; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake, Schulenberg, et al., 2017). Further, Malin et al. (2017) found a similar decline in civic involvement, including community service and political activities, as youth transitioned out of high school. Decreases in community engagement during this developmental period may be associated with changes or events occurring in other aspects of life, for example moving to a new city or changing educational settings (Arnett, 2024; Ramey et al., 2022). For many Canadian youth, the transition from high school to university also involves the transition from compulsory community service to elective volunteering (Henderson et al., 2019; Hill & Hammond, 2023). This transition and its impact on youth volunteering will be discussed further below and will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

Other areas of volunteering research have also framed volunteering as a behaviour that evolves over time. Omoto and Snyder (1995, 2002) developed a process-oriented conceptual framework, the *volunteer process model*, to organize their understanding of volunteer behaviour

over time. This perspective considers three elements: (a) the antecedents of volunteerism (e.g., opportunities, motivations, dispositional traits), (b) the volunteer experience (e.g., satisfaction, organizational support), and (c) the consequences of volunteering for both volunteers and beneficiaries. While research on the antecedents and consequences of volunteering has been widespread (discussed further below), fewer studies have focused on the volunteer experience stage of the volunteer process (Stukas et al., 2015; Wilson, 2012). Further, less is known about how people navigate events (e.g., normative, widespread, or idiosyncratic) that may occur throughout the volunteer experience and their potential implications for future engagement.

Therefore, drawing on previous trajectory research (e.g., Metcalfe et al., 2018), for the purpose of this thesis, volunteering trajectories refer to patterns of change and continuity in volunteer engagement over time. To examine trajectories of youth volunteering, this thesis uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches, drawing on retrospective narratives and present accounts, to explore how youth interpret and describe their past and present volunteer experiences, behaviours, and decisions.

Opportunities for Youth Volunteer Engagement

Volunteer behaviours are often shaped by an individual's social environment, where social systems, social interactions, and contextual factors may influence initial decisions to volunteer and sustained volunteering over time (Pancer, 2020; Stukas et al., 2015). Research on the emergence of prosocial behaviour in children indicates that parental scaffolding and early socialization plays a critical role in fostering the development of prosocial behaviours, including helping, sharing, and cooperating (Brownell et al., 2013; Dahl et al., 2017; Hammond & Carpendale, 2015). From this perspective, exposure to volunteering in early childhood may lay an important foundation for future civic and community engagement (Astuto & Ruck, 2010). In

fact, past studies found that youth with parents who volunteered were more likely to volunteer themselves, highlighting the role that parents play in socializing and modeling volunteer behaviour (Perks & Konecny, 2015; White, 2021). In a study that examined the transmission of volunteering across generations, Mustillo et al. (2004) found that mothers who volunteered offered resources and social connections that facilitated their daughter's volunteer engagement.

Formal education institutions also offer opportunities for volunteering and prosocial engagement. For instance, elementary school-aged children participate in prosocial learning through interactions with their teachers and peers (Hammond et al., 2023). At secondary and post-secondary institutions, formal community service initiatives have been introduced to encourage youth community engagement and civic development. In Canada, many high schools have implemented compulsory community service requirements, while post-secondary initiatives are typically structured around elective and student-selected volunteering (Henderson et al., 2019; Hill & Hammond, 2023). As youth transition from one institutional structure to another, their opportunities for and decisions about volunteer engagement may change. Therefore, to understand trajectories of youth volunteering, this thesis explores youths' experiences with both mandatory and elective structures of engagement, both of which are described briefly below.

Mandatory Community Service Requirements: Ontario and Beyond

In 1999, the Ontario provincial government implemented a 40-hour community involvement requirement as part of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) requirements (i.e., community service is required for graduation).[2] According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2023), the requirement is intended to foster civic development by

[2] In 1999, the Ontario provincial government eliminated the fifth year of high school (known the Ontario Academic Credit [OAC] or Grade 13) and introduced a four-year high school curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999). In addition to the community involvement requirement, the new curriculum also introduced a required civics course, with the goal of increasing youth civic awareness and civic engagement (Henderson et al., 2007).

encouraging youth to contribute to their communities through community service. Since its introduction, several other Canadian jurisdictions have implemented similar community service requirements, including British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories (Brown et al., 2007). However, compulsory community service is not unique to Canada. For example, the state of Maryland also mandated community service for high school graduation (Helms, 2013). Similarly, while not mandated at the state-level, many school districts across the United States have incorporated service requirements into their high school curriculums (e.g., see Bennett, 2009). These initiatives also extend beyond North America, for example, recent studies have examined school-based community service requirements in Singapore (Kwan & Wray-Lake, 2025) and South Korea (Lee & Cnaan, 2025).

Several studies have explored whether community service requirements are effective for promoting youth civic engagement, and the evidence remains unclear. Aligning with the objectives of a high school community service requirement in the United States, Metz and Youniss (2003, 2005) found that mandated service was associated with enhanced youth civic development and future volunteer engagement. Similarly, Ontario-based studies found that many students reported positive experiences with mandated service, and quality of experience has been associated with future volunteering (Gallant et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2014, 2019; Taylor & Pancer, 2007). The requirement also encouraged some youth to engage in service who may not have participated otherwise (Henderson et al., 2007; Padanyi et al., 2010; Pancer et al., 2007). However, other studies found that students described feeling exploited and forced to participate due to service requirements (e.g., Warburton & Smith, 2003), which suggests compulsory community service may be ineffective (Kim & Morgül, 2017; Stukas et al., 1999; Yang, 2017). In Ontario, Pancer et al. (2007) found that some students did not intend to continue volunteering

after high school, meaning that, for these students, mandatory service did not foster future engagement. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that committed volunteering is more likely when past experiences with service are voluntary, rather than required (Kim & Morgül, 2017; Stukas et al., 1999). Students' experiences with Ontario's high school community service requirement will be explored further in Chapter 5.

Elective Volunteering and Post-Secondary Institutions

With the transition to post-secondary school, volunteering typically becomes elective and self-selected, meaning that students can choose to engage, or not engage, in volunteer work (Hill & Hammond, 2023; Meyer et al., 2019). However, volunteering and community service remains widely encouraged and supported within these institutional contexts. For example, university volunteering initiatives promote the benefits of volunteering for personal growth (e.g., skill development, career exploration, and academic achievement) and community development (e.g., see Holmes et al., 2021). Some universities provide official documentation (e.g., a co-curricular record) to showcase students' volunteer engagement and enhance their future academic or vocational endeavours (Elias & Drea, 2013). Further, many universities offer community service learning programs that integrate volunteer-based experiential learning placements with university course material (Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Hill & Hammond, 2023). While the characteristics of service-learning programs varies between institutions, a key feature involves formal opportunities for reflection that allow students to connect their hands-on service experiences with the theoretical concepts from their university courses (Furco & Norvell, 2019; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Opportunities for reflection have also been associated with enhanced service experiences (e.g., fostering civic development and future engagement; van Goethem et al., 2014).

Developmental Benefits of Youth Volunteering: Personal, Social, and Moral Growth

Given the prevalence of initiatives designed to encourage youth engagement, many studies have explored the short- and long-term impact (or consequences) of volunteering on many domains of youth development. Although volunteering is typically defined as an activity that benefits others (e.g., Musick & Wilson, 2007), it is well-established in the literature that engaging in volunteer work also has important benefits for the volunteer. Volunteering in adolescence and young adulthood has been associated with personal, social, and moral growth (e.g., Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Padilla-Walker, 2014; Soucie et al., 2025), which, as noted above, are important features of this developmental period (Arnett, 2024). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2020) interviewed a sample of Australian university students about the benefits of volunteering in university. This study found that volunteering offered opportunities for career advancement (e.g., work experience), social development (e.g., building friendships), and personal growth (e.g., understanding of the self and society). Similarly, other studies found that volunteering is associated with improved life skills, including communication, leadership, and critical thinking (Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Kilgo et al., 2015; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014). Youth volunteering has also been associated with psychological benefits, including increased well-being, self-esteem, and purpose in life (e.g., Armstrong-Carter et al., 2020; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; Okun & Kim, 2016; Stukas, Hoye, et al., 2016), and these benefits may persist into adulthood (e.g., Bowman et al., 2010; Soucie et al., 2025). However, these findings may also reflect a bidirectional relationship, such that individuals who report higher levels of well-being, self-esteem, or purpose in life may be more likely to volunteer to begin with (e.g., Armstrong-Carter et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2019).

A few studies have also found that engagement in prosocial helping and volunteering is associated with youths' moral and civic development (e.g., see Padilla-Walker, 2014), and these

findings may support initiatives designed to foster youth engagement (e.g., service requirements, service-learning). Volunteering in high school and university has been associated with increased civic responsibility, including intentions to engage in future volunteer and civic behaviours (e.g., Fenzel & Peyrot, 2005; Hart et al., 2007; Hébert & Hauf, 2015). Carlo and Randall (2002) found that adolescents' prosocial helping was associated with increased perspective taking, sympathy, and prosocial moral reasoning. Other studies found that prosocial engagement is positively associated with empathic concern (Mestre et al., 2019; Randall & Wenner, 2014), however, as noted above, it may be that youth who score higher on measures of empathic concern are more likely to volunteer in the first place (Meyer et al., 2019). Volunteer engagement also offers opportunities for youth to reflect on moral issues and consider their role as a moral agent in their communities, which may contribute to their moral growth (Boss, 1994).

Volunteer Motives: Why do Youth Choose to Volunteer?

Despite the opportunities for and developmental benefits of youth volunteering, not everyone chooses to engage. Therefore, over the years, many researchers have examined *why* people choose to volunteer (i.e., reasons or motives for volunteering). As described above, in regions with mandatory community service, that question can be answered in terms of educational policy. However, in contexts where volunteer engagement is elective, the decision to volunteer may stem from a variety of motives. The following sections offer a brief overview of a few widely used approaches for examining and understanding volunteer motivation.

Self- and Other-Oriented Volunteer Motives

In the volunteering literature, there has been a longstanding debate about whether the motivation to volunteer reflects self- or other-oriented goals. As described earlier in this chapter, volunteering is often characterized as a prosocial behaviour intended to benefit others (e.g.,

Stukas et al., 2015), and therefore, some scholars argue that the decision to volunteer should be driven by altruistic or other-oriented motives (i.e., volunteering to help others; see Haski-Leventhal, 2009). However, as described above, volunteering can also benefit the volunteer, and therefore may be motivated by egoistic or self-oriented goals (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). Despite this dichotomy, it is relatively well-established that volunteer engagement involves a combination of both self- and other-oriented motives (Cornelis et al., 2013; Stukas, Snyder, et al., 2016; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). While some research suggests other-oriented motives are associated with greater volunteer satisfaction and sustained volunteering over time (e.g., Stukas, Hoye, et al., 2016; Stukas, Snyder, et al., 2016), others have found that committed volunteering is unlikely without benefits for the self (e.g., Cornelis et al., 2013; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). These findings highlight the complexity of volunteering decisions such that the motivation to volunteer may often involve a coordination of self- and other-oriented goals.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Volunteer Motivation

Other researchers have examined the motivation to volunteer through the lens of Deci and Ryan's (2000, 2012) *self-determination theory*, which frames volunteer motives as intrinsic (i.e., internally motivated, driven by interest or enjoyment) or extrinsic (i.e., externally motivated, driven by obtaining rewards or avoiding punishments) (e.g., Finkelstein, 2009; Geiser et al., 2014; Güntert et al., 2016). Geiser et al. (2014) examined volunteer motives in a sample of American undergraduate students and found that intrinsic motives were associated with more frequent volunteer engagement. Similarly, Wu et al. (2016) found that intrinsic motivation was associated with intentions to continue volunteering. This perspective also considers the extent to which behaviours are autonomous (or self-determined) or controlled (or non-self-determined) (Deci & Ryan, 2012), which may be relevant for understanding youth engagement in compulsory

service contexts. Although several forms of youth volunteering may be controlled by external factors (e.g., service requirements) or motivated by extrinsic goals (e.g., career growth), they also incorporate aspects of autonomy (i.e., through opportunities to choose volunteer placements that align with personal interests; e.g., McNeil & Helwig, 2015). Further, it is possible that volunteer motives shift over time (i.e., from extrinsic to intrinsic) through experience with service (e.g., Blasi, 2004; Walker, 2004). These ideas will be discussed further below and in Chapter 4.

Volunteer Motives and the Functional Perspective

In the literature, volunteering motivation has also been widely explored from a *functional* perspective, which proposes that volunteering can serve different motivational functions for different people, or several functions for the same person (Clary & Snyder, 1995). Clary et al. (1998) developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), which identified six possible reasons (or motivational functions) for volunteering: (a) *values* (i.e., altruistic and humanitarian concern for others), (b) *understanding* (i.e., knowledge acquisition and personal development), (c) *social* (i.e., social relationships), (d) *career* (i.e., career and professional development), (e) *protective* (i.e., protecting the self from negative feelings), and (f) *enhancement* (i.e., enhancing positive affect) (Clary et al., 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1995). Since it was first introduced, the measure has been widely used to assess volunteer motives in various social and cultural contexts (for review, see Chacón et al., 2017). The measure has also been adapted to address the motivational functions of specific populations (e.g., adolescents in Katz & Sasson, 2019) and translated into several different languages (e.g., Dutch in Niebuur et al., 2019). While the values function reflects other-oriented motives (i.e., helping others), the remaining functions are largely self-oriented (i.e., personal and social growth), which suggests that both self- and other-oriented motives may be important aspects of volunteer motivation.

Several studies have used the functional approach to examine university students' volunteer motives. Moore et al. (2014) examined volunteer motives in a sample American university students and found that the values function (e.g., helping others) was the most salient reason for student engagement. This finding is consistent with other studies of university-aged youth (e.g., Gage & Thapa, 2012; Soldavini et al., 2022), and with research conducted with older age groups (e.g., Brayley et al., 2014) and in different social contexts (e.g., Erasmus & Morey, 2016). Youth also frequently report volunteering to advance their careers (i.e., career function) and engage in new learning experiences (i.e., understanding function) (Gage & Thapa, 2012; Johnson et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2014). Güntert at al. (2016) explored volunteer motives in a sample of Swiss volunteers and identified similarities between understanding and career-based motives for younger volunteers. Consistent with research on the benefits of youth volunteering (e.g., Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020), these findings suggest that youth view volunteering as an avenue for personal growth and career development and may reflect the unique developmental features of the transition between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2016, 2024).

Motive Fulfillment and Volunteer Persistence

Research on sustained volunteerism indicates that people are more likely to persist as volunteers if their volunteer experiences fulfill their motives (Faletehan et al., 2021; Finkelstein, 2008; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). Drawing on the volunteer process model (Omoto & Snyder, 1995), Davis et al. (2003) hypothesized that motive fulfillment and satisfaction were important aspects of the volunteer experience and may contribute to volunteer persistence. This study found that motive fulfillment was associated with satisfaction in the early stages of participants' volunteer experiences, however, satisfaction was not associated with long-term volunteer persistence. In comparison, other studies found that volunteer satisfaction did predict volunteer

retention (Hyde et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2017). In line with the coexistence of self- and other-oriented motives for volunteering described above, past studies have also found that volunteers who perceive their contributions as meaningful for both themselves and others are more likely to persist as volunteers over time (Faletehan et al., 2021; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008).

Volunteer motives may also change over the course of a volunteer's experience within an organization (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Similarly, initial motives for volunteering do not necessarily reflect reasons for committed volunteer engagement over time (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). For example, a high school student may start to volunteer to complete a service requirement, however, once that motive is fulfilled, they may continue volunteering for other reasons (e.g., to advance their career or help others). Further, from a volunteer trajectory perspective, changes throughout the life course (e.g., graduation, parenthood, retirement) may contribute to changes in volunteer motives (Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake, Schulenberg, et al., 2017). Therefore, exploring not only why youth start to volunteer but also why they continue volunteering (i.e., motives for volunteer persistence) may offer further insight into trajectories of youth volunteering over time.

Barriers and Challenges of Youth Volunteering

The transition between adolescence and young adulthood is often characterized as a period of uncertainty and instability (Arnett, 2024). For instance, the typical undergraduate student is experiencing changes in many domains of life as they transition between educational settings, gain independence, build relationships, and explore their identities (Arnett, 2016, 2024). Although, as described above, youth have unique opportunities to engage in their communities (i.e., mandatory service, service-learning), the competing demands of this life stage may also introduce barriers to volunteering. Ballard (2014) interviewed 22 high school students about their

civic involvement and found that some students discussed personal barriers that highlighted a lack of interest or motivation and the belief that their contributions would not be meaningful. In comparison, other youth reported that a lack of resources (e.g., time, money, opportunities) inhibited their engagement (see also Bitton, 2025; Davies, 2018). Since volunteering involves a commitment of time and effort (Snyder & Omoto, 2008), time constraints have been identified as a prominent barrier to volunteering throughout the life course (Ballard, 2014; Bitton, 2025; Gage & Thapa, 2012; Sundeen et al., 2007). Gage and Thapa (2012) explored barriers to volunteering in a sample of American undergraduate students and found that many students reported that commitments in other aspects of their lives prevented their volunteer engagement. Familial responsibilities, financial constraints, and paid employment have also been identified as factors that may influence the time students have available for volunteering (Bitton, 2025; Sundeen et al., 2007). These time constraints may reflect why many youth choose short-term or occasional volunteer activities as they are more flexible and easier to fit into their lives (Smith et al., 2010).

Despite these findings, Ballard (2014) and Haski-Leventhal et al. (2018) argued that time and access-related barriers may be perceived by youth as reasonable justifications for their decision not to engage, rather than factors that prevented their involvement. However, the closure of many in-person volunteering sites during the COVID-19 pandemic did reduce the availability volunteer opportunities (Lebenbaum et al., 2024) and thus may have been a prevalent barrier to volunteering during this time period (explored further in Chapter 3). Further, negative or challenging past experiences with volunteering may contribute to discouraging future or persistent engagement (e.g., Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; Warburton & Smith, 2003). Although largely beyond the scope of this thesis, sociodemographic characteristics may also impact access to volunteer opportunities. For instance, youth from lower-income households may have fewer

social and economic resources and this may inhibit their volunteer engagement (Davies, 2018).

Theoretical Background: Moral Developmental Theory

Exploring Volunteering from a Moral Developmental Perspective

The volunteering literature presented in this chapter thus far highlights the complexity of youth volunteering, such that trajectories of youth volunteering may be shaped by opportunities, benefits, motives, and barriers, which can all change over time. Therefore, to develop a deeper understanding of youth volunteering trajectories, this thesis draws on perspectives from moral developmental theory to explore *why* youth volunteer and *how* they justify their decisions about volunteering. Although volunteering is a form of moral engagement, defined by its benefits to others (e.g., Stukas et al., 2015), moral developmental theory has rarely been used to examine what drives youth to engage or not engage in service. One reason for little involvement of moral developmental approaches in volunteering research is likely that, as described throughout this chapter, volunteering benefits not only others, but may also benefit the volunteer themselves, a configuration that many conceptions of morality, which are wholly altruistic and other-oriented, are ill-suited to handle. However, as Walker (2014) remarked, drawing on Flanagan (1991), the expectation that decisions about moral engagement are entirely other-focused is an unrealistic standard for real-life moral agents.

Therefore, this thesis explores youth volunteering through the lens of social domain theory (Turiel, 2006) and moral self theory (Blasi, 2004), which are two moral developmental perspectives that integrate aspects of the self into moral decision-making. Broadly speaking, these approaches reject a strict divide between self- and other-oriented motives for moral action and integrate personal, social, and moral dimensions into a more systemic view of social and moral reasoning (Blasi, 2004; Smetana et al., 2013; Turiel & Banas, 2020; Walker, 2004, 2014).

This perspective aligns with past volunteering research that also rejects this self-other dichotomy and suggests that persistent volunteering over time is unlikely without benefits for the self (e.g., Cornelis et al., 2013; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). The following sections of this chapter provide a brief overview of social domain theory (Turiel, 2006), moral self theory (Blasi, 2004), and perspectives on real-life moral reasoning (e.g., Walker, 2014), alongside a brief discussion of the relevance of each approach for understanding youths' volunteering decisions.

Social Domain Theory: Personal, Social, Moral, and Prudential Domains of Reasoning

Social domain theory is a moral developmental theory that focuses on the development of social and moral reasoning (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). According to this approach, people develop an understanding of their social worlds through personal, social, moral, and prudential domains of social knowledge and draw on these domains to interpret, justify, and evaluate actions and decisions (Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 2006, 2013; Turiel, 1983, 2006). *Personal issues* refer to personal choice and preference and consider concerns of personal agency and individual freedom. *Social issues* consider social conventions, social rules, and norms, including references to social order and authority (also characterized as conventional or social-conventional in some research literatures). *Moral issues* refer to how people ought to behave with a focus on other-oriented welfare, harm, justice, and fairness. Lastly, *prudential issues*, consider personal or self-oriented welfare, including harm, health, safety, and comfort.

Historically, social domain theory research has focused primarily on the moral domain and examined whether children can distinguish morality from personal and social domains of knowledge (Smetana, 2013). This research emphasized the role of criterion judgments (i.e., the criteria defining the domain) used to identify how an individual thinks about the domains. These criteria refer to whether evaluations of an action are (a) alterable, (b) generalizable across

contexts, (c) obligatory, and (d) right or wrong in the absence of rules or authority (Killen & Smetana, 2015; Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 2006). In general, early domain theory research demonstrates, from an early age, children can make distinctions between moral (e.g., hitting someone), conventional (e.g., wearing a uniform at school), and personal issues (e.g., liking a particular video game), and also deem some actions as contrary to prudential judgments (e.g., jumping off a swing) (e.g., see Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 2006; Smetana et al., 2013).

Despite the distinctions between the domains, most social situations are multifaceted and involve simultaneous coordination between two or more domains of reasoning (Turiel, 2006; Turiel & Banas, 2020). In fact, a social situation could involve multifaceted domain coordination *between* and *within* individuals (i.e., two people could consider different domains, or one person could consider more than one domain when making judgments about a social situation; Turiel, 1983). Since it is relatively well understood that young children can make distinctions between domains of social knowledge (Smetana, 2006; Smetana et al., 2013), more recent research has explored reasoning in more complex and multifaceted social situations, for example, judgments of youth misbehaviour (e.g., Daddis & Meadows, 2021) and civic engagement (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020). In integrating moral concerns alongside other concerns, social domain theory could provide a useful framework for examining the personal, social, and moral aspects of youths' volunteering decisions (discussed further below and explored in Chapters 3 and 4).

While social domain theory proposes four distinct domains of social knowledge, historically, the prudential domain has been overlooked in past research. Prudential issues, in that they consider personal welfare, are often considered as an aspect of the personal domain (Smetana, 2011, 2013). Research examining prudential reasoning in adolescence has focused on judgments about high-risk behaviours, for example alcohol and drug use and reckless driving

(e.g., Flanagan et al., 2008; Nucci et al., 1991; Shaw et al., 2011). Prosocial behaviours, like volunteering, could be framed as a positive or prosocial risk, and, although intended to benefit others, could have costs for the volunteer (Armstrong-Carter & Telzer, 2025; Do et al., 2017; Duell & Steinberg, 2019). Consistent with previous social domain theory research, this thesis focuses primarily on examining youths' personal, social, and moral reasoning about their own volunteering decisions. However, prudential judgments of personal health and safety associated with volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic will be explored in Chapter 3.

Perspectives on Volunteering Using a Social Domain Theory Approach

A few past studies have used social domain theory to examine adolescents' judgments and justifications about hypothetical civic activities, including volunteering (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Metzger et al., 2014, 2019, 2020; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Findings from this research suggests that adolescents view volunteering as a moral activity and consider volunteer engagement as important, obligatory, and worthy of respect (Metzger et al., 2014; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Similarly, in a mixed methods study, Alvis and Metzger (2020) asked adolescents why people should or should not volunteer. This study identified moral justifications for volunteering that emphasized other-oriented welfare, including fairness, reciprocity, and equity. Adolescents' judgments about hypothetical civic activities have also been associated with their real-life civic involvement (e.g., Metzger et al., 2019; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). For instance, Metzger and Smetana (2009) found that adolescents who were more civically involved were more likely to view volunteering as a form of moral engagement with some obligatory aspects.

Volunteering can also be viewed as a matter of personal discretion (Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Metzger and Ferris (2013) found that although older

adolescents evaluated volunteering as important, they were more likely to situate it within the personal domain. In a study that examined youths' judgements about hypothetical service requirements, McNeil and Helwig (2015) found that requirements that incorporate opportunities for personal choice (e.g., choice of volunteer activity) were evaluated more favourably. Although much of this research focused on domain-based judgments about hypothetical civic involvement, these findings highlight personal and moral aspects of volunteering and may be consistent with youths' real-life volunteering decisions (discussed further below). This perspective also aligns with the volunteering literature that situates volunteer motives as self- and other-oriented (e.g., Cornelis et al., 2013; Stukas, Snyder, et al., 2016; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015).

Moral Self Theory: Moral Motivation and Moral Identity Development

The theoretical background of this thesis also draws from a broader moral identity and moral personality perspective, which considers the importance of morality (i.e., moral values and principles) to an individual's identity or sense of self (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Hardy & Carlo, 2005, 2011; Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). Much of the early work in this area was driven by Blasi (1980, 1983) who suggested that moral identity development occurs as people integrate moral thoughts and actions into their identities, and this integration can motivate moral behaviour. Blasi's (2004) self model of moral motivation considers the role of the self in moral functioning, through real-life decision making, to bridge the gap between moral judgment and action (also discussed below). This theoretical perspective proposes three components of moral functioning: (a) the moral self (i.e., the importance of moral values for personal identity); (b) personal responsibility (i.e., responsibility to engage in moral action); and (c) self-consistency (i.e., personal integrity) (Blasi, 2004; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Walker, 2004). Although this perspective is far less developed empirically, examining youths' volunteer motives from a moral self

perspective could contribute to further understanding volunteering decisions over time.

Perspectives on Volunteering Using a Moral Self Approach

The assumption in the field of moral development is that more moral students will engage in volunteering, overlooking the possibility that students may become more moral *through* service (i.e., moral motivations may change as a function of experience; Blasi, 2004; Walker, 2004, 2014). However, as discussed earlier in this chapter, previous research has found that volunteer engagement is associated with youths' moral and civic development (e.g., Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Padilla-Walker, 2014). Therefore, drawing on Blasi's (2004) model of the moral self, youths' experiences with volunteering could promote a shift from external motives (e.g., mandatory service, career advancement) towards internally integrated motives as their identity as a volunteer becomes important to their sense of self, which in turn may contribute to developing a sense of responsibility to act in accordance with these integrated moral values. In other youth, this transformation may not take place, and volunteering may remain a largely externally motivated act that is not integrated into one's identity and therefore may be less likely to encourage persistent volunteer engagement.

Framing the volunteer experience in this way is consistent with past volunteering research that used role identity theory as a framework to examine volunteer behaviour over time (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2005; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Penner, 2002). This research proposes that volunteer experiences may be associated with the development of a *volunteer role identity*, where volunteering becomes important to an individual's sense of self, which in turn may motivate persistent volunteer engagement (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner, 2002). Much of this research has focused on volunteer identity development in older adulthood, where volunteering is associated with productivity and purpose in life in the absence of previous

roles (e.g., paid employment, parental roles; van Ingen & Wilson, 2017).

Although fewer studies have examined youth volunteering from a role or moral identity perspective, volunteer engagement during this life stage may be especially transformative as youth are exploring their identities and developing a deeper understanding of their role in their communities (Arnett, 2024). Several scholars, including Blasi, recognize adolescence and emerging adulthood as key developmental periods for moral identity development (e.g., Frimer & Walker, 2009; Hardy & Carlo, 2011; Kingsford et al., 2018; Krettenauer & Hertz, 2015). Previous research also suggests that once an individual develops a moral identity it remains relatively stable over time and across social contexts (Krettenauer et al., 2016; Pancer, 2020). From this perspective, volunteering may be an important avenue for youth moral development and may contribute to fostering lasting moral identities, which would support the widespread presence of initiatives designed to encourage youth engagement (as described above).

Hypothetical and Real-Life Moral Reasoning

Moral developmental research presents contrasting cases for using hypothetical and real-life dilemmas to examine moral reasoning. Historically, most moral developmental research, with roots in Piagetian and Kohlbergian approaches, has focused on evaluating judgments and justifications about hypothetical moral dilemmas. Hypothetical dilemmas are abstract fictional scenarios, often featuring competing moral principles (e.g., the Heinz dilemma; see Kohlberg, 1985), that are designed to capture an individual's highest stage of moral reasoning (Carpendale, 2000; Walker et al., 1987). Research using this approach has been influential in the field of moral developmental psychology and contributed to advancing knowledge on the developmental trajectories of moral reasoning. As noted above, social domain theory is also rooted in these research traditions and has focused primarily on examining children's and adolescent's personal,

social, and moral judgments about hypothetical situations (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2008).

However, several scholars have argued that focusing solely on moral judgements about hypothetical dilemmas overlooks the role of moral reasoning in everyday decision-making (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Trevethan & Walker, 1989; Walker, 2004, 2014; Walker et al., 1987; Wygant, 1997). Similarly, Blasi (1983, 2004) was focused on moral motivation and noted discrepancies between hypothetical moral reasoning and real-life moral behaviour (i.e., the "judgment-action gap"; see also Krettenauer, 2024; Walker, 2004). According to Walker (2004, 2014), real-life reasoning is more likely to involve considerations of the consequences of an action on an individual's real life, and, as such, may involve a coordination of competing facets of an individual's life (e.g., social relationships, personal values, and goals). Similarly, Gilligan (1982) argued that previous approaches to research on moral reasoning overlooked female perspectives and used real-life dilemmas to highlight gender differences in moral orientations of care and justice (see also Killen & Smetana, 2015; Walker et al., 1987). These findings suggest that while hypothetical dilemmas may reveal aspects of moral reasoning, the inclusion of real-life dilemmas may contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of real-life moral decisions.

Examining Volunteering as a Real-Life Dilemma

As described earlier in this chapter, historically, research examining volunteering from a social domain theory perspective has focused on evaluating judgments and justifications in hypothetical scenarios and found that adolescents view volunteering as a personal and moral activity (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Metzger et al., 2019; Metzger & Ferris, 2013). However, it is possible, that real-life decisions about volunteering could involve different considerations, and these considerations may also change over the course of an individual's trajectory as a volunteer. A study by Tavassoli et al. (2020) found that unique themes

of refusal (i.e., deciding not to help) and regret (i.e., regretting helping) emerged from reflections on real-life prosocial behaviours. Therefore, this thesis aimed to expand on existing moral developmental literature by examining youths' real-life decisions about their own volunteer behaviours. In integrating the social domain and moral self approaches through real-life dilemmas, this research could contribute to advancing knowledge on the role of moral decisions and moral reasoning in everyday decision-making.

Thesis Overview and Structure

Although past research has examined many facets of youth volunteer behaviour, less is known about trajectories of youth volunteering and volunteering decisions from a moral developmental perspective. Therefore, this thesis examines patterns of youth volunteering from a volunteer trajectory perspective and integrates approaches from moral developmental theory to explore moral and other judgments associated with youths' real-life decisions about volunteering in three distinct yet overlapping contexts. Chapter 2 describes the volunteer trajectory model. Chapter 3 presents a mixed method study that examined youths' volunteering trajectories and decisions during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 4 presents a qualitative study that integrated moral developmental approaches to explore the persistence of youth volunteering. Chapter 5 presents a mixed method study that, despite pandemic-related disruptions, explored volunteering trajectories through institutional transitions, youths' experiences with compulsory community service, and youth volunteering during the pandemic. Together, these studies aim to advance knowledge on youth volunteering, volunteering trajectories, and real-life decisions about volunteering from a moral developmental perspective (discussed in Chapter 6).

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Chapter 2:

Trajectories of Volunteering and the Volunteer Trajectory Model

Trajectories of Volunteering and the Volunteer Trajectory Model

As described in Chapter 1, a small number of volunteering researchers have examined trajectories of volunteer behaviour across the life course. Overall, findings from this research suggests that normative transitions and idiosyncratic life events may be associated with changes to volunteer engagement over time (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Niebuur et al., 2022; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). However, less is known about how the onset of an event or transition influences volunteering decisions, and thereby overall volunteering trajectories. This chapter presents a novel *volunteer trajectory model* that was designed to examine changes to and continuity of volunteering following events, transitions, or individual circumstances. With this model, I propose that when an event or transition occurs, people make decisions to continue, start, or stop volunteering, resulting in four categories of volunteers: (a) *persistent volunteers*, (b) *emergent volunteers*, (c) *former volunteers*, and (d) *persistent non-volunteers*. As noted in the preface, the volunteer trajectory model was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic through the study presented in Chapter 3. However, I also subsequently applied the model in Chapter 5. Therefore, this chapter offers a general introduction to the model and briefly describes previous studies that informed the model, outlines the key components of the model, and highlights how the model can be applied to examine volunteering trajectories.

Research on Volunteering Trajectories

Previous research on volunteering trajectories has focused primarily on exploring patterns of volunteer engagement in older adulthood (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Niebuur et al., 2022). Using a retrospective life course approach, Hogg (2016) interviewed 26 older adults (aged mid-50s to late-70s) from the United Kingdom about their past and present volunteering. This study found that decisions about volunteering were associated with stability in other aspects

of life. Adults with more stable lives (e.g., stable employment and personal relationships) were more likely to remain volunteers, whereas those who reported more instability (e.g., employment changes, separation) were more likely to start, stop, or restart volunteering over the life course. Similar retrospective and longitudinal studies found that adults moved in and out of volunteering over time as they navigated life events, including new employment, marriage, parenthood, retirement, illness, and loss (Metcalfe et al., 2018; Nesbit, 2012; Niebuur et al., 2022).

A few studies have also examined trajectories of civic and community engagement, including volunteering, in adolescent and young adult populations (e.g., Hill & Hammond, 2023; Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). Ramey et al. (2022) examined trajectories of helping behaviour during the transition from adolescence to adulthood and found that helping was highest during adolescence and decreased in early adulthood. Similarly, Malin et al. (2017) and Wray-Lake et al. (2017) found that community service and civic involvement declined after high school graduation. This decrease in engagement may reflect the changing nature of volunteering during this developmental transition. For instance, in Ontario, community service is mandatory at the high school level and typically becomes elective as youth transition to university (e.g., Henderson et al., 2019; Hill & Hammond, 2023). However, university settings can also offer opportunities to engage. For example, Hill and Hammond (2023) identified a small group of undergraduate students who emerged as volunteers during their university studies as part of an optional service-learning program offered at the University of Ottawa.

Together, the findings from previous studies illustrate that events and transitions occurring throughout the life course may be associated with changes to volunteer behaviour. From this perspective, the onset of an event or transition may encourage volunteering for some and inhibit engagement for others. Therefore, using a trajectory perspective to explore patterns of

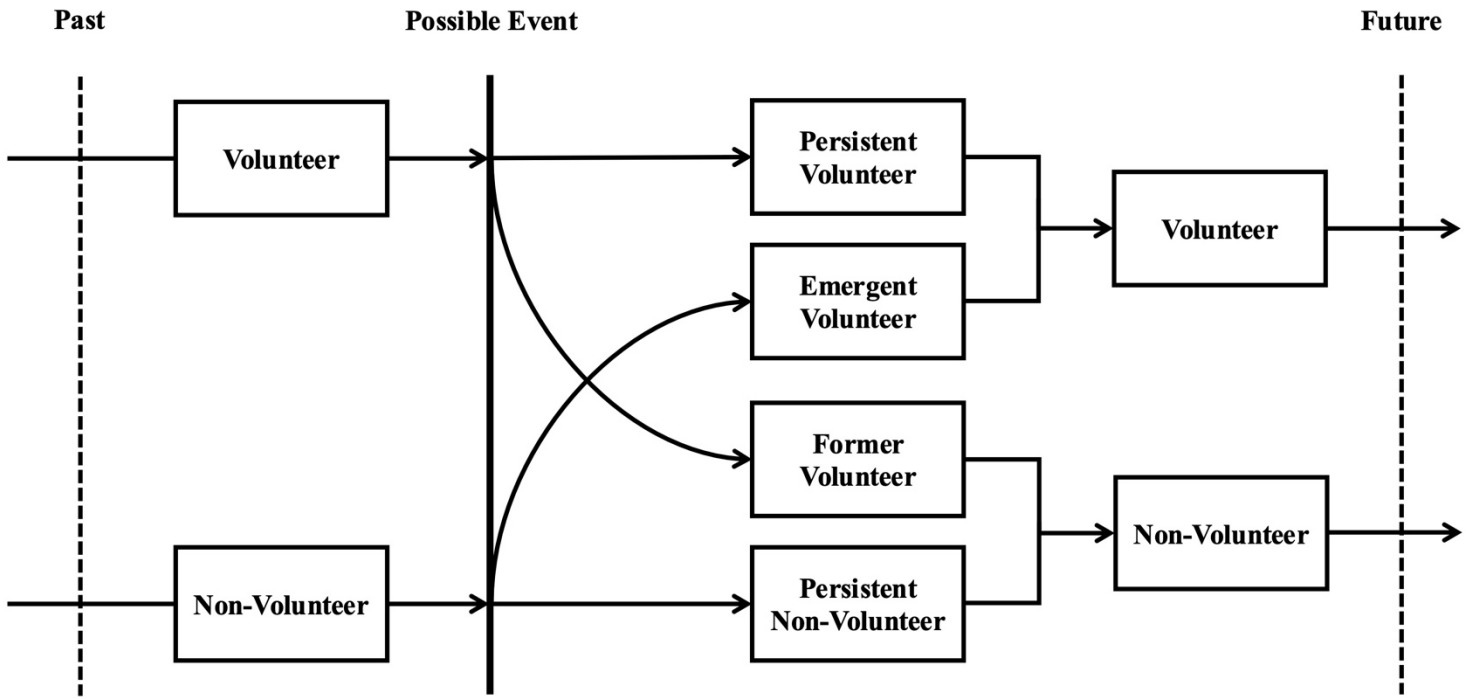
volunteer engagement before and after the onset of events or transitions may offer further insight into when, how, and why people start, continue, or stop volunteering over time.

The Volunteer Trajectory Model

The general volunteer trajectory model is presented in Figure 1. Drawing on previous research on volunteering and volunteering trajectories (described in this chapter and Chapter 1), the model was developed as a lens through which researchers could examine patterns of volunteer engagement over time. The model begins by specifying a period of time, bound between a past and a future, which could be done for a general population or a particular individual. The model includes the possibility of events that could be associated with changes to volunteering (represented by the solid black vertical line in Figure 1). When an event occurs, volunteers and non-volunteers make decisions to continue, start, or stop volunteering, resulting in four volunteering possibilities. Volunteers will either continue to volunteer despite the event (a *persistent volunteer*) or stop volunteering (a *former volunteer*). Non-volunteers will either remain a non-volunteer (a *persistent non-volunteer*) or begin to volunteer following the event (an *emergent volunteer*). While the model focuses on examining volunteering during a specific period of time, inclusion in a volunteer category could be altered again by a future event (e.g., a persistent volunteer at one time point could become a former volunteer at another) or have been previously altered by a past event (e.g., a persistent non-volunteer may have volunteered at an earlier time point). The four volunteer categories are described further below. I will also offer a more critical discussion of these categories in Chapter 6.

Figure 1

The Volunteer Trajectory Model



Note. The solid black event line indicates the possibility of the onset of an event that could impact patterns of volunteer engagement. The period before the event line reflects participants' volunteer status prior to the event. The period after the event line reflects the four possible volunteer trajectories and participants' volunteer status after the event onset. The model could be extended further into the past or future to examine the impact of more than one event on volunteer engagement over time.

Persistent Volunteers

Persistent volunteers are volunteers who were volunteering before the event and continued to volunteer after the event onset. This volunteer category is consistent with previous trajectory perspectives that characterized individuals who commit to volunteering over a longer term as "stickers" (Metcalfe et al., 2018) or "constant volunteers" (Hogg, 2016). It is also possible for long-term volunteers to volunteer with different organizations over time. Metcalfe et al. (2018) classified long-term volunteers who moved between causes or organizations as "natural switchers" and volunteers who altered their engagement to fit their lives as "pragmatic switchers". However, the model presented in this chapter focuses primarily on an individual's volunteer status following the onset of an event (i.e., volunteer or non-volunteer), rather than the particularities of their volunteer activities. In fact, in some cases, events or transitions may make it difficult, or even impossible, for volunteers to remain engaged in the same activities or organizations (e.g., moving to a new city or the closure of volunteer placements).

Emergent Volunteers

Events and transitions may foster opportunities for new volunteer engagement. In our model, emergent volunteers were not volunteering prior to the event and began to volunteer after the event onset. This categorization draws from previous research on volunteering and prosocial helping in emergency and disaster situations which suggests that disruptive events can encourage formal and informal volunteer engagement (e.g., Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Whittaker et al., 2015). Similarly, Hogg (2016) used the term "trigger volunteers" to refer to individuals who begin to volunteer in response to a specific event. Events and transitions may also introduce unique opportunities for volunteering that were not present before their onset (e.g., virtual volunteering during COVID-19; Chapter 3 and Lachance, 2021). An emergent volunteer may volunteer for a

short period of time or persist as a volunteer over a longer term. In the volunteering literature, this form of engagement is also characterized as episodic or spontaneous volunteering (e.g., Aguirre et al., 2016; Hyde et al., 2016).

Former Volunteers

In contrast to the emergence of volunteering, events and transitions may also interrupt volunteer engagement. In this context, former volunteers are individuals who were volunteering prior to the event and stopped volunteering after the event occurred. Aligning with research on barriers to volunteerism (e.g., Ballard, 2014; Bitton, 2025; Davies, 2018), this change in volunteer status (i.e., from volunteer to non-volunteer) may reflect changes to the time, resources, or interest an individual has for volunteering or the availability of volunteer opportunities following the onset of an event or transition. However, as noted above, a former volunteer could emerge as a volunteer again at a future time point. In fact, previous studies have found that people often report volunteering on and off throughout their lives (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Niebuur et al., 2022; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). In previous trajectory approaches, these short-term or occasional volunteers have been referred to as “stop-starters” (Metcalfe et al., 2018) or “serial volunteers” (Hogg, 2016).

Persistent Non-Volunteers

Lastly, the persistent non-volunteer category refers to individuals who were not volunteering before or after the event occurred. However, this categorization does not mean that these individuals did not volunteer in the past or will never volunteer in the future. In fact, Metcalfe et al. (2018) argued that cross-sectional studies may report lower rates of volunteerism because they examine volunteer behaviour over a shorter timeframe (e.g., in the past 12 months). Although the model outlined in this chapter captures volunteer engagement during a specific

period of time (i.e., offering a “snapshot” in time), the model could be repeated over time to examine patterns of volunteering following the onset of more than one event or transition.

Applying the Volunteer Trajectory Model

As outlined in Chapter 1, the empirical studies presented in this dissertation aimed to expand on previous research by employing a trajectory perspective to explore *how* and *why* youth choose to start, continue, or stop volunteering over time, and following the onset of events or transitions. The volunteer trajectory model described in this chapter was first developed to examine changes to and continuity of youth volunteering during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (presented in Chapter 3). However, as described in this chapter, the model can be used to examine patterns of volunteer behaviour amid other events or transitions occurring throughout the life course. The study described in Chapter 5 applied the model to examine volunteer engagement following the onset of two normative transitions: (a) the transition to high school, where community service was mandatory, and (b) the transition to university, where volunteering became elective. Additionally, due to interruptions caused by COVID-19, Chapter 5 also illustrated the application of the trajectory model to three events: the two institutional transitions noted above, and the pandemic onset. The strengths and limitations of the trajectory model for understanding patterns of volunteer engagement will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

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Chapter 3:

Volunteering Trajectories and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Persistent, Emergent, and Former Volunteers and Personal, Moral, and Prudential Reasoning

Author Note

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Abstract

Although trajectories of youth volunteering were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, nevertheless some youth persisted in volunteering, and others emerged as volunteers. To understand volunteering trajectories, the present mixed method study proposed a model adapted from prior literature and examined volunteer trajectories during the pandemic. Youths' volunteer trajectories were categorized (as persistent, emergent, or former volunteer, or persistent non-volunteer) and their justifications for their volunteer decisions were classified using social domain theory (personal, social, moral, and prudential). A sample of 461 youth (M_{age} = 19.26; 68.8% female) from a large Canadian university completed a retrospective survey on pandemic volunteering and volunteer decisions. Volunteer decisions were coded using conventional and directed qualitative content analysis. Although the pandemic disrupted the volunteering trajectories of former volunteers, overall, more youth persisted or emerged as volunteers during the pandemic, a finding framed in both the trajectory and emergency and disaster literature. Volunteers were more likely to use *moral* justifications, whereas *prudential* justifications were more frequent among non-volunteers. The present study offers insight into the impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering and is one of the first studies to find a substantive role for prudential reasoning in youth decision making.

Keywords: volunteering, trajectories, youth, social domain theory, COVID-19

Introduction

Developmental models of volunteering have examined *trajectories* wherein an individual may start, stop, and restart volunteering over time. Previous research has examined patterns of volunteering in older adults (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018), and more recent research has examined volunteering trajectories in adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Hill & Hammond, 2023; Ramey et al., 2022). Although trajectory research suggests that volunteer behaviours shift throughout the life course, less is known about changes to volunteering in relation to specific events. Through the lens of a novel *trajectory model* (see Figure 1), the present study examined trajectories of youth volunteering during the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic (before the widespread availability of vaccines). In addition to understanding *how* the pandemic impacted youth volunteering, the present study used social domain theory (Turiel, 1983) to examine *why* youth made these decisions about volunteering to offer further insight into the impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering.

Defining Volunteering

Volunteering is defined as an activity that benefits others without direct financial compensation to the volunteer (Musick & Wilson, 2007). In some research literature, volunteering is characterized as a prosocial behaviour (e.g., caring for others; Stukas et al., 2015) or as a form of civic engagement (e.g., voting; Hart et al., 2007), which signals the larger importance of volunteering to research on altruism and the flourishing of democratic societies. Although beyond the scope of the present study, volunteering also has cultural dimensions that apply to industrialized societies (see Lancy, 2018 and limitations). Volunteering can occur in formal (e.g., volunteering for an organization) and informal (e.g., shopping for an elderly neighbour) contexts (Smith et al., 2016). Informal volunteering is often overlooked in the larger

literature on volunteering (Einolf et al., 2016) and became more prevalent as a form of volunteering during the pandemic (Alvis et al., 2023).

Youth Volunteering: Benefits, Motives, and Barriers

Volunteering is defined by its other-oriented aspects; however, research has long examined the benefits of volunteering for the volunteer, particularly in youth. Developmentally, youth volunteering contributes to personal growth and improved well-being, social responsibility and community engagement, and moral identity development during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Arnett, 2014; Bowman et al., 2010; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Padilla-Walker, 2014). Given these benefits, research has examined the motives and barriers associated with youth volunteering. Motives for youth volunteering reflect both self- (e.g., enhancing one's CV) and other-oriented (e.g., helping others) motives (Ballard, 2014; Moore et al., 2014). In fact, Walker (2014) argues that committed prosocial behaviours, like volunteering, are unlikely without both self- and other-oriented motives. However, youth also face barriers to volunteering, which may impact their decisions. Ballard (2014) found that personal (i.e., lack of interest) and systemic (i.e., lack of opportunities) barriers prevent volunteering for some youth. Many secondary and post-secondary institutions have developed initiatives designed to facilitate youth volunteering (e.g., Henderson et al., 2014).

Pandemics, Emergencies, and Opportunities to Help Others

Pandemics are defined as a form of emergency or disaster that involve the spread of an infectious disease over a large area of the globe (Snowden, 2019). Disasters foster opportunities for volunteering (Rodríguez et al., 2006; Whittaker et al., 2015), and volunteering, whether through formal (e.g., Rotolo & Berg, 2011) or informal channels (e.g., Whittaker et al., 2015), plays a critical role in disaster management (Twigg & Mosel, 2017). Most research on

volunteering in the context of disasters has examined short-term or sudden disasters (e.g., the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; Rodríguez et al., 2006). However, pandemics differ in that their threat to life can continue for years, and their impact is geographically widespread (Snowden, 2019). Historically, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred during a period when virtual (i.e., online) volunteering afforded possibilities that made volunteering safer and more accessible (Lachance, 2021). Virtual volunteering is more common among youth than older adults (Liu et al., 2016). Since the beginning of the pandemic, youth have been turning to online platforms to share information and help their peers (Armstrong-Carter & Telzer, 2021).

Pandemic Disruptions to Volunteering

The onset of COVID-19 brought disruptions to youths' lives, including education, paid employment, and social gatherings (Aucejo et al., 2020). Youths' volunteering may have also been disrupted due to closures or restrictions on the activities of organizations (e.g., volunteering at hospitals; Pickell et al., 2020) and increased risks to personal health or the health of other individuals in one's household (AlOmar et al., 2021; Seah et al., 2021). These disruptions and the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic have been associated with challenges and consequences for youths' health and well-being, including stress, anxiety, and social isolation (Alvis et al., 2023; Son et al., 2020), and may have prevented volunteering for some. Although, as noted above, virtual volunteering afforded other possibilities for volunteering (Lachance, 2021).

The Trajectory Model: Persistent, Emergent, and Former Volunteers

Trajectories of volunteering (see Hill & Hammond, 2023; Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Ramey et al., 2022) have examined the persistence, emergence, and cessation of volunteering in relation to normative transitions (e.g., adolescence to adulthood in Ramey et al., 2022; retirement in Hogg, 2016 and Metcalfe et al., 2018). However, a trajectory perspective

could also examine patterns of volunteering associated with widespread events (e.g., disease outbreak) or individual circumstances (e.g., an injury). Building on previous trajectory research, the present study introduces a novel trajectory model to examine changes to and continuity of volunteering after a disruptive event (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic). As described in Chapter 2, the proposed trajectory model begins with researchers specifying a period of time, bounded between a past and a future, which could be done for a general population or a particular individual. The model includes the possibility of events that could be associated with changes to volunteering. When an event occurs, volunteers and non-volunteers make decisions to continue, start, or stop volunteering, resulting in four volunteer possibilities. Volunteers will either continue to volunteer despite the event (a *persistent volunteer*) or stop volunteering (i.e., the cessation of volunteering, becoming a *former volunteer*). Non-volunteers will either remain a non-volunteer (a *persistent non-volunteer*) or begin to volunteer following the event (i.e., the emergence of volunteering, becoming an *emergent volunteer*). Inclusion in a category could be altered again by a future event (e.g., a persistent volunteer could become a former volunteer) or have been previously altered by a past event.

Specifying Trajectories of Volunteering in the COVID-19 Pandemic

The present study specified the trajectory model to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1), where the event line represents the World Health Organization's (WHO) declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). In this context, a *persistent volunteer* was volunteering before and after the pandemic onset, an *emergent volunteer* was not volunteering prior to the pandemic but began volunteering after the pandemic onset, a *former volunteer* was volunteering prior to the pandemic but stopped volunteering after the pandemic onset, and a *persistent non-volunteer* was not volunteering before or after the pandemic onset.

Using Social Domain Theory to Understand Trajectories of Volunteering

A trajectory perspective suggests that some individuals may start or stop volunteering. However, it does not reveal why these individuals made these decisions. The present study used social domain theory to examine youths' decisions about volunteering. Social domain theory posits that people interpret their experiences through four domains of social knowledge and draw on these domains to make decisions (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006). The personal domain refers to personal choice and preference, including agency and individual freedom. The social domain considers social conventions, regulations, and norms. The moral domain refers to other-oriented welfare, harm, justice, and fairness. And finally, the prudential domain considers personal (self-oriented) welfare, including health and safety.

Previous research has examined youths' judgments about volunteering using social domain theory (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Metzger et al., 2019; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009; Oosterhoff et al., 2015). These studies found that volunteering is more likely to be viewed as personal (or discretionary) for older adolescents and more likely to be viewed as moral (or obligatory) for females (Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). There is also evidence that as the cost of volunteering (e.g., time commitment) increases, volunteering is more likely to be viewed as a personal choice than a moral obligation (e.g., Metzger & Ferris, 2013). Most social domain theory research, like most research on moral reasoning more generally, has focused on evaluating judgments about hypothetical scenarios (Turiel, 2008; Walker, 2004). The present study aims to expand on this literature by using social domain theory to examine how youth justify their real-life decisions about volunteering.

To our knowledge, the present study will be the first to examine prudential reasoning in the context of volunteering. Yang (2021) found that volunteers reported moral and personal

reasons for volunteering during the pandemic but did not specifically examine the prudential domain. Recent research examining barriers to pandemic volunteering found that those at a higher risk of health complications due to the virus were less likely to volunteer (AlOmar et al., 2021), and this consideration could extend to the health of family members (Seah et al., 2021). Zhu and colleagues (2021) examined the acceptance of COVID-19 public health measures using social domain theory, and findings suggested that all four domains were used to evaluate these restrictions, with the prudential domain related to measures designed to prevent infection. Personal health concerns may have played a role in decisions about volunteering during the pandemic as youth coordinated prudential reasons with personal, social, and moral reasons.

Present Study

The primary objective of the present study was to examine trajectories of youth volunteering during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic before vaccination was widely available. A secondary objective was to examine volunteer decisions using social domain theory. Finally, the trajectory and domain perspectives were integrated to better understand youths' volunteer experiences during the pandemic. The present study thus examined three questions:

1. What were youths' volunteer trajectories during the pandemic?
2. How did youth justify their decisions about volunteering?
3. How does framing trajectories of volunteering in social domain theory further our understanding of the impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering?

Method

Participants

A total of 578 students at a large Canadian urban university participated in the study. From this total, 117 participants were excluded from the final sample due to incomplete

responses (n = 93), short response time (one minute or less; n = 16), and graduate or mature student status (n = 8). The final sample consisted of 461 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 19.26, SD = 1.80) who were predominantly female (n = 317; 68.8%) first-year undergraduate students (n = 308; 66.8%) enrolled in the faculties of social science and arts (n = 218; 47.3%), science and engineering (n = 133; 28.9%), and health science (n = 110; 23.9%). Participants' self-reported ethnicities were coded and categorized according to Statistics Canada's (2021) census classifications. The sample consisted of a plurality of students reporting European origins (n = 192; 41.6%) and Asian origins (n = 145; 31.5%), with the remaining participants reporting African origins (n = 67; 14.5%), Mixed ethnic origins (n = 28; 6.1%), Caribbean origins (n = 5; 1.1%), and other origins/decline to answer (n = 24; 5.2%).

Timeline of Data Collection

Data collection took place between October 2020 and April 2021. During data collection, all university courses were delivered online, and COVID-19 vaccines were unavailable for the general population of youth (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2023). However, volunteers in health care settings or those with severe health issues may have had earlier access to vaccines. Data collection included a retrospective question about volunteering in the academic year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in September 2019). During that period, most participants (n = 308; 66.8%) were not yet enrolled in university.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from introductory undergraduate courses in psychology, linguistics, and communication through a participant recruitment system in which students receive course credit for research participation (ISPR). Students were eligible to participate in the study if they had engaged in some form of volunteering in the past year. Students were given a

brief description of the study (see Appendix A) and provided written informed consent before participating (see Appendix B). Participation in the study consisted of completing a retrospective online survey of multiple choice and open-ended questions (see Appendix C). Most participants (n = 440; 95.4%) completed the survey within 15 minutes. Participants received a half point of their course grade from four points allotted for research participation. This study was approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (H-01-20-5326).

Measures

Volunteer Trajectories

Participants reported their volunteer status prior to and after the pandemic onset. Participants who were volunteering prior to the pandemic also responded to an open-ended question assessing the impact of the pandemic on their volunteering. We used this information to determine a volunteer trajectory for each participant based on the trajectories described above (persistent, emergent, or former volunteer, and persistent non-volunteer).

Volunteering Characteristics

We collected information about the characteristics of participants' volunteering, including volunteer organizations, informal volunteer activities, hours of volunteering per week, and volunteer settings. For the present study, we only analyzed information about volunteer settings (virtual and in-person) and volunteer status (formal and informal) during the pandemic.

Reasoning about Volunteer Decisions

Participants responded to two open-ended questions assessing their decisions about formal and informal volunteering after the pandemic was declared: (a) Why did you choose (or not choose) to engage in formal volunteering (e.g., with an organization) during COVID-19? and (b) Why did you choose (or not choose) to engage in informal volunteering (e.g., helping an

elderly neighbor with shopping) during COVID-19?

Analytic Approach

Qualitative Content Analysis

Participants' responses to the open-ended questions about their volunteer decisions were analyzed using conventional and directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach allowed us to examine participants' justifications for their volunteer decisions using social domain theory alongside other reasons not reflected by the domains. The first author developed a coding scheme that defined the criteria for each category, based on social domain theory (Turiel, 2006) and previous social domain research on volunteering (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015). The first author and a second reliability coder coded a randomly selected sample of responses (n = 100). Responses were coded for the presence (1) or absence (0) of each of the four domains (a response could contain references to more than one domain). Following the first round of coding, adjustments were made to the coding criteria, discrepancies were discussed, and an additional reasoning category was identified (defined as Limited Opportunities; see Table 1 for the final coding scheme). The remaining responses were coded by both coders and a Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) was calculated for each domain (personal = 0.82; social = 0.87; moral = 0.89; prudential = 0.83). Coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved prior to the analyses.

Table 1

Descriptions of Justification Categories and Examples

Category	Descriptions and examples
Personal	References to personal choice, preference, or interest (e.g., *I enjoy volunteering*; *I don't have time for volunteering*).
Social	References to social conventions, social rules, regulations, and norms, or authority figures dictating volunteer decisions (e.g., *My parents want me to volunteer*; *The government said we should stay home).*
Moral	References to the welfare of others, including justice, fairness, or avoiding harm to others. Describing an obligation to help and/or protect others (e.g., *I have a responsibility to help others*; *I didn't volunteer to protect my vulnerable family members*).
Prudential	References to personal health and safety. Consider whether volunteering has consequences for the self (e.g., *I felt safe volunteering*; *I didn't volunteer because I was afraid to get sick*).
Limited Opportunities	References to an inability to find volunteer opportunities (e.g., *I couldn't find any organizations accepting volunteers*).

Findings

The qualitative findings and quantitative results are presented below. First, we specified the trajectory model to reflect the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and categorized participants as persistent, emergent, or former volunteers, or persistent non-volunteers. We then examined participants' use of personal, social, moral, and prudential domains to justify decisions about volunteering. Finally, we integrated the trajectory and domain perspectives to examine domain justifications in the context of demographic characteristics and volunteer trajectories.

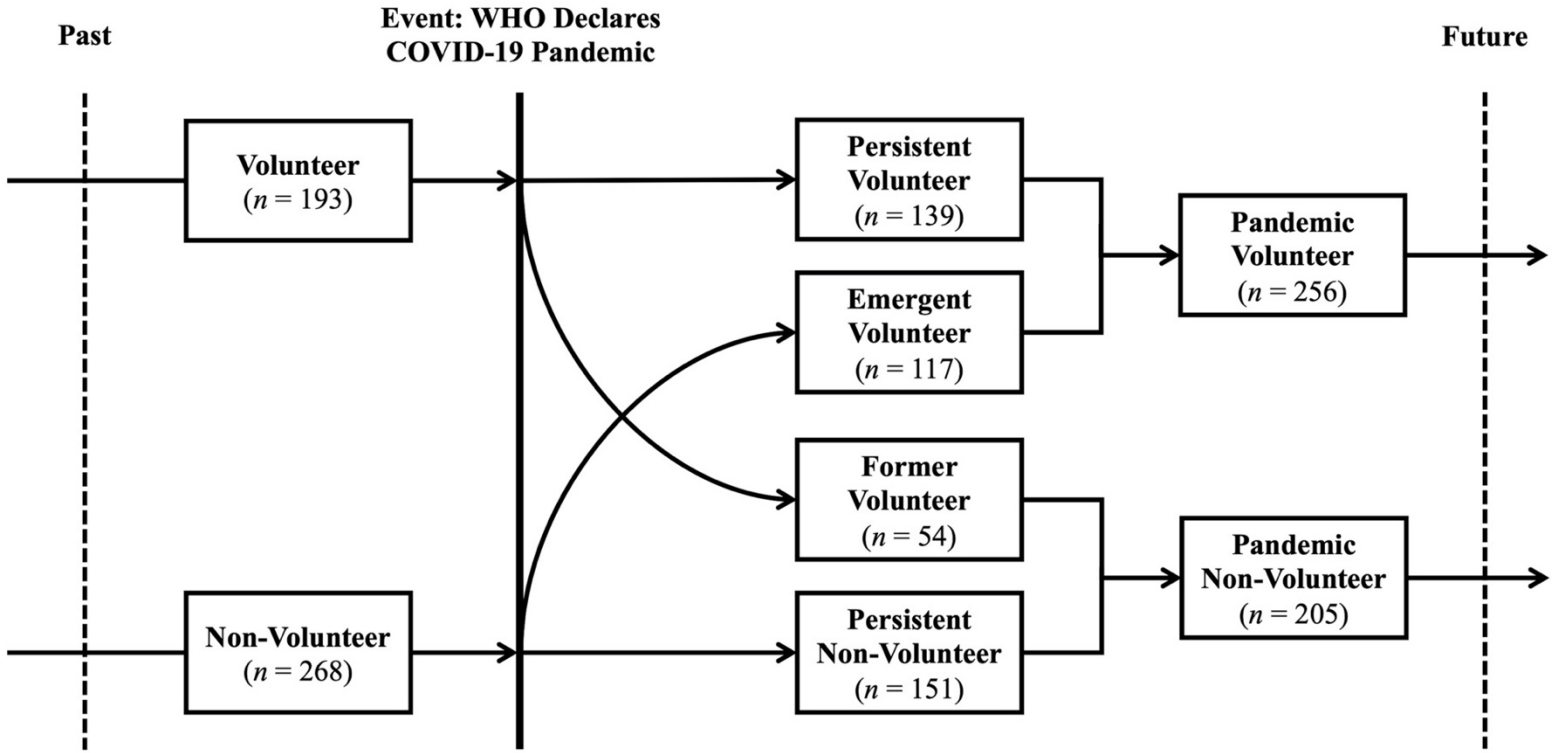
Trajectories of Volunteering

Participants were first categorized as *volunteers* or *non-volunteers* prior to the pandemic. The majority (n = 268; 58.1%) reported they were not volunteering prior to the pandemic, while

the remaining participants (*n* = 193; 41.9%) reported they were volunteering. Participants were then grouped into volunteer trajectory groups based on their volunteer status after the pandemic was declared (depicted in Figure 1). Of the 193 who reported volunteering prior to the pandemic, subsequent trajectories were 139 (72.0%) *persistent volunteers* (i.e., continued to volunteer) and 54 (28.0%) *former volunteers* (i.e., no longer volunteering). Of the 268 who reported not volunteering prior to the pandemic, subsequent trajectories were 151 (56.3%) *persistent non-volunteers* (i.e., did not volunteer) and 117 (43.6%) *emergent volunteers* (i.e., began to volunteer after the pandemic onset). Together, over half of the participants reported volunteering after the pandemic was declared (*pandemic volunteers*; *n* = 256; 55.5%), while the remaining participants (*n* = 205; 44.5%) reported they were not volunteering (*pandemic non-volunteers*). Of note, persistent volunteers included participants who continued the volunteering they began before the pandemic (*n* = 38), participants who continued their previous volunteering and began new volunteer activities (*n* = 43), and participants who were unable to continue their past volunteering but began new volunteer activities after the pandemic was declared (*n* = 58).

Figure 1

Volunteer Trajectory Model Specified to the COVID-19 Pandemic



Note. The solid black event line indicates the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization (WHO) declared on March 11, 2020). The period before the event line reflects participants' volunteer status prior to the pandemic. The period after the event line reflects the four volunteer trajectories and participants' volunteer status after the pandemic was declared (before the arrival of vaccines). In principle, the model could be extended to future events (e.g., the arrival of widespread vaccination).

Qualitative Findings

Domain Justifications About Volunteer Decisions

Participants were asked to explain their decisions about volunteering after the pandemic was declared. A total of 423 participants provided justifications that could be coded (n = 38 persistent volunteers reported they continued their previous volunteering but did not provide a justification for this decision and were excluded from subsequent analyses; see limitations). Although participants provided reasons for decisions about formal and informal volunteering, for the present study, reasoning about formal volunteering was retained for most participants (n = 293; 69.3%). Reasoning about informal volunteering was retained for participants who reported only informal volunteering after the pandemic onset (n = 130; 30.7%).

Among the coded responses, we identified 460 references to the domains. The majority (n = 313; 73.9%) mentioned one domain in their response, whereas 69 participants (16.3%) cited two domains, and three participants (0.7%) cited three domains. Personal, social, moral, and prudential justifications were used to justify decisions to volunteer and not volunteer. Overall, 42.6% (n = 180) provided moral justifications, 38.8% (n = 164) provided personal justifications, 23.6% (n = 100) provided prudential justifications, and 3.8% (n = 16) provided social justifications. Representative quotes are presented below to illustrate how youth used the domains to justify their volunteer decisions.

Personal Justifications. Pandemic volunteers (n = 89) cited personal reasons for their decision to volunteer. These responses highlighted participants' personal interests (e.g., hobbies), goals (e.g., acquiring career-related experience), or circumstances (e.g., more time for volunteering, prior experience with the volunteer organization). For example, a persistent volunteer wrote, "This is a project I had going on before COVID-19. I was quite happy to

continue volunteering in the same domain as before as I enjoy performing music." Similarly, an emergent volunteer stated, "I wanted to make use of my free time and gain experience in the research field early on as it is something that I am very passionate about."

Personal considerations were also cited by non-volunteers (n = 75). These statements included references to prioritizing other activities (e.g., paid employment), limited time for volunteering, or personal preferences. For example, a persistent non-volunteer said, "Honestly, I don't have time. I'm a full-time student and I work 16 hours a week, so it was difficult for me to make place to volunteer." A former volunteer expressed a preference for in-person volunteering: "I don't want to spend more time online than is necessary. I think that the experience of volunteering wouldn't be the same with it being online, rather than in person."

Social Justifications. Social considerations were rare. Pandemic volunteers (n = 3) mentioned their volunteering felt required (e.g., "I felt obligated as they were family friends and my parents were helping as well"), whereas pandemic non-volunteers (n = 13) described that lockdowns, government-imposed restrictions, and physical distancing measures prevented their volunteering. For example, one persistent non-volunteer wrote, "Even though I wanted to start volunteering this year, the COVID-19 pandemic didn't let me volunteer. This is the result of quarantine and health guidelines that forced organization to not accept any more volunteers."

Moral Justifications. Pandemic volunteers (n = 135) cited moral reasons for volunteering that highlighted a responsibility to help others in need and protect vulnerable populations (e.g., older adults, immunocompromised individuals). For example, a persistent volunteer said, "I wanted to help them because the elderly population is extremely susceptible to this virus, by purchasing and delivering groceries to them they avoid the risk of being infected." Another participant, an emergent volunteer, explained why they started to volunteer: "I realized

that my participation in my community can have a greater impact. That is why I started to help."

Pandemic non-volunteers (n = 45) cited moral reasons for not volunteering that reflected a desire to protect the health and safety of others, including vulnerable family members. For example, a former volunteer stated, "I chose to stay home and social distance as someone in my household is immunocompromised." Another persistent non-volunteer described the risks of volunteering: "My mother has cancer, and her immune system is not strong at all. Me and my family couldn't risk getting infected. If not, I'm sure I would have helped my community out."

Prudential Justifications. Some pandemic volunteers (n = 18) cited prudential considerations that referenced the safety of their volunteer placements, volunteering outdoors to facilitate physical distancing, and virtual volunteering to avoid in-person contact with others. For example, a persistent volunteer stated, "The activities that I was doing did not involve getting too close to other people. Therefore, I can help the community and stay safe." Similarly, an emergent volunteer expressed, "It [the volunteering] was outside on a farm. All socially distanced, so I felt safe and happy that I could make a positive contribution to the community."

Prudential considerations cited by non-volunteers (n = 82) referenced concerns related to contracting COVID-19 for their own health and safety, including feelings of fear associated with the pandemic. For example, a former volunteer wrote, "I was watching how fast COVID was spreading and became afraid that I would contract it if I really went anywhere during the outbreak." Another participant, a persistent non-volunteer, described how their vulnerable health status contributed to their decision: "I am immunocompromised, so my family and I are being extra careful during these times. Volunteering would not be favourable in my situation."

Additional Findings

While many participants justified their decisions using the domains, an additional

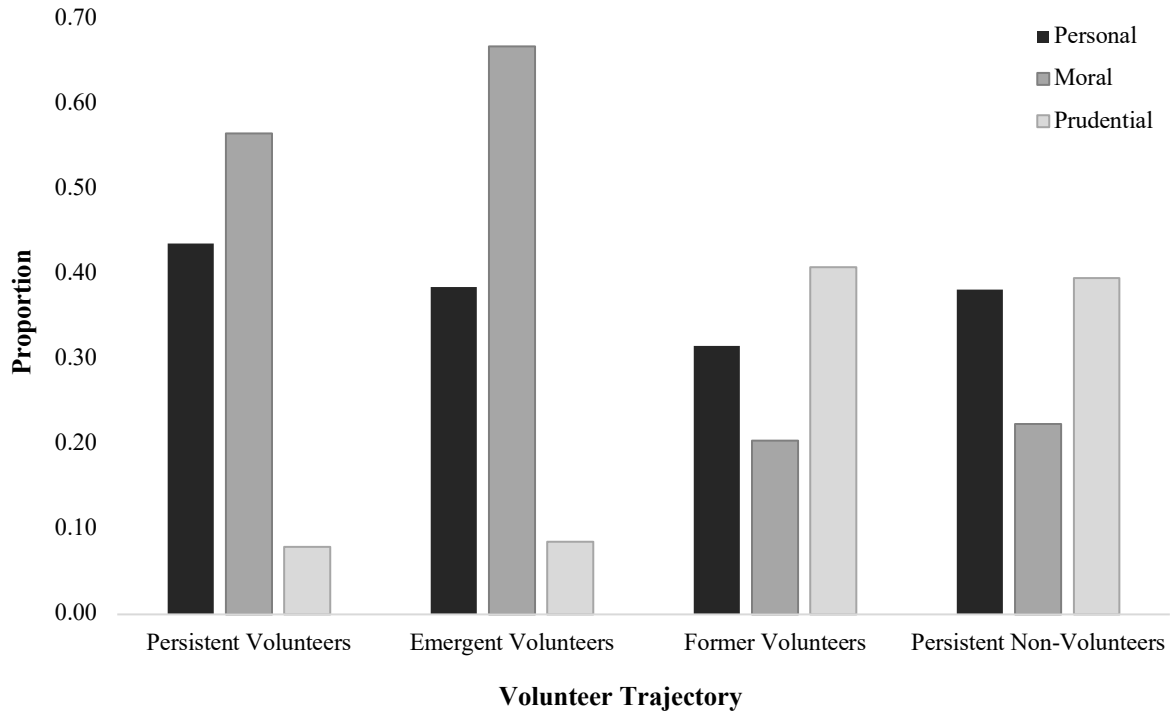
category, *Limited Opportunities*, was identified among pandemic non-volunteers (n = 26). Participants described that a lack of available volunteer opportunities contributed to their decision not to volunteer. For example, a former volunteer said, “I did try applying for volunteer positions … but I never received any information after I applied.”

Quantitative Results

Figure 2 presents the proportion of participants using personal, moral, and prudential domain justifications by volunteer trajectory. Three binary logistic regression analyses were performed using SPSS 28 to assess the effects of demographic variables (age, gender, ethnicity, year of study, and program of study) and volunteer trajectory status (persistent, emergent, and former volunteer, and persistent non-volunteer) on the likelihood of using personal, moral, and prudential justifications for volunteer decisions (see Table 2). Reflecting sample characteristics, self-reported ethnicities were grouped into three categories: (a) European origins, (b) Asian origins, and (c) African, Mixed, Caribbean, or other ethnic origins. Due to the infrequent use of the social domain, this domain has been excluded from the analyses below.

Figure 2

Proportion of Participants Using Personal, Moral, and Prudential Domain Justifications by Volunteer Trajectory



Note. Participants' responses could contain references to more than one domain. Persistent Volunteers (n = 101); Emergent Volunteers (n = 117); Former Volunteers (n = 54); Persistent Non-Volunteers (n = 151).

Table 2

Binary Logistic Regression Results for Personal, Moral, and Prudential Domain Justifications

Variable	Personal				Moral				Prudential			
	B	*SE*	*OR*	95% CI	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	95% CI	*B*	*SE*	*OR*	95% CI
Age	-0.01	0.07	0.99	[0.87, 1.13]	-0.05	0.07	0.95	[0.83, 1.09]	0.08	0.08	1.08	[0.92, 1.26]
Gender[a]	-0.08	0.22	0.93	[0.60, 1.44]	0.18	0.24	1.20	[0.75, 1.92]	0.10	0.27	1.10	[0.64, 1.89]
Ethnicity[b]												
Asian	-0.35	0.25	0.70	[0.43, 1.14]	-0.63*	0.26	0.53	[0.32, 0.89]	0.47	0.31	1.60	[0.88, 2.92]
African, Mixed, Caribbean, other	-0.53*	0.26	0.59	[0.35, 0.99]	-0.50	0.28	0.61	[0.35, 1.04]	0.72*	0.31	2.05	[1.11, 3.78]
Program of study[c]												
Health science	0.59*	0.25	1.80	[1.11, 2.92]	-0.12	0.27	0.89	[0.53, 1.50]	0.16	0.30	1.17	[0.65, 2.11]
Science and engineering	0.14	0.26	1.15	[0.69, 1.93]	-0.15	0.28	0.86	[0.50, 1.49]	0.21	0.32	1.24	[0.66, 2.32]
Year of study[d]	-0.59*	0.26	0.56	[0.34, 0.92]	0.12	0.28	1.13	[0.66, 1.95]	0.21	0.31	1.23	[0.67, 2.25]
Trajectory status[e]												
Former	-0.35	0.34	0.71	[0.36, 1.39]	-0.13	0.40	0.88	[0.41, 1.91]	0.08	0.33	1.09	[0.57, 2.07]
Emergent	-0.01	0.26	0.99	[0.60, 1.65]	1.93**	0.28	6.91	[3.98, 11.99]	-1.95**	0.37	0.14	[0.07, 0.30]
Persistent	0.11	0.27	1.11	[0.65, 1.90]	1.49**	0.29	4.46	[2.54, 7.83]	-1.97**	0.41	0.14	[0.06, 0.31]

Note. [a]Reference category is female. [b]Reference category is European. [c]Reference category is social science and arts. [d]Reference category is second year and above. [e]Reference category is persistent non-volunteer.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .001$.

Personal Justifications

The personal domain model was significant, χ^2 (10, N = 423) = 19.40, p = .035. The model explained 6.1% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in the use of personal justifications and correctly classified 61.5% of cases. Trajectory status, age, and gender were not associated with the use of personal justifications. Participants who reported African, Mixed, Caribbean, or other ethnic origins were about one and a half times less likely to provide personal justifications than those who identified as European (B = –0.53, SE = 0.26, OR = 0.59, 95% CI [0.35, 0.99], p = .044). Participants enrolled in health science were about two times more likely to provide personal justifications than those enrolled in social sciences and arts (B = 0.59, SE = 0.25, OR = 1.80, 95% CI [1.11, 2.92], p = .017). First-year undergraduate students were about half as likely to provide personal justifications compared to those in second year and above (B = –0.59, SE = 0.26, OR = 0.56, 95% CI [0.34, 0.92], p = .022).

Moral Justifications

The moral domain model was significant χ^2 (10, N = 423) = 83.09, p < .001. The model explained 24.0% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in the use of moral justifications and correctly classified 70.7% of cases. Emergent volunteers were almost seven times more likely to provide moral justifications than persistent non-volunteers (B = 1.93, SE = 0.28, OR = 6.91, 95% CI [3.98, 11.99], p < .001), and persistent volunteers were almost four and a half times more likely to provide moral justifications than persistent non-volunteers (B = 1.49, SE = 0.29, OR = 4.46, 95% CI [2.54, 7.83], p < .001). Former volunteers were no more or less likely to provide moral justifications than persistent non-volunteers (B = –0.13, SE = 0.40, OR = 0.88, 95% CI [0.41, 1.91], p = .750). Age, gender, year of study, and program of study were not associated with the moral domain. Participants who identified as Asian were about half as likely to use moral

justifications compared to those who identified as European (B = –0.63, SE = 0.26, OR = 0.53, 95% CI [0.32, 0.89], p = .017).

Prudential Justifications

The prudential domain model was significant χ^2 (10, N = 423) = 69.31, p < .001. The model explained 22.7% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in the use of prudential justifications and correctly classified 77.3% of cases. Both emergent volunteers (B = –1.95, SE = 0.37, OR = 0.14, 95% CI [0.07, 0.30], p < .001) and persistent volunteers (B = –1.97, SE = 0.41, OR = 0.14, 95% CI [0.06, 0.31], p < .001) were about seven times less likely to provide prudential justifications than persistent non-volunteers. Former volunteers were no more or less likely to provide prudential justifications than persistent non-volunteers (B = 0.08, SE = 0.33, OR = 1.09, 95% CI [0.57, 2.07], p = .804). Age, gender, year of study, and program of study were not associated with the prudential domain. Participants who reported African, Mixed, Caribbean, or other ethnic origins were twice as likely to use prudential justifications compared to those who identified as European (B = 0.72, SE = 0.31, OR = 2.05, 95% CI [1.11, 3.78], p = .022).

Additional Results

Among pandemic volunteers, 88 (40.4%) were volunteering with formal organizations and 130 (59.6%) reported informal volunteer activities. Chi-square tests indicated formal volunteers were more likely to engage in virtual volunteering (χ^2 (1, n = 218) = 44.32, OR = 0.14, 95% CI [0.07, 0.25], p < .001) and informal volunteers were more likely to volunteer in person (χ^2 (1, n = 218) = 62.12, OR = 17.48, 95% CI [7.63, 40.05], p < .001). Emergent volunteers were more likely to report informal volunteering than persistent volunteers (χ^2 (1, n = 218) = 4.01, OR = 0.57, 95% CI [0.33, 0.99], p = .045). For volunteer justifications, formal volunteers were more likely to use personal justifications (χ^2 (1, n = 218) = 31.78, OR = 0.19,

95% CI [0.11, 0.35], $p < .001$), whereas informal volunteers were more likely to use moral justifications (χ^2 (1, n = 218) = 19.41, OR = 3.55, 95% CI [2.00, 6.30], $p < .001$).

Discussion

Volunteer behaviours may change throughout the life course and may be altered by life events (Hill & Hammond, 2023; Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Ramey et al., 2022). The trajectory model presented in the present study specified four trajectories of volunteering (persistent, emergent, or former volunteer, and persistent non-volunteer) and applied the model to examine how the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted trajectories of youth volunteering. Although, during the time period examined, some youth had their volunteering disrupted and became former volunteers, others emerged as volunteers, and many persisted as volunteers or non-volunteers. To better understand why some youth continued to volunteer and others started or stopped, we examined decisions about volunteering using social domain theory. Consistent with prior social domain research on youth volunteering (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Metzger et al., 2019), youth from the present study reported personal and moral justifications for their decisions about volunteering. Unlike past research, the present study also found prudential justifications for decisions about volunteering, particularly (though not uniquely) among non-volunteers. These findings are discussed further below.

Trajectories of Volunteering and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Consistent with past research on emergency volunteering (e.g., Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Whittaker et al., 2015), the present study found an increase in volunteering following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the present study, more youth emerged or continued volunteering than ceased to volunteer or remained non-volunteers. Research examining predictors of volunteering during a hypothetical pandemic found that those with past volunteer experience

were more willing to volunteer (Rosychuk et al., 2008). The present study, in the context of a real-life pandemic, found that many youth persisted as volunteers. Emergent volunteers in the present study were often engaged in informal volunteering, and informal volunteer opportunities may be less salient or necessary outside of emergency contexts (Whittaker et al., 2015).

As a pandemic, COVID-19 also brought barriers and risks to volunteering (i.e., because the virus was not geographically isolated). Many volunteer settings became unsafe or inaccessible to volunteers (Lebenbaum et al., 2024). Consistent with research on barriers to youth volunteering (Ballard, 2014), some non-volunteers in the present study reported they could not find volunteer opportunities. The pandemic also brought direct risks to health, which may have contributed to reduced volunteering (AlOmar et al., 2021). As noted below, concerns about personal health and the health of vulnerable family members were cited as reasons for not volunteering. However, the present study also found that virtual volunteering offered opportunities for volunteering during the pandemic, particularly among formal volunteers.

Social Domain Theory and Volunteer Decisions

Similar to past social domain theory research, some decisions about volunteering (i.e., whether a person volunteered or not) were framed as a matter of personal discretion (Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). In the present study, volunteer trajectory status was not associated with the personal domain, and personal justifications were cited frequently by both volunteers and non-volunteers. Prior research demonstrates the prevalence of personal motives for volunteering (e.g., Ballard, 2014; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Moore et al., 2014). Volunteers from the present study cited personal interests and goals (e.g., career development) as reasons for their volunteer involvement. Personal reasons for formal volunteering may also reflect the commitment (e.g., time and effort) associated with volunteering for an organization (Smith et al.,

2016). However, non-volunteers in the present study also justified volunteer decisions in terms of personal interests and described prioritizing other activities (e.g., formal education), which likewise contributes to personal development (Arnett, 2014). In the present study, students later in their university careers were more likely to consider personal reasons than first-year students. This finding extends previous research on older adolescents' personal judgments about volunteering (see Metzger & Ferris, 2013) and offers some insight into how reasoning about volunteering may shift as youth advance through their undergraduate studies.

Previous research suggests that youth perceive volunteering as an activity with some moral (and obligatory) aspects (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2015), and morality can motivate volunteer involvement (Moore et al., 2014), particularly during emergencies (Twigg & Mosel, 2017). In the present study, persistent and emergent volunteers were more likely to give moral reasons for their decision to volunteer. Non-volunteers also used moral reasons (e.g., protecting the welfare of others) to justify their decision not to volunteer, although they were less likely to do so than volunteers. To our knowledge, moral reasons for *not* volunteering have not been prominent in previous literature. This finding may reflect that the present study examined real-life decision making, where individuals are more likely to consider the impact of actions on their real lives (Walker, 2014). Tavassoli and colleagues (2020) examined real-life prosocial behaviour and found that refusals (i.e., deciding not to help) and regret (i.e., regretting helping) emerged in real-life contexts, whereas these themes were largely absent in studies of hypothetical prosocial behaviour. The findings from the present study, though occurring in the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic, may likewise reflect the complexities of real-life moral reasoning.

In addition to personal and moral justifications, many youth justified their decisions using

the prudential domain. Past research on the prudential domain is largely restricted to research on peer pressure and risk-taking (e.g., Daddis, 2011; Shaw et al., 2011). In the present study, prudential justifications were the most frequently reported justifications among former volunteers and persistent non-volunteers, and reflected concerns related to personal health and safety (AlOmar et al., 2021). Interestingly, however, some volunteers cited prudential considerations to justify decisions to volunteer (e.g., volunteering was deemed safe). To our knowledge, this the first study to find prudential justifications used in this way.

The present study reflected how real-life reasoning is multifaceted and may involve coordination between two or more domains (Turiel, 2006). The findings also provide insight into multifaceted domain reasoning between individuals, such that it is possible to find people justifying the same decision using different domains. For example, all persistent volunteers chose to continue volunteering during the pandemic; however, some youth justified this decision using moral reasons, and others cited personal reasons. Only a small number of participants justified their volunteer decisions using more than one domain (i.e., mixed-domain reasoning; e.g., personal and moral), which may reflect the limitations of open-ended online survey measures (see limitations). Non-volunteers, however, often justified their decisions by citing the health of their families. In a strict reading of social domain theory, these family-oriented justifications are moral as they pertain to the welfare of others. However, these findings also extend research on the prudential domain. Past research has examined how parents respond to toddlers' risky behaviours (i.e., judging another's behaviour using prudential concerns; Dahl, 2016). Making decisions to protect the safety of one's loved ones could be classified as moral-prudential.

Implications and Future Directions

Building on previous volunteer trajectory research (Hill & Hammond, 2023; Hogg, 2016;

Metcalfe et al., 2018; Ramey et al., 2022), the present study further developed a trajectory model to understand patterns of volunteering during the height of the pandemic. Consistent with emergency volunteering research (e.g., Whittaker et al., 2015), the trajectory model illustrated the emergence of volunteering during the pandemic. However, the trajectory model also addressed the persistence and cessation of volunteering, which have received little attention in the literature. The proposed trajectory model applied at a tighter timeframe (e.g., immediately after the onset of widespread lockdowns) or extended to a later timeframe (e.g., the widespread availability of vaccines and the removal of restrictions) would likely present different findings.

Prior social domain research has focused on examining judgments about volunteering in hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020). To our knowledge, the present study is the first to apply social domain theory to examine real-life decisions about volunteering. Consistent with prior research (e.g., Metzger & Ferris, 2013), personal and moral justifications were associated with decisions to volunteer. Unlike past studies, the moral domain was referenced as a reason not to volunteer, and the prudential domain was frequently cited to justify not volunteering. These findings may reflect the timeframe examined (i.e., shortly after the pandemic onset and before vaccination) and the complexities of real-life reasoning. Future studies could examine the role of moral and prudential concerns in real-life decisions about volunteering beyond the context of COVID-19 (see Walker, 2004; Tavassoli et al., 2020). We also examined domain justifications in the context of other characteristics such as ethnicity and program of study. Although beyond the scope of the present study, the findings point to some domain reasoning differences in real-life contexts and represent an avenue for future research.

Findings from the present study suggest that, together, the trajectory and domain perspectives offer insight into the impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering. The present

study found that more youth emerged or persisted as volunteers during the pandemic. This finding differs from previous trajectory research that found a decrease in helping behaviours during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (e.g., Ramey et al., 2022). However, drawing on social domain theory, the moral imperative to help in the unique context of the pandemic may have contributed to this finding. Future studies could integrate the trajectory and domain perspectives to examine the impact of other events on youth volunteering. For example, the transition to university may influence volunteering (e.g., Hill & Hammond, 2023), and the trajectory and domain perspectives could offer insight into how and why volunteering changes or persists in this context (this will be explored further in Chapters 4 and 5).

The findings have practical implications for initiatives designed to facilitate youth volunteering during emergencies or disasters. Despite disruptions, more youth in the present study were volunteering during the pandemic, which signals the importance of developing strategies to support volunteering in emergency contexts. Many youth in this study reported they did not volunteer due to concerns about their own health or the health of others. We recommend that emergency volunteering initiatives anticipate these barriers to volunteering and increase the availability and accessibility of safe volunteer opportunities. For example, more virtual volunteering opportunities may have contributed to increased volunteering during the pandemic.

Limitations

The present study had several limitations. Data collection began eight months after the pandemic was declared and thus relied on participants' self-reported recollections of their volunteering, which could also be influenced by social desirability biases (Metzger & Ferris, 2013). The data was collected using an online survey and did not allow for follow-up questions. For example, we do not know why some youth continued their past volunteering into the

pandemic. Future research should consider using an interview approach to allow for more detailed descriptions of volunteer decisions. The survey provided examples of volunteering, but did not include a definition, therefore some youth may have been engaging in behaviours that they do not consider as volunteering. Future studies could provide a definition of volunteering or ask participants to describe their own understanding of volunteer behaviours. We also did not examine how the characteristics of youths' volunteering (e.g., where they volunteered) may be related to their volunteering decisions, which represents an interesting avenue for future studies.

The present study was based on a sample of predominately female first-year undergraduate students from one Canadian university, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations. Public health measures in response to the pandemic (e.g., lockdowns) also varied between cities, provinces, and countries (Hale et al., 2021), thus findings from this study may not reflect the volunteer experiences of youth from other regions during the pandemic. Finally, the present study did not consider prior trajectory periods (e.g., whether non-volunteers had a history of volunteering at an earlier time point). Past research found that future volunteering is more likely when past volunteer experiences are positive (e.g., Henderson et al., 2014), and those with past volunteer experience are more likely to volunteer during emergencies (Rosychuk et al., 2008). Future research employing a trajectory model could examine a longer timeframe to better understand youths' volunteer decisions in response to events.

Conclusion

The present study contributed to the literature on youth volunteering by examining trajectories of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic and exploring how youth justified their real-life decisions about volunteering. Despite disruptions to volunteering, more youth persisted or emerged as volunteers during the pandemic. To understand why some youth chose to

emerge or persist as volunteers while others chose to stop volunteering, the present study illustrated how youth used personal, social, moral, and prudential reasons to justify their decisions about volunteering. Although the findings are bound to a particular point of the pandemic, in a particular region, before the arrival of vaccination, the proposed trajectory model could be extended to later periods of the pandemic to examine the trajectories of emergent volunteers, and the role of prudential reasoning in volunteer decision making.

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Chapter 4:

Moral Motives and Social Realities of Youth Volunteering Over Time: A Qualitative Exploration of Undergraduate Students' Volunteering Trajectories

Abstract

Although recent research has examined patterns of volunteering over the life course, less is known about trajectories of youth volunteering, notably *how* and *why* youth persist as volunteers over time. The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a deeper understanding of youth volunteering trajectories by examining why youth volunteer, how they justify their decisions about volunteering, and how their reasons for volunteering change over time. A sample of 28 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.36; 64.3% female) from a large Canadian university participated in a semi-structured interview about their past and present volunteer experiences and decisions. Using inductive and deductive reflexive thematic analysis, we identified five overarching themes reflecting how personal interests, social contexts, moral motives, and students' evolving understanding of volunteering contributed to shaping their volunteer behaviours and decisions. The findings are framed from a moral developmental perspective, drawing on social domain theory and moral self theory, and illustrate how youth coordinate personal, social, and moral considerations when making decisions about volunteering and how moral development may occur *through* volunteer engagement. This research contributes to our understanding of youth volunteering trajectories and offers practical implications for youth volunteering initiatives.

Keywords: volunteering, volunteer motives, trajectories, youth, social domain theory, moral development

Introduction

Research examining the developmental benefits of youth volunteering has been widespread. However, less is known about changes to youth volunteer behaviours over time. From a volunteering trajectory perspective, youth experience life transitions (e.g., high school to university) and developmental changes (e.g., personal and moral growth) that may influence how they engage in service and their reasons for volunteering (Hill & Hammond, 2023; Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). To further understand trajectories of youth volunteering, the present study drew ideas from social domain theory (Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 2006) and moral self theory (Blasi, 2004) to examine why youth volunteer, how they justify their decisions about volunteering, and how their reasons for volunteering change over time.

Youth Volunteering: Opportunities to Engage and Developmental Benefits

The typical undergraduate student is in a developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood, sometimes called *emerging adulthood,* which is important for personal development, knowledge acquisition, identity exploration, and self-discovery (Arnett, 2016, 2024). During this stage, youth have unique opportunities to engage with their communities through volunteering (Padilla-Walker, 2014). Notably, volunteering is widely encouraged in secondary and post-secondary institutional contexts (Hill & Hammond, 2023). For example, in Ontario, Canada's most populous province, 40 hours of community service is compulsory for high school graduation, and this requirement is intended to encourage youth civic development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). With the transition to university, volunteering typically becomes elective and self-selected (i.e., students choose to engage; Hill & Hammond, 2023; Meyer et al., 2019). University volunteering initiatives encourage volunteer engagement by highlighting opportunities for personal growth, career development, and experiential learning (e.g., co-

curricular record; Elias & Drea, 2013). Many institutions also offer community service learning programs that integrate volunteer-based experiential learning placements with university course material (Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Hill & Hammond, 2023).

Although volunteering is typically defined as an activity that benefits others (Musick & Wilson, 2007), the developmental benefits of youth volunteering have been well-documented. Volunteering in university has been associated with increased well-being and purpose in life, career advancement, social engagement, and the development of lasting moral values (e.g., Bowman et al., 2010; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Okun & Kim, 2016; Padilla-Walker, 2014). These benefits provide evidence to support initiatives designed to encourage volunteering to enhance youth development. However, they do not necessarily reflect why youth choose to volunteer, nor do they explain why youth commit to volunteering over a longer period, especially once the required aspects of community service are removed.

Volunteer Motives and the Functional Perspective

Previous research has explored *why* people choose to volunteer (i.e., reasons or motives for volunteering). Clary et al. (1998) developed the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), which has been a widely used measure to assess volunteer motives (for review, see Chacón et al., 2017). The measure outlines six possible reasons for volunteering: *values* (altruistic and humanitarian concern for others); *understanding* (knowledge acquisition and personal development); *social* (social relationships); *career* (career and professional development); *protective* (protecting the self from negative feelings); and *enhancement* (enhancing positive affect) (Clary et al., 1998; Clary & Snyder, 1995). According to this approach, volunteering can serve different motivational functions for different people, or several functions for the same person (Clary & Snyder, 1995).

Studies examining volunteer motives among university students found that the values

function (e.g., helping others) is a central motive for student engagement (Gage & Thapa, 2012; Moore et al., 2014; Soldavini et al., 2022), and this finding is consistent with research conducted with other age groups and in various contexts (e.g., Brayley et al., 2014; Erasmus & Morey, 2016). However, youth also report volunteering to advance their careers (i.e., career function) and engage in new learning experiences (i.e., understanding function) (Gage & Thapa, 2012; Johnson et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2014). Güntert et al. (2016) examined volunteer motives in a sample of Swiss volunteers and found similarities between the career and understanding functions for younger volunteers, suggesting that these functions may be particularly important for youth who are simultaneously developing their careers and acquiring knowledge.

Research on sustained volunteerism suggests that people are more likely to persist as volunteers if their volunteer experiences fulfill their motives (i.e., volunteer satisfaction; Faletehan et al., 2021; Finkelstein, 2008; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020). However, volunteer motives may also change over the course of a volunteer's experience within an organization (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Furthermore, research on trajectories of volunteering in older adulthood suggests that transitions throughout the life course (e.g., parenthood, retirement) may contribute to changes in volunteer motives (Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018). Previous studies also found a decline in prosocial helping, volunteering, and civic engagement as youth transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). Therefore, exploring not only why youth start to volunteer but also why they continue volunteering over time may improve our understanding of youth volunteering trajectories.

Volunteering as a Moral Behaviour

Perspectives from moral developmental theory may offer further insight into *why* youth choose to volunteer and *how* they justify their decisions about volunteering. However, the fact

that volunteering benefits the volunteer has raised questions about whether volunteering can be considered a "moral" behaviour. Consistent with traditional perspectives that situate volunteering as a *prosocial behaviour* intended to benefit others (e.g., Stukas et al., 2015), some scholars argue that volunteer behaviours should be purely other-oriented or altruistic (i.e., volunteering to help others; see Haski-Leventhal, 2009). This conceptualization would thus seem to exclude many forms of youth volunteering, which may also benefit the personal, social, and moral development of the volunteer. However, other perspectives on volunteering, and moral development more generally, have rejected this strict self and other divide and argue this is an unrealistic expectation for real-life prosocial behaviours, like volunteering (Cornelis et al., 2013; Walker, 2014). In fact, previous studies found that self-oriented reasons for volunteering are associated with sustained volunteer involvement over time (e.g., Cornelis et al., 2013; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). As such, decisions about volunteering, particularly persistent youth volunteering over time, may reflect a coordination of self- and other-oriented motivation.

Social Domain Theory and Decisions to Volunteer

Social domain theory is a moral developmental theory that examines how people justify actions and make decisions based on three domains of social knowledge: *personal* (personal choice and preference)*, social* (social conventions and norms)*,* and *moral* (other-oriented welfare and justice) (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1983, 2006).[3] Despite theoretical distinctions between the domains, social situations are often multifaceted and may involve coordination between two or more domains of reasoning (Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 2006). Drawing on this framework, personal (i.e., self-oriented) and moral (i.e., other-oriented) reasons may be associated with decisions to

[3] Historically, social domain theory research has focused on personal, social, and moral reasoning in children and adolescents. However, a small number of studies have also examined prudential reasoning (i.e., judgments of personal health and safety; e.g., Dahl, 2016 and children's risky behaviours and Chapter 3 of this thesis pertaining to COVID-19). As noted in Chapter 1, other researchers include prudential issues as an aspect of the personal domain.

volunteer. Additionally, this approach captures the possibility of social considerations (e.g., social rules and norms) that may influence volunteering.

Previous studies have examined adolescents' reasoning about hypothetical volunteering scenarios using social domain theory and found that judgments about volunteering involve both personal (or discretionary) and moral (or obligatory) aspects (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Metzger et al., 2019; Metzger & Ferris, 2013). However, few studies have examined real-life volunteering decisions from a social domain theory perspective. The study presented in Chapter 3 used social domain theory to examine youths' real-life volunteering decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic and found that volunteers justified their decisions using personal and moral reasons, while non-volunteers cited personal and prudential reasons. The present study aimed to expand on this previous research by qualitatively examining how current university student volunteers describe and justify their real-life volunteering decisions.

Volunteer Identity Development and the Moral Self Perspective

Recently, a small number of volunteering researchers have examined patterns of volunteer behaviour across the life course (e.g., Hill & Hammond, 2023; Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Niebuur et al., 2022; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). However, less is known about why people persist as volunteers over time. Previously, some researchers have used role identity theory as a framework to understand volunteer persistence (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2005; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Penner, 2002). From this perspective, volunteer experiences may be associated with the development of a *volunteer role identity* (i.e., volunteering becomes important to an individual's identity), which could motivate sustained volunteer engagement (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner, 2002). Much of this research has focused on volunteer identity development in older adulthood, where volunteering is associated

with productivity and purpose in life in the absence of previous roles (e.g., paid employment, parental roles; van Ingen & Wilson, 2017).

However, identity development perspectives may also offer insight into the persistence of youth volunteering and may be particularly relevant given that youth are in a developmental stage important for personal and moral identity development (Arnett, 2024; Padilla-Walker, 2014). The present study examined changes to youth volunteer motives through the lens of Blasi's (1983, 2004) moral self theory, which fits into this larger class of identity development theories. Broadly, theories of moral identity development suggest that moral development occurs as people integrate moral thoughts and actions into their identities (Blasi, 2004; Walker, 2004), and this integration can occur through real-world experiences (Walker, 2014). From this perspective, youths' experiences with volunteering could promote a shift from external sources (e.g., service requirements) toward internally integrated motives as their identity as a volunteer becomes important to their sense of self. This, in turn, may contribute to developing a sense of responsibility (or moral obligation) to act in accordance with these integrated moral values.

Present Study

The present study examined the persistence of volunteering among current undergraduate student volunteers. The primary objective of this study was to gain further insight into students' volunteering trajectories by examining their past and present experiences with volunteering and their reasons for and decisions about volunteering over time. A secondary objective was to explore trajectories of youth volunteering from a moral developmental perspective, drawing on social domain theory and moral self theory. The present study thus examined four questions:

1. What are undergraduate students' past and present experiences with volunteering?
2. What are students' reasons for volunteering, and how do these reasons change over time?

3. How do students justify their decisions about volunteering?
4. How does framing volunteering trajectories from a moral developmental perspective further our understanding of youth volunteering?

Method

Participants

A total of 28 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 20.36; *SD* = 1.98) from a large university in Ontario, Canada, participated in the study. Participants predominately identified as female (*n* = 18; 64.3%) and their year of undergraduate studies ranged from first year to fifth year (first year [*n* = 7; 25.0%]; second year [*n* = 7; 25.0%]; third year [*n* = 9; 32.1%]; fourth year [*n* = 4; 14.3%]; fifth year [*n* = 1; 3.6%]). Participants were enrolled in the faculties of science (*n* = 12; 42.9%), health science (*n* = 10; 35.7%), and arts and social science (*n* = 6; 21.4%). Participants' self-reported ethnicities were coded and categorized according to Statistics Canada's (2021) census classifications and consisted of Asian origins (*n* = 14; 50.0%), European origins (*n* = 8; 28.6%), African origins (*n* = 3; 10.7%), and mixed ethnic origins (*n* = 3; 10.7%).

Timeline of Data Collection

Data collection took place between February and July 2024. Data collection included retrospective questions about past volunteering experiences. While beyond the scope of the present study, the COVID-19 pandemic (beginning in March 2020) may have disrupted aspects of students' volunteering trajectories (see Chapter 3 and Grant et al., 2024). During that period, all students in the present study were not yet enrolled in university.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from introductory undergraduate courses in psychology and communications through a participant recruitment system in which students receive course credit

for research participation (ISPR). Students were eligible to participate in the study if they were currently volunteering with an on- or off-campus organization. Students were given a brief description of the study (see Appendix D) and provided written and verbal informed consent before participating (see Appendix E). Participation in the study consisted of a short online survey (administered via Qualtrics) and a semi-structured interview conducted online via Zoom videoconference (described below). Participants received two points of their course grade from four points allotted for research participation. This study was approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (H-03-23-8944).

Measures

Online Survey

The online survey (see Appendix F) consisted of multiple choice and open-ended questions assessing participants' demographic characteristics, the characteristics of their past and present volunteering experiences (e.g., volunteer organizations, volunteer settings, weekly volunteer hours), and their current volunteer motives (VFI; Clary et al., 1998). All participants completed the survey within 11 minutes (M = 6.30; SD = 1.83). For the present study, we only used information about the participants' demographic characteristics. The characteristics of students' volunteer experiences were explored in depth during the interviews.

Semi-Structured Interview

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix G) consisting of six open-ended questions and a series of follow-up questions to encourage students to provide clear, detailed, and thoughtful responses. During the interviews, students discussed their past and present experiences with volunteering, their reasons for volunteering, and their general understanding and perceptions of volunteering. The average interview length was 35

minutes, with a range from 23 to 58 minutes. Following the interview, an interview summary (adapted from Miles et al., 2014) and reflexive notes (Braun & Clarke, 2022b) were completed by the interviewer to record thoughts immediately following the interview. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim using Zoom transcription, and verified for accuracy.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2022b) six-phase approach to *reflexive thematic analysis*. Thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative research as it offers a flexible and accessible approach to explore, identify, and interpret patterns of meaning in qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022b). The present study incorporated both *inductive* (data-driven) and *deductive* (theory-driven) approaches to thematic analysis, which allowed for an in-depth analysis of students' volunteer experiences described throughout the interviews, alongside an interpretation of these experiences from a moral developmental perspective. The analysis was conducted using an *experiential* qualitative framework, which prioritized the exploration of students' experiences, perspectives, behaviours, and decisions (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, 2022b).

The analysis was led by the first author and was conducted in two stages using NVivo 14 and hard copies of the interview transcripts. The first stage employed an inductive approach and focused on developing initial codes and themes derived directly from the interview data. The first author conducted the semi-structured interviews for this study and thus was actively engaged and deeply familiar with the data prior to beginning the analysis. In the initial coding phase, the first author systematically reviewed the transcripts and assigned descriptive codes (i.e., words or short phrases to summarize content) and *in vivo* codes (i.e., codes using participants' words; Miles et al., 2014) to relevant and meaningful segments of the data relative to the research questions.

Codes with shared meaning were then grouped together to develop initial themes. A thematic map was also created from the initial codes and themes, which allowed us to visualize connections between the themes and identify potential subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2022b).

The second stage of our analysis used a deductive approach and revisited the preliminary themes developed in the first stage through the theoretical lenses of social domain theory and moral self theory. Our purpose during this phase was not to fit the data into predetermined theoretical categories, but to use these moral developmental approaches as a lens to interpret students' volunteer experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). During this phase, we grouped our initial themes based on shared meaning relative to the domains of social domain theory (i.e., personal, social, and moral) and moral self development (i.e., shifting reasons for volunteering over time). We then returned to the dataset to review and refine our candidate themes, ensuring our themes accurately represented students' experiences. Throughout the writing process, themes were named and defined, and illustrative quotes were selected.

Reflexivity

To ensure the quality, credibility, and trustworthiness of this study, the authors engaged in a process of reflexivity throughout the research process. Given their lead role in project development, data collection, and data analysis, the first author engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022b) and recorded analytic memos during data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The authors also have personal experiences as volunteers, alongside experience conducting research on youth volunteering. As such, we discussed how these experiences shaped this research and were mindful of how our experiences, assumptions, and biases could influence data collection and analysis. As the analysis progressed, the authors met weekly to discuss, refine, and revise codes and themes. Preliminary themes were also discussed

with an undergraduate research assistant who was familiar with the dataset but was not involved in the study development or data collection phases.

Findings

Through the reflexive thematic analysis procedures described above, five themes were developed: (a) navigating social expectations and requirements to engage, (b) personal considerations influencing volunteering decisions, (c) moral motives and volunteering to make a difference, (d) evolving motives and perspectives on volunteering, and (e) opportunities for volunteer engagement in a university context. The themes highlight various aspects of students' volunteering experiences, motives, and decisions. Illustrative quotes are presented below.

Theme 1: Navigating Social Expectations and Requirements to Engage

Reflecting on the beginning of their volunteering trajectories, students highlighted how community service requirements and social expectations influenced the way they approached their volunteer engagement, aligning with the social domain. Most students recounted their early experiences with volunteering in the context of formal community service requirements. Many students reported participation in Ontario's mandatory high school community service program (i.e., 40-hours of community service was required for high school graduation). However, several students noted other forms of mandated community service, including in high schools outside of Ontario and in middle schools (within and outside of Ontario). The required nature of these community service requirements placed external pressure on students, and some recalled feeling "scared" and "intimidated" by the requirements: "I remember at the time being really nervous about completing my volunteer requirements. … it seemed like a lot of them [volunteer opportunities] were really high commitment or just very intimidating to get into" (P18). These feelings were reflected in the way that students approached their involvement in community

service to fulfill their requirements. In many cases, students described that they chose activities that were easy to accomplish, familiar, or convenient. For example, students mentioned that their previous involvement with an organization (e.g., as a participant), family connections to the organization (e.g., parent's workplace), and the proximity (or convenience) of the organization's location were among the factors that facilitated their required community service experiences:

> I went to the school [as a student] when I was younger, and because I have a younger sibling, that sibling was just attending every Sunday, and I thought "Why don't I [volunteer]?" You know, it's convenient for me to go to the same place. My parents won't have to drive me to two different places. (P1)

Students also described the social aspects of their early volunteer experiences and expressed that volunteering was more enjoyable when they could also spend time with their friends: "My friends were there too, so it was fun for us to go and do all this [volunteering] together" (P8). The opportunity to participate with their friends seemed to make students feel more comfortable volunteering and helped to ease some of the uncertainty about completing their requirements.

Community service requirements did not only occur in the context of formal education. Some students described that they were required to engage in community service as part of their extracurricular activities, and these requirements served as a catalyst for their involvement. For example, one student described their role as a young volunteer in their martial arts club:

> I was put in martial arts as a kid, and in order to move on [to the next belt] we had to assist class and help kids, like a younger age group. … basically, to get your next belt, it wasn't only if you were good at the techniques, or if you could scream or punch the hardest, it was also, can you sacrifice your time on a weekend, for example, and do a class with someone else? … Can you pass on what you know and assist the class? (P15)

Students also described informal expectations to participate in the community which contributed to their early volunteer behaviours. Some students explained that their parent's expectations or their teacher's encouragement influenced their decision to volunteer. For example, one student spoke about their mother's involvement in their extracurricular skating club, which led to an expectation that they would volunteer at the club once they were old enough:

> My mom was on the [skating club] council, so it's kind of just also expected from me, because she was like, you know, "I'm doing this for you, like you can give back the hour that it takes to do the learn to skate [lessons]". (P5)

Some students expressed that the community service requirement encouraged their future volunteering. While their initial motives for engagement were largely centered around completing mandatory requirements or satisfying informal expectations, students shared that they were inspired to seek new volunteer opportunities once their obligations were fulfilled. For instance, one student explained that they were interested in volunteering at the hospital; however, they chose to start by volunteering at a local community event to fulfill their requirements and build their "confidence" before pursuing a volunteer placement at the hospital:

> When I saw that I could handle it [volunteering], I thought, why not? Because the only thing that [was] keeping me from doing anything was kind of fear … I thought that going to the hospital, I was going to be given so many huge responsibilities and I felt so small in a big world … But once I dipped my toes in the idea of volunteering, I thought that it was something I could handle, and I could handle it in a hospital. (P10)

Thus, although community service requirements encouraged students to start volunteering, many did not commit to these activities long-term. Most students acknowledged that their required experiences with volunteering were short-lived (i.e., lasting a few weeks or months), and they

moved on to pursue new opportunities once their requirements were fulfilled.

Theme 2: Personal Considerations Influencing Volunteering Decisions

Throughout the interviews, students described reasons for volunteering centered around participating in volunteer activities that were meaningful and beneficial for themselves. Aligning with the personal domain, this theme highlights self-oriented aspects of volunteering related to students' personal goals, interests, and choices of volunteer activity. Within this theme, two subthemes were identified: (a) enhancing academic and career development, and (b) pursuing personal interests and enjoyment.

Theme 2.1: Enhancing Academic and Career Development

Students highlighted the benefits of volunteering for their academic and career development, and for many this was a central motive for their involvement. Through their volunteer experiences, students explored their career interests, gained insight into different career paths, and experienced professional work environments. Some students chose to volunteer to explore whether a career path they were interested in would be a good fit: "I really want to see if I'm suited to pursue any type of career in any healthcare profession" (P1). Others reported they were uncertain about their career interests and used volunteering as an opportunity to explore different avenues. For example, one student described that their volunteer experience confirmed they were not interested in pursuing a career at the hospital:

> I find it [volunteering] definitely has guided me a bit. … I don't think I could work in a hospital. I just think it is a really challenging environment and can be a bit sad at times … I definitely think [volunteering] has helped me kind of navigate a little bit. I'm still not exactly sure what I want to do post grad, but it's definitely been a valuable experience to learn what the different career options are in healthcare. (P23)

Another student articulated that volunteering provides a safe environment to learn and make mistakes. This perspective frames volunteering as position with lower stakes and less pressure, which offers opportunities for students to develop and gain experience in work environments:

> Everybody makes mistakes, and when you start off you can't be perfect. I feel like if you're volunteering, people aren't expecting as much from you as if you're actually working … I think making the mistakes when people aren't actually expecting that much from you is easier with less impact than if you actually have a job and you're getting paid and you making mistakes with the fear of getting fired. … it's a healthy and safe place to grow. … when you do start your job, you're ready, you're prepared. (P10)

Students also reported that their volunteer experiences were supporting their academic and professional goals (e.g., future graduate studies and paid employment). Through volunteering, students described opportunities for networking, building professional connections, and getting their "foot in the door" in their field of interest:

> [Volunteering] allows me to network with different people, communicate and just build different connections … throughout all these different [volunteer] experiences I've learned different things, and been able to network and meet a bunch of people that have opened doors for me in other volunteering positions, or paid positions. (P25)

Similarly, many students emphasized the benefits of volunteering for enhancing their resumes: "If I should be 100% honest, it's a great thing to put on my resume and a great experience to gain for medical school" (P11). Students also noted that they wanted to develop technical skills and acquire hands-on work experience, with the overall goal of enhancing their employability. For some students, these motives were associated with feelings of internal pressure related to accumulating relevant volunteer experiences to improve their chances of achieving their

academic or professional goals. For example, one student spoke about a "checklist" they had developed to help them achieve their goal of attending medical school:

> [At] the start of my university career I was like, "Okay, I need to rack up as much [volunteer experience] as I can." … I guess it was kind of like a mental checklist I had. I need to get this many volunteer things for my [medical school] application to make myself competitive. (P13)

Further, although not an initial reason for volunteering, students also noted the benefits of volunteering for the development of their soft skills (e.g., communication, problem-solving, teamwork) and expressed that these skills were valuable for their personal and professional lives.

Theme 2.2: Pursuing Personal Interests and Enjoyment

While discussing their volunteering decisions, students described the importance of choosing volunteer activities that aligned with their personal interests. For some students, these considerations were associated with being a "good volunteer". From this perspective, students highlighted that they wanted to engage in volunteer activities they were genuinely interested in:

> I won't go into something that I don't have a genuine interest in. … I'm not the type of person to go into something that I'm not passionate about, because I'm not able to give my all for something that doesn't interest me. (P25)

Many students reported that they stopped their past volunteering experiences because they were not truly interested in the activity or organization. For example, one student explained that, when a new volunteer opportunity arose, they chose to end their role as a volunteer at their mother's school because it did not align with their personal interests:

> I wasn't really interested, like I don't want to be a teacher … it wasn't something I was super passionate about, it was just something that I can do on the side. … [so] when I got

> a job or I got busy with life or [I] found another volunteer opportunity that [was] more in my pathway, I kind of jumped to that. (P12)

For some students, the organization's mission statement was important for determining whether their interests aligned with the organization and served to inform their decision to pursue a volunteer opportunity: "I think reading volunteering missions can kind of be a make-or-break moment for me. Like, maybe I want to do it [volunteer at the organization], maybe I don't actually want to do that ever" (P27). Similarly, another student noted they would stop volunteering if the organization began to deviate from their mission statement:

> If the mission of the volunteering strays away from the path as originally intended, for example, if a volunteer organization has a certain mandate, and I see that there is an abuse of that mandate, then that's something that I would consider valid as execution of [my] volunteering, and I wouldn't continue with that. … that would be grounds for me to stop volunteering. (P19)

Other students noted their volunteering was closely aligned with their cultural or religious interests. One student spoke about their religious beliefs as a primary motivator for their commitment to volunteering with their church: "My main reason [for volunteering] is just because I love Jesus and I'm ready to do whatever the Bible states, like helping others, loving others, accepting others" (P11). Likewise, another student described how their role as a volunteer dance teacher contributed to strengthening their connection to their culture:

> I'm also very, very passionate about my culture. So, I really like to stay connected to my roots, and who I am. … I think maybe one thing that just got a little bit more amplified [through volunteering] was the whole cultural aspect. (P1)

Alongside personal interests, students also emphasized the importance of enjoyment, and

expressed that they could not be effective volunteers if they did not enjoy their volunteer work:

> I think what's most important is that you actually enjoy doing what you're volunteering with, and I think that's why I kept going for all my volunteering experiences … if you don't enjoy volunteering, then you're not going to do a good job in it, and you're not actually going to help the people that you're supposed to be helping. (P6)

Similarly, while discussing possible reasons to stop volunteering, another student expressed that they would discontinue their volunteer involvement if they were not enjoying their experience:

> If I feel like I'm having a bad experience or feel like I'm not enjoying my time [at the organization], I'm not going to force myself to do it, because remember how I said before I think volunteers are happy to be there, if I'm not embodying that, then I don't think I should be there, because I'm not showing them what I think is a real volunteer. (P13)

This subtheme highlights how students navigated personal aspects of their volunteering decisions while also striving to be good volunteers and make meaningful contributions to the community.

Theme 3: Moral Motives and Volunteering to Make a Difference

Reflecting on their reasons for volunteering, students expressed other-oriented motives related to helping others and contributing to their communities in a meaningful way, aligning with the moral domain. Throughout the interviews, students highlighted their desire to give back to specific organizations or groups of people in their communities. One student described a gap in their childhood education experience and chose to volunteer with an education-oriented non-profit organization to support knowledge development for future generations of young children:

> I want to make a difference. … I kind of see myself through the children because most of the children that I taught [are] young girls who [were] left behind by their parents, and I was one of them when I was really young. … I was hoping I [could] have someone who

> [could] teach me all of that when I [was] a child. … I didn't have that when I was young, so I'm going to be the one who is teaching the other generation of young children. (P7)

Similarly, students recalled their experiences as a recipient of volunteer work, and, in turn, described that they wanted to help others in similar situations. One student shared the profound impact that volunteers had on their personal life and expressed that this experience motivated their involvement as a volunteer at the same social service non-profit organization:

> [My reason for volunteering] was to help people in a situation that I could deeply understand. … some of the experiences that I had with volunteers helping me have stuck with me for over five years. It still can like choke me up if I'm thinking about how helpful they were. … I want to do that for people. (P22)

Students also described feeling less motivated to volunteer when they believed their efforts were not helping others or contributing in a meaningful way. For instance, while describing their role as a volunteer at an academic conference, one student expressed: "[The volunteer role] was very basic. … I [was] kind of just there, like they could have definitely done it without me" (P24). A similar sentiment was conveyed by another student who explained that they left their previous volunteer organization when it felt like they were no longer making a difference:

> With [my] previous organization, when it stopped being about making change and became about interpersonal issues and trying to wrangle people together to get anything done … when the job stops being what you signed up for and starts like struggling just to get anything done, that's kind of my sign that like this isn't the space for me and I can probably make more change and have a more fulfilling experience somewhere else. (P18)

Feelings of accomplishment were also associated with students' persistent volunteer involvement. Students described that they were reinforced by the opportunity to witness the

positive impact of their volunteer work. In this context, seeing the tangible results of their contributions made volunteering feel more meaningful, and thus encouraged their continued involvement: “I just love the results that come back from helping out these students. … it helps to see the results of my hard work … it definitely motivates me” (P25). Recognizing their contributions were making a difference in their communities made volunteers feel good about themselves, which also seemed to support their sustained volunteer engagement:

> It also felt kind of good to know that what I was actually making was going to somebody who needed it, and I think that’s a different feeling when you can actually see what you’re doing is making a difference. Because we’d see pictures of people who would take the [menstrual] kits to girls around the world, and them holding them, taking pictures. … I did feel good about myself, and I felt like I was kind of making a difference. Even though it’s a small difference, I felt like I was helping some girls who really needed it, and so that’s why I continue doing it. (P28)

These reflections highlight some integration and coordination of other-oriented and self-oriented reasons for volunteering and suggests that both may be important aspects of students’ decisions.

Theme 4: Evolving Motives and Perspectives on Volunteering

During the interviews, students described how their reasons for volunteering and their perceptions of volunteering more generally have changed throughout their experiences as a volunteer. Students noted their initial reasons for volunteering were primarily centered around fulfilling community service requirements: “I didn’t really have any reasons in high school other than getting volunteer hours” (P21). However, as they moved away from the mandatory aspects of community service, students expressed that they started to see volunteering in a new way:

> At the time I always felt like volunteering … whenever somebody volunteers, it’s always

> school, it's always something mandatory, it's never something that they want to do. So, when [I] started volunteering, I always thought, "Okay, you have to just do it. Just get these hours and then that's it, you don't have to volunteer ever again". Whereas I think, as I started volunteering more at other places, it kind of help[ed] me see how compassionate people are, how people are willing to dedicate their own time to help other people. (P27)

As their understanding of volunteering began to shift, students described that volunteering became something they wanted to do, rather than something they were required to do:

> As I was more engaged, and the more time I spent [volunteering] I realized that this is something I really do enjoy doing. … slowly but surely, it started converting more from a need to a want, and I really hope that continues throughout my experience. (P13)

While many students acknowledged their initial motives for volunteering were self-oriented, associated with fulfilling requirements or gaining career-related experience, over time, students highlighted that they began to recognize the broader impact of volunteering on others:

> I think in high school I didn't really care as much about issues around the world, and I just kind of did it for the credits. But the more I did it [volunteering], and the more I actually saw how much it was helping and how much these [underprivileged] girls needed this kind of help, it made me really want to do it more. (P28)

These reflections illustrate how students' reasons for volunteering started to change as they acquired more experience as a volunteer. Similarly, another student articulated that their motives for volunteering shifted from self-oriented reasons towards other-oriented reasons:

> It started for more personal reasons … and then kind of transitioned to, instead of internal reasons, to external reasons. Like, I like helping other people, not because of how it makes me feel about myself, but because I know I'm doing good in the world, because I

> know I'm contributing something that matters. If it's an 8-hour shift, yeah, I could spend eight hours cleaning my house or doing laundry or watching TV, or I could spend eight hours and do something that legitimately makes a difference to someone's life where they remember it 20 years later. And not because that makes me feel good, but because that person feels good. I definitely shifted from an "internal-personal-me" reason to an "other-community-bigger-picture" reason over time. (P22)

Alongside their evolving volunteer motives, students also described changes to their perceptions of volunteering on a broader level. One student explained that their volunteer experiences provided an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of volunteering:

> After my first [volunteer] service trip, I really saw the real impact of volunteerism … being able to see [volunteering] in an international context, a context that I guess extended beyond myself, I got to really appreciate what volunteering meant. (P19)

As volunteers, students contributed to local and global initiatives which challenged their perspectives, opened their eyes to other people's struggles, and exposed them to diverse communities. These experiences broadened their horizons, encouraged perspective-taking, and allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of the world and their role within it:

> I came from a pretty privileged situation, and like a decent household, and our town was small, but very kind of separated by areas, so I had never really been to the areas that were not as privileged as where I was from. … it was something I had never really thought about … [volunteering] at a young age, gave me a bit more perspective, like expanded my world a bit to be like, not everyone lives like I do, and kind of cracked that sheltered area a little bit, and then every time I volunteered it expanded a bit more. (P22)

Students also described how their volunteer experiences provided opportunities for personal

growth which contributed to strengthening their understanding of themselves. For example, one student noted that volunteering allowed them to identify their personal strengths:

> I believe [volunteering] is definitely important because, not just for doing good for the community, that is important, but it's important for yourself. It helps you to grow so much as a person, like just to realize how much your work, your efforts are affecting others around you. [Volunteering] just teaches you so much about yourself and your own skills. … I have definitely understood my best skills, where I'm good at something and where I'm not as good. (P2)

By developing a deeper understanding of themselves, students mentioned that they became more confident in their ability to make meaningful contributions to their communities:

> Through these [volunteer] experiences, I've learnt a little bit, like I'm still in this learning process anyways, but I've learned a little bit about where my interests lie, what I am passionate about, what I want to do, how I want to help people, how I want to like impact the world, I guess you can say, or the communities I'm working with, for the better. (P12)

These reflections highlight that students felt they were learning about themselves and the world through volunteering, which suggests that youth volunteer engagement may offer opportunities for personal growth, understanding, and self-discovery.

Theme 5: Opportunities for Volunteer Engagement in a University Context

While describing their recent and ongoing volunteering in university, students highlighted how the institution and their role as undergraduate students contributed to their volunteer engagement. For most students the transition to elective volunteering occurred when the required aspects of volunteering were removed, which coincided with the transition to university. This transition offered opportunities for students to choose to volunteer, which changed the way they

approached volunteering (i.e., as a choice rather than a requirement). Many students embraced volunteer opportunities facilitated by the university: “I feel like there’s so many things going on at the university … I don’t want to not [sic] participate in anything” (P26). Within the university, students were volunteering with research laboratories, extracurricular clubs, student committees, and student support initiatives (e.g., mentoring, tutoring). Several students also participated in the university’s community service learning (CSL) program:

> It was a volunteer placement given through my school as a replacement for a laboratory for one of my genetics classes. … the laboratory [grade] was replaced by my performance [at the volunteer placement] and I had to write about three essays about my [volunteer] experience … but I liked [my volunteer placement] so much that I actually extended, so I’m going to continue doing that as well. (P13)

The university context also offered connections to organizations that were not affiliated with the institution. Students were exposed to external volunteer opportunities through their university courses (e.g., through professors or guest speakers) or their friend’s recommendations and chose to contact the organizations to pursue those opportunities further. One student noted they heard about their volunteer placement at a local hospital while attending a career fair at the university:

> There was a career fair where [hospital name redacted] showed up. I was looking through everything, and I realized this is all for master’s students, they don’t want undergrads. But I was talking to the coordinator at the [hospital] booth, and she was like “There [are] volunteer options”, and I was like, “Alright, I’ll check it out”. (P4)

While the institution encouraged students to volunteer and provided resources to facilitate involvement, students recognized they were making intentional choices to volunteer, and they could choose to stop or restart volunteering at different points throughout their university careers.

Despite the opportunities for elective volunteering, students also described challenges associated with volunteering in university. Undergraduate students are balancing volunteering with commitments in other aspects of their lives, including coursework, paid employment, extracurriculars, and social relationships. These commitments influenced the time that students had available for volunteering, and these time constraints were described as an important consideration for many students' decisions to volunteer:

> It's been really hard with the two full time [degrees], and then I also work part time, so like to fit in volunteering in there, even if it's just three hours a week … it's hard to finagle it and find the energy to [volunteer] after like very long days. (P4)

In this context, students noted that flexibility at the volunteer organization, for example, supervisors that offered reduced hours during exam periods, facilitated their ability to commit to volunteering. Similarly, students described that a consistent schedule (e.g., three hours per week) and choosing volunteer activities that were located nearby (i.e., did not require a long commute) made it easier to fit volunteering into their lives. Another student explained that although volunteering in university is a time commitment, surrounding themselves with a supportive network helped make volunteering easier:

> University is already hard to balance with like a social life, with your school life, with your work life, and on top of that, adding a volunteer position can be overwhelming. But with the right support, with the right people that are understanding and there to support you, I think it's definitely made [volunteering] a lot easier. (P14)

Alternatively, although less common, a few students described that the transition to university offered more free time for volunteering compared to their high school experiences:

> I find [volunteering] easier now. I feel like because [in] university there's a flexibility to

> have your own schedule, I don't have as many commitments. … [in high school] I was constantly working, and it was stressful … now, it's great, I have a lot of free time. (P1)

These statements situate university students in a unique developmental period, and emphasizes how society, in this case the university, can encourage and create opportunities for students to volunteer. However, university students are also managing volunteer engagement alongside other personal and academic commitments, which are considered in their volunteering decisions.

Discussion

To better understand trajectories of youth volunteering, this qualitative study examined undergraduate students' lived experiences with and reasons for volunteering. In the present study, students' volunteer motives were largely aligned with motives identified in previous volunteering research and reflected both self- and other-oriented reasons for volunteering (e.g., Cornelis et al., 2013; Stukas et al., 2016; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). This study also used perspectives from moral developmental theory as a lens to examine how students justified their decisions about volunteering and explore how their reasons for volunteering may have changed over time. Consistent with prior social domain theory research (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Metzger et al., 2019), students justified their decisions to volunteer using personal and moral justifications. Unlike previous research, students also reported social reasons for volunteering. Students also described changes to their volunteer motives over the course of their volunteering trajectories, and their evolving perspectives on volunteering were reflected in their decisions, a finding framed from a moral self theory perspective. These findings extend previous volunteering and moral developmental research and suggest that students may develop *through* service.

Understanding Volunteer Motives from a Functional Perspective

Overall, students reported reasons for volunteering that largely aligned with the functions

of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI; Clary et al., 1998). Consistent with previous research that examined volunteer motives among university students (e.g., Gage & Thapa, 2012; Moore et al., 2014), students in the present study reported they were motivated to volunteer to help others (aligning with the values function) and advance their careers (aligning with the career function). Students also described how influential members of their social networks (e.g., friends, family, teachers) encouraged and supported their volunteering (aligning with the social function). Although not framed as an initial motive for volunteering, students in the present study noted their volunteer experiences contributed to feelings of personal fulfillment (aligning with the enhancement function), which was also associated with their decision to persist as a volunteer (i.e., sustained volunteerism). Previous research found that the understanding function is an important motive for youth volunteering (e.g., Güntert et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2014). While students in the present study noted their volunteer experiences offered new learning opportunities and contributed to their personal growth, these aspects were framed as a positive outcome or benefit of their volunteering, rather than factors that motivated their initial involvement. The protective function was not prominent in the present study.

These findings may reflect that the present study qualitatively examined students' reasons for volunteering and explored how these reasons may have changed over time. While previous quantitative studies examining initial motives for volunteering have been widespread, a qualitative approach offers insight into how students' reasons for volunteering may evolve over the course of their volunteering trajectories. For students in the present study, the findings suggest that values, career, and social motives may have been important at the beginning of their volunteering trajectories, while aspects of the enhancement and understanding functions were reflected in their decisions to persist as volunteers. Future research could employ a longitudinal

approach to examine changes in volunteer motives over a longer term (see limitations).

Social Domain Theory and Personal, Social, and Moral Reasons to Volunteer

A social domain theory perspective offers further insight into *how* youth justify their decisions about volunteering. In the present study, students' volunteer experiences occurred within in a social context, and, aligning with the social domain, were often governed by external social factors (e.g., requirements and expectations). For many students, their volunteering trajectories began due to community service requirements or expectations imposed by educational institutions (e.g., mandatory service), extracurricular organizations, or authority figures (e.g., parents or teachers). Research on the effectiveness of mandatory community service initiatives suggests service requirements can both encourage and discourage future volunteering (e.g., Henderson et al., 2019; Pancer et al., 2007; Warburton & Smith, 2003). In the present study, although service requirements did not deter future engagement, they did influence the way students chose to engage (i.e., by choosing familiar or convenient short-term volunteer activities). With the transition to university, volunteering became elective (Hill & Hammond, 2023). In this context, institutional conventions (i.e., volunteering that is endorsed, supported, and recognized by the university) encouraged students to volunteer. Historically, the social domain has received less attention in social domain theory research on volunteering, which has largely focused on personal and moral judgments about hypothetical volunteer behaviours (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). The presence of social reasoning in the present study may reflect that we asked youth about their real-life decisions, which may elicit different facets of their volunteering decisions.

Previous social domain theory research situates volunteering as a matter of personal choice, framed within the personal domain (Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009).

In the present study, personal motives were important elements of students' decisions to volunteer, and these findings are consistent with self-oriented motives described in the volunteering literature (e.g., Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). A prominent personal motive for many students was career-related, centered around volunteering to explore their careers, develop skills, build professional connections, and enhance their resumes. Unlike previous studies that suggest career and academic goals may compete with community service goals (e.g., Bowman et al., 2010), students in the present study specified that their career goals encouraged their volunteer involvement. From this perspective, volunteering could be framed as a form of *apprenticeship* (see Lancy, 2018) or *unpaid internship* (see Allan, 2019), whereby students are using volunteering as an avenue to gain real-world work experience. Additionally, although youth obtain career-related external rewards from volunteering (e.g., career advancement), Güntert et al. (2016) found that volunteers did not perceive these career benefits as a form of external control on their decisions to volunteer (i.e., volunteering was still perceived as elective).

Students also chose volunteer activities that aligned with their personal interests. In the present study, students described that personal alignment with their volunteer activities made them better volunteers, suggesting that youth may be more effective volunteers when they feel personally connected to their work. Dawes and Larson (2011) examined motivational change in youth development programs and found that youth who developed a personal connection to the organization were more motivated to continue their engagement. Personal connections also made volunteering more enjoyable. Allison et al. (2002) assessed motives for episodic volunteering and identified enjoyment as a motive that was not captured by the VFI. In the present study, students described that interest and enjoyment contributed to their overall satisfaction with their volunteer work, and this was an important aspect of their decision to continue volunteering, a

finding that aligns with research on volunteer retention (Hyde et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2017).

Similar to past research on the moral domain (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020), students in the present study recognized the moral and other-oriented aspects of volunteering and reported they were motivated to volunteer to make a difference in the lives of others. This conceptualization of volunteering is in line with the literature that frames volunteering as an other-oriented, prosocial, and altruistic behaviour (Stukas et al., 2015). However, in the present study, moral reasons for volunteering were closely intertwined with students' personal reasons. Alongside volunteering to help others, students described personal benefits of volunteering that included personal growth, professional development, and social engagement. Previous research suggests that volunteers who perceive their contributions as meaningful and worthwhile for themselves and others are more likely to persist as volunteers over time (Faletehan et al., 2021; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Further, the positive feelings youth experience from helping others may also be associated with future prosocial engagement (Hartmann et al., 2017).

From a moral development perspective, Frimer and Walker (2009) proposed that the reconciliation and integration of personal and moral goals may be associated with prosocial and moral action. Similarly, previous volunteering research found that the satisfaction of volunteers' personal and moral goals was related to committed volunteer engagement (Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Penner, 2002). The present study's qualitative approach offers further insight into youth volunteering by illustrating how students integrate both personal and moral considerations in their real-life decisions about volunteering.

Evolving Volunteer Motives and Moral Development Through Volunteering

Previous research on volunteering trajectories suggests that youth volunteer behaviours may change over time (e.g., Hill & Hammond, 2023; Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022;

Wray-Lake et al., 2017) and these changes may also extend to their reasons for volunteering (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). In the present study, students recounted that their volunteer trajectories began due to external influences (e.g., service requirements, career benefits). Once volunteering became elective (e.g., through the transition to university; Hill & Hammond, 2023), students described intentional decisions to volunteer, which, as discussed, involved a coordination of personal and moral considerations. Drawing on Blasi's (1983, 2004) moral self framework, students may be moving away from external reasons for volunteering towards more internally integrated moral motives as they begin to internalize a deeper understanding of the meaning of volunteering and their impact on others. Although far less developed empirically, these findings indicate that perspectives from moral identity development may be useful for examining how moral motivation changes through real-world experiences (Walker, 2014) and suggests that students' moral identities may be developing *through* their volunteer experiences.

Exploring changes to youths' volunteer motives also contributes to furthering our understanding of students' volunteering from a social domain theory perspective. This study highlights how students' initial reasons for volunteering may feature social (e.g., social rules) or personal (e.g., enhancing one's CV) justifications, while their reasons for continued volunteering highlight moral justifications (e.g., other-oriented welfare). However, it is also possible for students to start volunteering for moral reasons and continue for personal reasons (e.g., personal fulfillment; Gage & Thapa, 2012). Developmentally, these findings suggest students' domain-based reasons for volunteering may change over the course of their volunteering trajectories. Although largely beyond the scope of the present study, social domain theory has been criticized for its lack of developmental framework, despite its roots in moral developmental psychology (for review, see Lourenço, 2014). In general, research on moral development, including social

domain theory, has examined reasoning in hypothetical rather than real-life contexts (Walker, 2014). Therefore, the changes in students' reasoning observed in the present study may reflect the complexities of real-life personal, social, and moral reasoning.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings from this study offer theoretical contributions to the volunteering and moral development literatures. While the VFI has been widely used in quantitative studies examining volunteer motives (see Chacón et al., 2017), the qualitative approach of this study illustrated how functional motives for volunteering may arise during an interview and also identified interest and enjoyment as important aspects of students' volunteering decisions. This study also offers further insight into how youths' volunteer motives may change over time, notably how their initial motives for volunteering may differ from their reasons for persistent volunteer engagement. These findings provide evidence to support the functional motives identified by the VFI, while also illustrating how a qualitative approach may allow for further insight into youth decision-making over the course of their volunteering trajectories.

The present study contributes to the moral development literature by integrating social domain theory and moral self theory. To our knowledge, this study is the first to integrate these two largely compatible yet historically distinct theories of moral development and apply them to examine trajectories of youth volunteering. Historically, moral developmental research, including social domain theory research, has focused on examining reasoning about hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Walker, 2014). The present study extended this research by examining students' reasoning about their real-life volunteer behaviours. Furthermore, the qualitative approach of this study illustrated how youth coordinate and integrate personal, social, and moral reasons for volunteering. Although the moral self perspective is less common in

empirical research, this study highlights how this approach may be useful for understanding how moral identity development may occur through prosocial engagement.

The findings also have practical implications for volunteer promotion initiatives. Most students' volunteering trajectories began due to mandatory service requirements, which supports the program's goal of encouraging youth to engage with their communities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). Students also participated in volunteer activities facilitated by the university, and this provides rationale for maintaining the accessibility and availability of these opportunities. Understanding why youth start volunteering, but also why they continue to volunteer, could contribute to the development of volunteer opportunities that align the goals and interests of undergraduate student populations. Students in the present study noted that their volunteer organizations played a role in supporting and facilitating their volunteering (e.g., through scheduling flexibility), which was associated with their satisfaction and commitment to volunteering (Faletehan et al., 2021; Penner, 2002). These findings may be of particular interest to organizations who depend on youth volunteers to function (e.g., non-profit organizations).

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study had several limitations. To examine students' volunteering trajectories, data collection relied on students' retrospective recollections of their past volunteering. Some students' first volunteer experiences occurred many years prior to the study and thus their recollections of their reasons for volunteering may have been incomplete. Furthermore, discussions of moral and prosocial behaviour may be prone to social desirability biases (Metzger & Ferris, 2013). Future research should consider using a longitudinal approach to examine real-time volunteer motives and how these motives evolve over the course of youths' volunteering trajectories. The present study also did not examine the characteristics of students' volunteer

experiences (e.g., organizations, length of service) and their influence on volunteering decisions, which would be an interesting avenue for future studies.

The themes identified in the present study are based on data collected from a sample of predominately female undergraduate students enrolled in the faculties of science and health science from one university in Ontario, Canada. Many students in our sample expressed an interest in pursuing healthcare professions (e.g., medical school), which may have influenced their experiences, motives, and perspectives on volunteering. Therefore, future research could examine volunteer experiences in different youth populations (within and outside post-secondary institutional contexts) to develop a deeper understanding of youth volunteering trajectories.

Conclusion

The present study contributed to the literature on volunteering trajectories by examining the persistence of youth volunteering, notably how and why youth volunteer over time. The qualitative findings highlight how personal interests, social contexts, moral motives, and students' evolving understanding of the meaning of volunteering contributed to shaping their volunteer behaviours and decisions. In integrating social domain theory and moral self theory, this study illustrates how youth coordinate personal, social, and moral considerations when making decisions about volunteering and how moral identity development may occur through volunteer engagement. Beyond the theoretical implications of this research, the findings also offer insight into the impact of community service initiatives for fostering youth engagement.

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Chapter 5:

Youth Volunteering Trajectories Through Transitions: Compulsory Community Service, Institutional Transitions, and the COVID-19 Interruption

Author Note

Although this chapter is written in a manuscript style, it is intended only for inclusion in this PhD thesis and will not be submitted for publication. As described in the preface, the study presented here on mandatory community service was impacted and ultimately interrupted by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collected before and in the seven months following the outbreak is reframed in this chapter as a means to examine the volunteer trajectory model and explore themes surrounding students' experiences with mandatory community service.

Abstract

School-based mandatory community service initiatives are intended to foster civic development by encouraging youth to engage in their communities; however, the effectiveness of these initiatives and their influence on trajectories of youth volunteering remains unclear. This chapter describes a project that intended to examine undergraduate students' retrospective experiences with Ontario's high school community service requirement and their transitions to elective volunteering in university. However, due to the onset of COVID-19, the study was reframed as a means to explore youths' volunteering trajectories, their experiences with mandated service, and the impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering. A sample of 25 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 18.60; 88% female) from a large Ontario university participated in a semi-structured interview about their past and present volunteering. Using a trajectory perspective, this study found that many students emerged or persisted as volunteers in high school, and many persisted as volunteers in university. However, several students also stopped volunteering after high school and following the onset of the pandemic. Using inductive reflexive thematic analysis, we identified four themes highlighting the benefits and challenges of students' experiences with mandatory community service and two themes reflecting disruptions to and opportunities for volunteering during the height of the pandemic. This research offers insight into volunteering trajectories through institutional transitions, the qualities of students' experiences with compulsory community service, and youth volunteering during the pandemic. This research could also contribute to informing policies intended to encourage youth engagement.

Keywords: mandatory community service, volunteering, trajectories, youth, COVID-19

Introduction

Many sectors of society have introduced community service initiatives designed to encourage youth civic development by providing opportunities for youth to contribute to and engage in their communities. At post-secondary institutions (e.g., colleges and universities), these initiatives are typically structured around elective and student-selected volunteering (i.e., students choose to engage; Hill & Hammond, 2023; Meyer et al., 2019). However, community service can also be made compulsory, and Ontario, Canada's most populous province, was one of the first North American jurisdictions to introduce mandatory community service at the high school level. Several studies have examined the impact of service requirements for youth development and future civic and community engagement; however, the evidence remains unclear (e.g., Henderson et al., 2014, 2019; Kim & Morgül, 2017; Yang, 2017). Therefore, the initial purpose of this study was to explore the qualities of youths' experiences with mandatory service in high school and their transitions to elective volunteering in university.

However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on the mandatory community service program being explored and also interrupted the data collection for this study. In fact, Ontario's community involvement requirement was waived for high school students graduating in the 2019-20 school year and reduced for students graduating in 2020-21 and 2021-22 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021). Given these disruptions and the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, the study presented in this chapter was reframed as an opportunity to examine institutional transitions through the lens of the *volunteer trajectory model* (described in Chapter 2) and explore students' retrospective experiences with mandatory community service. Building on the findings from Chapter 3, this study also unexpectedly explored the, perhaps historical, impact of the pandemic on youth volunteering.

The Impact of Service Requirements: Volunteering Trajectories and Experience Quality

As described in Chapter 1, in 1999, the Ontario provincial government implemented a 40-hour community involvement requirement in high schools across the province, with the goal of fostering youth civic development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). Previously, researchers have explored whether mandated community service initiatives, in Ontario and elsewhere, are effective for encouraging youth volunteering. In the years following its introduction, several studies examined the impact of the Ontario requirement, many of which focused on the high school graduating class of 2003 (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007, 2012, 2014, 2019; Padanyi et al., 2010; Pancer et al., 2007). This cohort of students was unique as it was comprised of the first group to complete the requirement and the final group that was not required to engage in service. Henderson et al. (2007) compared these cohorts upon entry to university, and, while the mandated cohort reported a higher frequency of high school volunteering, both groups shared positive attitudes towards volunteering. In a follow-up study, Henderson et al. (2014) interviewed 100 undergraduate students about their experiences with the Ontario requirement and found that many students spoke favourably of their experiences and of the requirement itself. Outside of Ontario, Metz and Youniss (2003, 2005) conducted a longitudinal study with a sample of American high school students and found that mandated service was positively associated with students' intentions to engage in future volunteering.

In contrast, findings from other empirical studies suggest that mandatory community service initiatives may be ineffective, or even counterproductive (e.g., Kim & Morgül, 2017; Stukas et al., 1999; Warburton & Smith, 2003; Yang, 2017). Warburton and Smith (2003) qualitatively explored Australian adolescents' and adults' perceptions of their experiences with compulsory community-based engagement. This study found that compulsory initiatives remove

opportunities for agency and choice, which made some participants feel frustrated and less inclined to engage. Four years after high school graduation, Henderson et al. (2019) compared the community engagement of mandated and non-mandated students from a mid-sized Ontario university. Findings indicated that while participation in mandatory service did not seem to have a negative impact on volunteering, it also did not increase the likelihood of future volunteering. Similarly, other studies found that persistent volunteering is more likely when past service experiences are voluntary, rather than required (Kim & Morgül, 2017; Stukas et al., 1999).

Other evidence suggests it is not the mandatory nature of service, but rather the quality of one's service experiences that is related to persistent volunteering and the long-term benefits of community engagement (Gallant et al., 2010; Taylor & Pancer, 2007). Engaging in activities that are perceived as both meaningful for the community and beneficial for the volunteer have been associated with more positive evaluations of service experience and intentions to engage in future volunteering (Henderson et al., 2014; Pancer et al., 2007). Others have found that sustained service over time (e.g., long-term commitment to an organization) is an important aspect of overall experience quality (Henderson et al., 2007, 2012; Padanyi et al., 2010). These findings suggest meaningful and sustained mandated service experiences may be more likely to encourage volunteering after high school and contribute to personal and civic development.

Positive community service experiences have also been associated with the quality of the initiatives themselves (Henderson et al., 2014; Malin et al., 2017; Meinhard & Brown, 2010). McNeil and Helwig (2015) found that the opportunity to choose one's volunteer activity was related to youths' positive evaluations of hypothetical service requirements. Further, initiatives that incorporate formal opportunities for reflection have been associated with more positive outcomes, including civic development and future engagement (van Goethem et al., 2014).

Previously, the Ontario requirement has been criticized for its lack of structure, suggesting the program may be lacking the resources required to provide meaningful and enriching service experiences (Brown et al., 2007; Henderson et al., 2019). Although provincially mandated, implementation of the requirement is the responsibility of the school boards and often varies between schools. For example, some schools provide resources to help students find placements, others incorporate reflection assignments, and some provide little to no support (Brown et al., 2007; Meinhard et al., 2007; Padanyi et al., 2010). This variability may contribute to diversity in the opportunities students receive and may be related to the overall quality of their experiences.

Together, these findings highlight that, although mandatory community service initiatives are expected to have a uniform impact on volunteering trajectories (i.e., by making everyone into a volunteer in high school), the impact of these initiatives for future and persistent volunteering remains unclear. Furthermore, previous studies on trajectories of youth volunteering have found that volunteer engagement declines as youth transition from high school to university (e.g., Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022; Turcotte, 2015; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). Thus, while high school service requirements have the potential to shape youths' attitudes towards volunteering and could promote persistent volunteer engagement, developing a deeper understanding of the quality of students' early experiences with community service may offer further insight into their decisions about future volunteering, for example, as they transition to university.

Present Study

The present study applied the volunteer trajectory model (presented in Chapter 2) to examine trajectories of youth volunteering through the transitions to high school and university. To further understand volunteering transitions, this study also explored students' experiences with Ontario's mandatory community service requirement and their general attitudes towards

volunteering. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection, this study also examined volunteering trajectories and decisions during the height of the pandemic.

Method

Participants

A total of 25 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 18.60; *SD* = 1.47) from a large Ontario university participated in the study. Most participants identified as female (*n* = 22; 88.0%), and the majority were first-year undergraduate students (*n* = 16; 64.0%), with some second-year students (*n* = 8; 32.0%), and one fourth-year student (4.0%). Participants were enrolled in the faculties of science (*n* = 11; 44.0%), social science and arts (*n* = 9; 36.0%), health science (*n* = 4; 16.0%), and engineering (*n* = 1; 4.0%). Participants' self-reported ethnicities were coded and categorized according to Statistics Canada's (2021) census classifications and consisted of European origins (*n* = 14; 56.0%), Asian origins (*n* = 8; 32.0%), African origins (*n* = 1; 4.0%), and mixed or other ethnic origins (*n* = 2; 8.0%).

Timeline of Data Collection

Data collection began in February 2020, and a total of 13 participants were interviewed by March 12, 2020. With the outbreak of COVID-19 (the World Health Organization (2020) declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020), the study was temporarily paused and adapted to be conducted online via Zoom videoconference. A total of 12 participants participated in the study through the videoconference format. One participant was interviewed in May 2020, and the remaining participants (*n* = 11) were interviewed in September and October 2020.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from introductory undergraduate courses in psychology and linguistics through a participant recruitment system in which students receive course credit for

research participation (ISPR). Students were eligible to participate in the study if they had completed Ontario's high school community service requirement. Students were given a brief description of the study (see Appendix H) and provided written (in-person interviews) or verbal (online interviews) informed consent prior to participation (see Appendix I). Interviews were conducted in a private meeting room at the University of Ottawa (February and March 2020) or online via Zoom videoconference (September and October 2020). Participants received one point of their course grade from four points allotted for research participation. This study was approved by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (H-01-20-5326).

Semi-Structured Interview

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (adapted from Pancer et al., 2007; see Appendix J) consisting of four open-ended questions and a series of follow-up questions to encourage participants to provide clear and detailed descriptions of their volunteer experiences. During the interviews, students reflected on their past experiences with Ontario's mandatory community service requirement, their current volunteer involvement in university, and their general attitudes towards volunteering. The interviews conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared also asked students about their involvement in formal and informal volunteering during the pandemic. The average length of the interview was 24 minutes, with a range from 10 to 43 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis of the interview data was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019, 2022b) six-phase approach to *reflexive thematic analysis* (as described in Chapter 4). This analysis was conducted using an *inductive* (data-driven) approach to thematic analysis and an *experiential* qualitative framework, which allowed for an in-depth analysis of students' volunteer

experiences, perspectives, and behaviours (Braun & Clarke, 2022a, 2022b). The analysis was performed by the first author using NVivo 14. The author conducted the interviews for this study and therefore was well-acquainted with the data prior to beginning the analysis. In the initial coding phase, the interview transcripts were systematically reviewed, and descriptive codes and *in vivo* codes (Miles et al., 2014) were assigned to meaningful segments of the data relative to the research questions. Codes with shared meaning were then grouped together to develop initial themes. Finally, the author returned to the dataset to review and refine the initial themes, ensuring the themes accurately represented students' experiences. Throughout the writing process, themes were named and defined, and illustrative quotes were selected.

Reflexivity

As described in Chapter 4, to ensure the quality, credibility, and trustworthiness of this study, the first author engaged in a process of reflexivity throughout this research. Given their lead role in project development, data collection, and analysis, the author engaged in reflexive journaling throughout the study (Braun & Clarke, 2022b) and recorded analytic memos during data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The first author also had their own experience completing Ontario's mandatory community involvement requirement as a high school student. While this experience sparked an interest in further exploring the impact of mandatory service initiatives, the author was mindful of how their personal experiences, perspectives, and biases could influence data collection and analysis. As the analysis progressed, the author met with their PhD supervisor regularly to discuss, refine, and revise the preliminary codes and candidate themes.

Findings

The findings will be presented in two parts. In Part 1, using the data from all students in our sample (n = 25), we specified the volunteer trajectory model to reflect the transitions to high

school and university and categorized students as persistent, emergent, or former volunteers, or persistent non-volunteers following each institutional transition. We then examined the characteristics of students' mandatory service activities, their retrospective reflections of their experiences completing the requirement, and their attitudes towards volunteering. In Part 2, due to the impact of COVID-19 on data collection, we explored the impact of the pandemic on the volunteer behaviours and decisions of the students who participated in the study after the pandemic was declared (n = 12).

Part 1: Trajectories, Institutional Transitions, and Mandatory Service Experiences

Volunteering Trajectories and Institutional Transitions

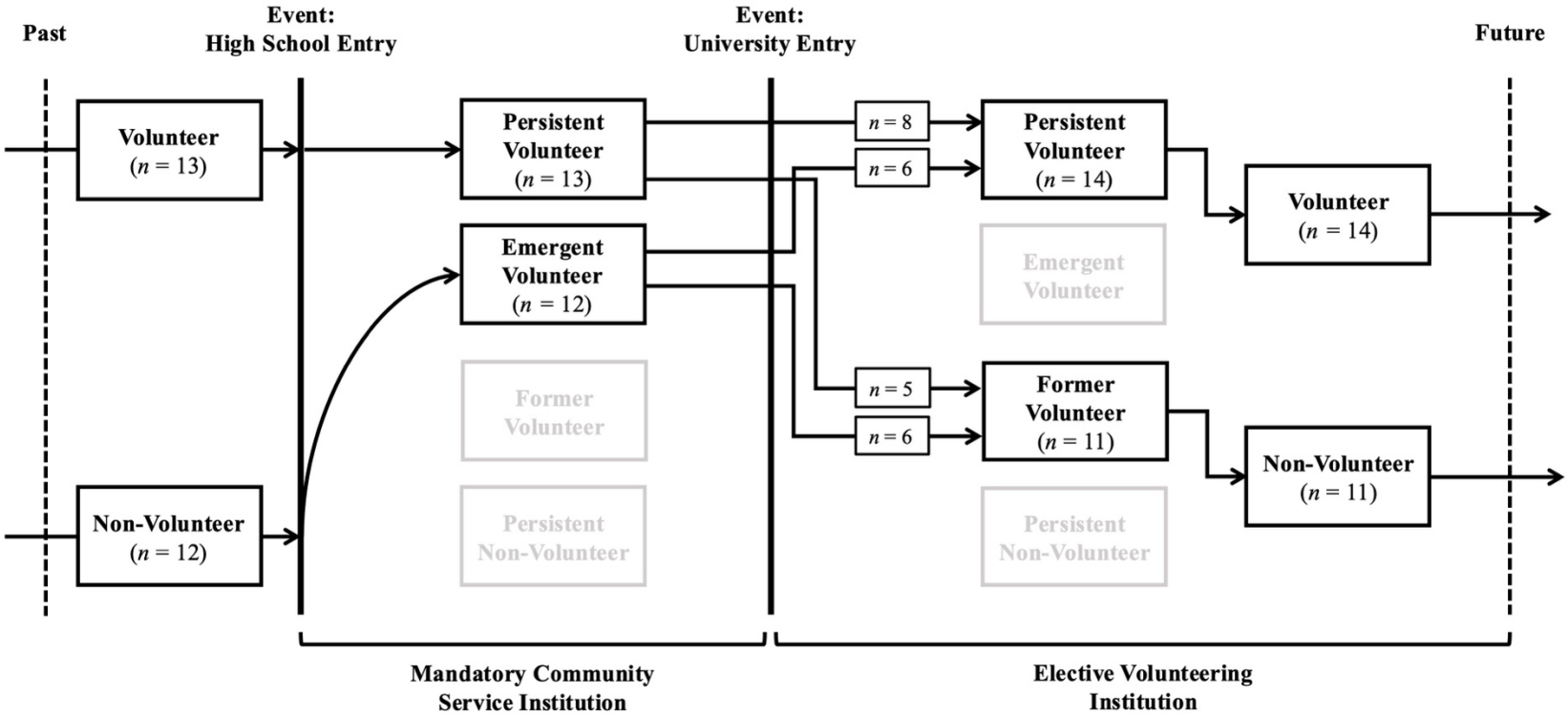
Students' volunteering trajectories through the transitions to high school and university are presented in Figure 1. Students were first categorized as *volunteers* or *non-volunteers* prior to beginning high school. The just over half of the students (n = 13) reported some experience with volunteering that took place before high school (categorized as *volunteers*). Of these students, three reported they were actively engaged in volunteer work (e.g., weekly volunteering at a dance studio) and 10 students reported occasional volunteer engagement (e.g., volunteering at school or community events a few times per year). The remaining students (n = 12) reported no prior volunteer experience (categorized as *non-volunteers*). With the transition to high school, community service hours were required for high school graduation, therefore all students reported volunteering during this period. Students who had some volunteer experience before high school (n = 13) where categorized as *persistent volunteers* (i.e., continued to volunteer), and those with no prior volunteer experience (n = 12) were categorized as *emergent volunteers* (i.e., began to volunteer for the first time in high school).

After high school, students transitioned to university, where volunteering became elective

(i.e., optional). Of the 13 students who persisted as volunteers in high school, eight continued to volunteer in university (remaining *persistent volunteers*), and five were no longer volunteering (becoming *former volunteers*). Of the 12 students who emerged as volunteers in high school, six continued to volunteer in university (becoming *persistent volunteers*), and six stopped volunteering (becoming *former volunteers*). Together, after the transition to university, 14 students reported they continued to volunteer (*persistent volunteers*), and 11 students reported they stopped volunteering (*former volunteers).*

Figure 1

Volunteering Trajectories and Institutional Transitions (n = 25)



Note. The greyed-out boxes signify empty volunteer trajectory categories in this study. Of the students categorized as volunteers prior to high school (n = 13), three reported they were actively engaged in volunteer work (e.g., weekly involvement) and 10 reported occasional volunteer engagement (e.g., a few times per year).

Characteristics of Students' Mandatory Community Service Activities

To complete their high school community service requirement, students participated in various formal volunteer settings including community-oriented (e.g., community events, local non-profit organizations), recreation-oriented (e.g., clubs, sports teams), education-oriented (e.g., tutoring, school activities), youth-oriented (e.g., summer camps), health-oriented (e.g., hospitals), and religious-affiliated (e.g., churches). Most students (n = 23) participated in more than one volunteer activity to complete their service requirement. Students found placements through their personal networks (e.g., friends and family), by consulting advertisements and approaching organizations, or through activities or organizations they were already involved with (e.g., extracurricular activities). Throughout their service experiences, students reported responsibilities including administrative tasks, assistantships, event planning, and supervision.

Qualitative Findings: Mandatory Service Experiences

Through the reflexive thematic analysis procedures described above, four central themes were developed: (a) fostering community engagement, (b) personal benefits of community service, (c) challenges of mandated service requirements, and (d) community-oriented perspectives on volunteering. The themes highlight aspects of students' experiences with mandated service and were present among all volunteering trajectories. Illustrative quotes for each theme are presented below.

Theme 1: Fostering Community Engagement. Reflecting on their experiences completing Ontario's high school community service requirement, many students discussed how the requirement encouraged their involvement in activities they may not have participated in otherwise. In fact, many students noted they did not have any experience with community service prior to entering high school and thus emerged as volunteers due to the requirement. As a

newcomer to Canada, a student who emerged as a volunteer in high school described that they were exposed to formal volunteering for the first time because of the service requirement:

> When I first came to Canada, I didn't know what volunteering was. In my country, we don't have a concept such as volunteering, so I wasn't super familiar with volunteering. If it wasn't because of the mandatory volunteering, I would probably not try it … but I'm very grateful that it was mandatory, because if it wasn't then I wouldn't know what an experience it is … because it was mandatory, I got to get out of my comfort zone and try something new, and it turns out that I really enjoyed doing it. (P21)

Students who had some experience with volunteering before high school also described engaging in new activities to complete the requirement. For example, a student who started volunteering at their church before high school also volunteered to help with school and community events as a high school student and remarked, "It was actually a nice opportunity, but I don't think I would think to do it if it weren't for having to do volunteer hours" (P16). Another student who persisted as a volunteer in high school mentioned they were offered a new opportunity to volunteer at their dance studio that they may not have been offered without the requirement: "I may not have been so like immediate about deciding to do it, and I don't know if maybe the opportunity would not have come to me immediately" (P9).

In addition to encouraging their initial engagement, students also expressed that the requirement influenced their decision to commit to volunteering for a longer period of time. For instance, some students noted they likely would have stopped their participation sooner if they were not required to complete 40 hours of service: "I would have done maybe eight hours instead of 40 [hours], but I don't think I would have gone out of my way to do more volunteering" (P6). Alternatively, many students shared that they enjoyed their volunteer activities, and this

encouraged them to persist as volunteers well beyond the minimum 40 hours of required service:

> After I finished 40 [hours], which was like in the first two weeks, I was like, "Wow this is really insightful, I'm really enjoying my time here". So, I just continued on and on until got to 1000 hours, and at that point I wasn't even tracking [the hours], just because it was not really a chore, it was more of like something I wanted to make time for. (P5)

Students also reported that committing to volunteering over a longer term helped them develop a deeper connection to the work they were doing in their communities: "I went for the long-term [volunteer opportunities], [rather] than just one short one. I liked the long[-term] thing because I actually got to know the people, I got to get invested in what I was doing" (P10).

Students expressed that their high school community service experiences also contributed to their actual or intended future volunteer engagement. For instance, several students attributed their interest in volunteering in university to their positive experiences with mandated service:

> I think that if I had a really negative experience volunteering, I wouldn't want to continue it, but because I knew that I could do it and I wanted to volunteer some more I looked for those opportunities, so I think that it really helped my experience. (P23)

Looking beyond their undergraduate studies, many students also described that they planned to continue to incorporate volunteering into their lives: "I really want to continue volunteering, even when I'm done university, like while I'm working. I think it would be cool to try different types of volunteering [and] help different kinds of people" (P22).

Theme 2: Personal Benefits of Community Service. Throughout the interviews, students discussed the personal benefits they acquired from their community involvement. Many students highlighted the soft skills they developed, including teamwork, time management, responsibility, communication, and leadership. One student described how their experience

volunteering at a local non-profit organization provided an opportunity to interact with diverse groups of people and develop skills that extended beyond what they could learn in the classroom:

> I learned how to socialize better with people and kind of stepped out of my comfort zone. I learned how to adapt to unexpected situations or emergencies, and I learned how to work in a team … I developed a lot of skills that are very valuable and transferable, and some of those things you just don't learn in a classroom. (P11)

Alongside skill development, several students noted the community service requirement contributed to their career development through opportunities to explore their career interests and acquire career-related experience. One student described that since their high school did not offer formal opportunities for career exploration (e.g., through high school courses), the community service requirement was a valuable opportunity to discover possible career avenues:

> We didn't actually have [a] career class at our school or anything, so exploring all these different things and seeing what actually interests me, I thought was really useful. … while doing all those volunteer things you get exposed to a lot of different professions … and I feel like that actually helped me see maybe what I'd want to [do] later on. (P25)

Similarly, students noted their high school community service helped to inform their decision about the university program they chose to pursue: "I got the experience at the hospital so that just made me more interested in getting into the medical field and it kind of played a part in me choosing my program of study [biomedical science]" (P20). Looking towards the future, another student expressed that they will likely continue to volunteer to acquire more career-related experience before securing paid employment in their field of interest: "I don't think I'll be able to get a job first, so I think I'll probably have to volunteer first to get that experience" (P4).

Students also described the social benefits of their high school community service. These

reflections highlighted opportunities to build social connections and make new friends through their community engagement: “It was my first time volunteering for the community, and I got to meet a lot of new people and made a lot of new friends, so giving back to the community you also get something in return” (P20). Framing volunteering as a social activity, students noted that completing their community service hours with their friends made volunteering less intimidating and more enjoyable: “I was [volunteering] with my friend group, so it was kind of fun. Even though the activities itself might not have been as exciting … doing it with friends makes it more enjoyable” (P16). Further, the community service requirement helped students connect with and develop a sense of belonging in their communities. For example, after relocating to a new city, a student described how the requirement facilitated their integration into their new community:

> I moved to [city name redacted], I was new to that community … it was a bit nerve wracking. I didn’t really know a lot, but having the community service hours, it was kind of a way for me to branch into my community and actually get to learn and be involved … if it wasn’t for the hours, I don’t think I would have gotten that involvement at all, like I would’ve still felt like an outsider. (P10)

Theme 3: Challenges of Mandated Service Requirements. Although students’ reflections of their mandatory community service experiences were largely positive, some students reported they did not learn anything through their placements, their tasks were not engaging or enjoyable, and they felt they were not making meaningful contributions to the community. For example, a student who volunteered at a community swimming pool noted their contributions as a volunteer were limited: “It’s kind of hard for a volunteer who’s not certified or trained in any way to help … I didn’t feel super useful because there’s just a lot of stuff that you can’t help with” (P14). Similarly, another student recounted that there were some difficult

aspects of their experience as a young volunteer at their church's nursery:

> It definitely had more negative aspects … it doesn't feel good when you can't console a child and you don't know what to do. And oftentimes older volunteers would kind of be like, "Oh you're too young to be able to deal with this" … it kind of was a little bit more of a condescending environment. (P7)

Much of the criticism discussed throughout the interviews was centered around the high schools' implementation of the community service requirement. Many students conveyed they were uncertain, nervous, and worried about fulfilling the requirement. One student remarked, "It almost seems daunting at first because you see this thing saying you need to have 40 volunteer hours to graduate and it's like, where do I even begin?" (P9). Similarly, another student mentioned that it would have been beneficial if the school put more effort into promoting the requirement: "I think my school didn't really promote the whole 40 hours thing and it kind of made it as a "you have to get it". I wish they kind of enticed it or marketed it a bit more" (P11). Students also described challenges experienced by themselves and their peers when it came to finding volunteer placements. From this perspective, students suggested support from the school, for example offering a list of examples or resources to help students find opportunities, would have facilitated participation and eased some of the uncertainty about fulfilling the requirement:

> Maybe more opportunities provided from the school. I found a lot of people that I knew were struggling to find volunteer opportunities, so if there was like a portal to find them … it might make it easier and less stressful. (P3)

Alongside the requirement, some schools incorporated additional incentives to encourage community engagement by recognizing students who completed an exceptional number of community service hours. However, some students felt these initiatives were counterproductive.

For example, one student noted that these awards made volunteering feel like a competition and suggested that this takes away from the purpose of volunteering:

> [The principals award] was based on how many [volunteer] hours you got … at that point it became a competition, not about actually helping people. So that maybe doesn't achieve the goal of really volunteering. I mean, yes, like they're still volunteering and that's great, but it's kind of like the motivation is not particularly aligned. (P4)

This student also went on to describe feeling pressure to complete more than 40 hours because of these external incentives and the volunteer behaviours of their peers:

> I did feel like the people around me were volunteering a lot … I did feel a little bit of pressure to be volunteering because like some of [my peers] had like 400 hours and I would be like struggling to get the 40 [hours]. (P4)

Theme 4: Community-Oriented Perspectives on Volunteering. Although students were mandated to engage in community service, overall, they expressed positive attitudes towards volunteering. Several students expressed that their experiences completing the requirement helped them develop a new perspective on volunteering and their communities, which in turn supported their continued involvement:

> In the beginning when I joined [organization name redacted], my mentality was I'm just going to be here, get my 40 hours, and then leave. But then, the more people I met, the more people I worked with, the more customers I interacted with, the more it opened up my mind, and it made me realize like, these people are less fortunate, and they need us to provide something for them, so my perspective kind of changed. (P11)

Another student shared a similar point of view and suggested that community-based volunteer opportunities may be especially important for broadening the horizons of young volunteers:

> I think it's important to gain perspective and meet a lot of different people from different walks of life. … if you have the opportunity to volunteer in a more community-based sense I think it's a really empowering thing, and you kind of check your privilege too, which I think is really important during those formative years. (P1)

Throughout the interviews, students reflected on the importance of contributing to their communities through volunteering. Many students' community-oriented attitudes were centered around giving back to their communities: "Your community does a lot for you, so I think then it is only fair that you give back … the least you can do is volunteer" (P18). Similarly, students spoke about the value of working together to strengthen their communities, framing volunteering as a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship between the volunteer and the community:

> I think the whole idea of a community is that it works better when we're supporting each other, otherwise we're just sort of lonely, solitary people trying to live our own lives. I think that everything works much better when we're all trying to help each other. I think that when everyone is helping each other, rather than just looking out for themselves, overall, everyone gets to have a more just and fair life. (P24)

These reflections suggest that students' real-life and hands-on experiences with community service may be associated with the development of a deeper understanding of the meaning of volunteering and how they can contribute to strengthening their communities.

Part 2: Volunteering Trajectories and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Volunteering Trajectories, Institutional Transitions, and the COVID-19 Pandemic

A total of 12 students participated in the study after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Three students in this subset of the sample were enrolled in their second year of studies, and thus the pandemic occurred after they had already transitioned to university. For the

remaining students (*n* = 9), the pandemic occurred before they transitioned to university. For most of these students (*n* = 8), the outbreak occurred in their final year of high school. To examine the impact of the pandemic on the volunteering trajectories of these students, the volunteer trajectory model was further specified to reflect the institutional transitions illustrated above, alongside the onset of COVID-19 (see Figure 2).

As above, students were first categorized as *volunteers* and *non-volunteers* prior to starting high school. In this group, three students reported some volunteer experience before high school (categorized as *volunteers*), and the majority (*n* = 6) reported no prior volunteer experience (categorized as *non-volunteers*). Due to the community involvement requirement, all students reported volunteering during high school. Students who had some volunteer experience before high school (*n* = 3) were categorized as *persistent volunteers*, and those with no prior volunteer experience (*n* = 6) were categorized as *emergent volunteers*.

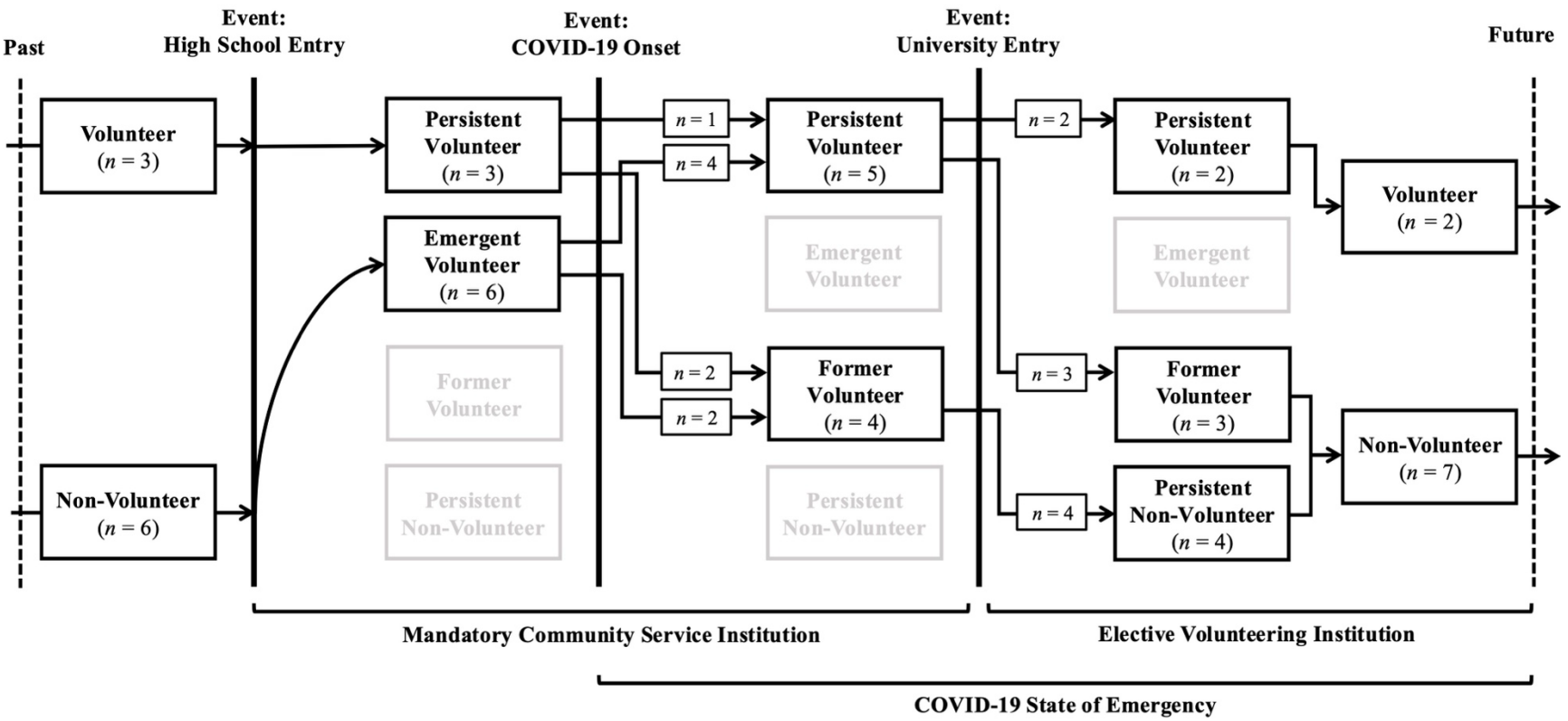
With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, students were then categorized based on their volunteer status after the pandemic was declared. Of the three students who persisted as volunteers in high school, one student continued to volunteer (remaining a *persistent volunteer*), and two students stopped volunteering (becoming *former volunteers*). Of the six students who emerged as volunteers in high school, four students continued to volunteer after the pandemic was declared (becoming *persistent volunteers*), and two students stopped volunteering (becoming *former volunteers*). Together, after the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, five students reported they continued to volunteer (*persistent volunteers*), and four students reported they stopped volunteering (*former volunteers*).

Lastly, students' volunteer trajectories were categorized when they transitioned to university. Of the five students who persisted as volunteers during the pandemic, two students

continued to volunteer in university (remaining *persistent volunteers*), and three students stopped volunteering (becoming *former volunteers*). The four students who reported they stopped volunteering during the pandemic, also reported they remained non-volunteers following their transition to university (classified as *persistent non-volunteers*). Together, after the transition to university, two students reported they were volunteering (*volunteers*), and seven students reported they were not volunteering (*non-volunteers*).

Figure 2

Volunteering Trajectories, Institutional Transitions, and the COVID-19 Pandemic (n = 9)



Note. The greyed-out boxes signify empty volunteer trajectory categories in this study. The COVID-19 pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020.

Qualitative Findings: Volunteering During the COVID-19 Pandemic

All students interviewed after the onset of COVID-19 (n = 12) described the impact of the pandemic on their previous or ongoing volunteer engagement. Through the reflexive thematic analysis procedures described above, two themes were developed and reflected aspects of students' volunteer behaviours and decisions during the height of the pandemic: (a) disruptions to volunteering, and (b) finding new ways to engage. Illustrative quotes are presented below.

Theme 1: Disruptions to Volunteering. Several students described that the pandemic interrupted their volunteering due to the closure of many in-person volunteering sites. One student spoke about how the pandemic disrupted their role as a volunteer at a hospital and shared their disappointment that they could no longer volunteer because of the outbreak:

> I was volunteering at the hospital, and we had actually come up with [a] schedule to increase my volunteer hours because [I] wanted to get as much learning in before I left [for university] … [but] literally the week we were supposed to start, everything stopped, so that was pretty upsetting … it was a bit of a bummer. (P19)

Similarly, another student, also a hospital volunteer, explained that they planned to continue their volunteering, however, at the time of the interview, they had yet to resume their involvement:

> I graduated [high school] during the pandemic so I couldn't go back to the hospital, so I haven't been there since the social distancing started because of the strict rules … although I'm still a volunteer there, I haven't got to go in and actually do stuff. (P20)

Public health restrictions implemented to reduce the spread of infection also had an impact on the availability of volunteer opportunities. Students described that, due to the pandemic, there were fewer opportunities to engage with their communities through volunteering. Health and safety concerns were also important considerations for several students' decisions to discontinue

their volunteering following the outbreak. For example, one student shared that they chose to stop volunteering to protect their immunocompromised family members:

> I can't really go out much because my grandma is at home, and my mom, it's not good for her, she has a reduced immune system, so I couldn't really do anything outside of the house … I don't think it would be safe for me to do that. Even like help[ing] out the neighbour, you're still in contact with someone and that can be kind of dangerous. (P16)

Similarly, other students mentioned they had in-person jobs during the pandemic and chose not to volunteer in in-person settings to avoid spreading the virus. For instance, a student remarked, "Helping people wouldn't be very beneficial if I somehow get COVID and passed it on" (P22).

At the time of the interview, students were also unsure how the pandemic would impact their future volunteering. A first-year student noted that they decided to take a break from volunteering while they transitioned to university, however, they expressed concerns about the availability of future volunteer opportunities amid the uncertainties of the pandemic: "I'm a little bit concerned about whether places, once I am more adjusted [to university], will be taking new volunteers because of COVID" (P24). These reflections capture the uncertainty of students' volunteering during this time period and highlight how students were adjusting their volunteer behaviours and their expectations about their future engagement in response to the pandemic.

Theme 2: Finding New Ways to Engage. Despite disruptions, a few students persisted as volunteers during the pandemic. Several of these students noted their volunteer activities were moved online (e.g., via videoconference) after the pandemic was declared:

> [Before the pandemic] I was teaching English to immigrants, [and] I'm still continuing to this day … before [the pandemic] you would go to an actual place and be [volunteering] in-person, but now it's online … that was easy to transfer to online. (P21)

Another student described their involvement with an organization that offered musical performances for retirement residences. Before the pandemic, these activities took place in-person, however, this student spoke about why it was important that they adapted to the pandemic restrictions and found a way to offer virtual performances during the pandemic:

> At this time seniors would be quite isolated, their families can't visit them, and they have to stay in one place. They can't even gather with their other friends living in the same residence, like I mean that's pretty tough … so that's one reason why we wanted to provide interaction, and a nice way is through music. (P17)

Some students who had their previous volunteer roles interrupted by the pandemic shared that they looked for new opportunities to volunteer virtually (e.g., online) that would allow them to continue to contribute to their communities in the months following the outbreak:

> [I] volunteered with an organization where we do French tutoring for kids over Zoom. … I didn't want to go somewhere [in-person] for a job because [of] the pandemic, like there's a lot of restrictions, so I was looking at online volunteer opportunities. (P23)

Virtual volunteering was not the only way for students to volunteer during the pandemic. For instance, one student described that they persisted in their role as a volunteer on a farm during the pandemic because their involvement seemed lower risk since their tasks took place outside and their interactions with others were limited:

> It wasn't something that really put me at risk of contracting the virus or anything … if I went to the city and did one of their [community] events, if they were still running them, then it would be obviously a lot more risky for me. There's just one [other] person really, so it's very secluded and risk free. (P25)

Opportunities for informal volunteering (i.e., volunteering outside the context of a formal

organization) were also present during the pandemic. A few students mentioned they helped their friends, family members, and neighbours acquire essential supplies (e.g., groceries, medications) in the early stages of the pandemic. Discussing why they chose to persist as an informal volunteer during the pandemic, a student remarked, "Everyone was struggling during that time, it was a hard time for everybody, and since I was able to get some resources and some people weren't, it was just fair to help everyone out" (P20). Thus, while the pandemic introduced new barriers to volunteering and made it difficult for some students to find volunteer placements, other students found ways to volunteer by seeking alternative opportunities (e.g., virtual volunteering) and embracing informal opportunities to help their communities.

Discussion

Initially, the purpose of this study was to examine undergraduate students' retrospective experiences with Ontario's mandatory community service requirement and their transitions to elective volunteering in university. However, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted data collection for this study and also interrupted some youths' volunteer behaviours and their transitions to university. Therefore, this study was reframed as an opportunity to apply the volunteer trajectory model (described in Chapter 2) to examine trajectories of youth volunteering through the transitions to high school and university. To further understand volunteering trajectories, this study also qualitatively explored students' perspectives on their experiences completing Ontario's high school service requirement and the impact of the pandemic on a subset of students' volunteering. The findings are discussed further below.

Volunteering Trajectories: The Emergence and Persistence of Youth Volunteering

Consistent with past research on Ontario's community service requirement (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007; Padanyi et al., 2010), the present study found that many students

emerged as volunteers in high school due to the community service requirement. In this case, the requirement created an opportunity for students to engage with their communities through community service, which aligns with the purpose of the initiative (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). However, just over half of the students in our sample reported a history of volunteering that began prior to high school. Although largely beyond the scope of this study, this raises questions about when youth volunteering first emerges. Statistics Canada reports rates of formal volunteerism starting at age 15 (e.g., Hahmann, 2021; Turcotte, 2015), however, our findings indicate that some youth start to volunteer earlier (i.e., before starting high school at age 13 or 14). This suggests an important avenue for future research on prosocial helping and the emergence of formal volunteerism.

With the transition to university, volunteering became elective, therefore, students could choose to engage (Hill & Hammond, 2023). In the present study, although some students discontinued their volunteering once the mandatory aspects of service were removed, more students persisted as volunteers through the transition to university (as seen in Figure 1). Aligning with previous research on the Ontario requirement (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007, 2019; Pancer et al., 2007), these findings suggest the community service requirement did not deter future volunteering and was associated with some students emerging or persisting as volunteers.

Benefits and Challenges of Mandatory Community Service

Previous research suggests that the quality of an individual's service experiences may influence their decisions about future volunteering (Gallant et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2014, 2019; Taylor & Pancer, 2007). In the present study, students' reflections of their experiences completing Ontario's high school community involvement requirement were largely positive. The compulsory nature of the requirement encouraged students to engage in community-oriented

activities that they may not have participated in otherwise, which also fostered opportunities for personal development. Students described the self-oriented benefits of their experiences, including opportunities for skill acquisition, career development, social engagement, and personal fulfillment. These findings align with previous research that found that volunteering contributes to the personal, social, and moral development of the volunteer (e.g., Haski-Leventhal et al., 2020; MacNeela & Gannon, 2014; Padilla-Walker, 2014; Soucie et al., 2025). Further, studies on youth volunteer motives found that opportunities for personal growth and career development encourages elective volunteer engagement (Gage & Thapa, 2012; Güntert et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2014). In the present study, students highlighted service-related benefits consistent with those reported in elective contexts, suggesting that the compulsory nature of the requirement did not prevent the developmental benefits associated with service participation.

However, the benefits of community service extend beyond the volunteer. Consistent with definitions that situate volunteering as a prosocial behaviour intended to benefit others (e.g., Musick & Wilson, 2007; Wilson, 2000), students highlighted the other-oriented aspects of their experiences. Throughout the interviews, students spoke about the value of contributing to their communities through community service, which is a promising finding supporting the presence of the requirement in the curriculum. Further, aligning with the findings from Chapter 4, several students described a shift from self-oriented goals (e.g., completing the requirement, enhancing their CV) towards other-oriented goals (e.g., community-oriented attitudes). These findings suggest that, through community engagement, youth may be reconstructing their perspectives and developing a deeper understanding of how they can contribute to their communities.

Community-based activities that are perceived as both beneficial for the volunteer and meaningful for the community are more likely to contribute to persistent volunteering over time

(Faletehan et al., 2021; Gallant et al., 2010; Taylor & Pancer, 2007; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). Furthermore, previous studies on mandatory service initiatives found that longer-term commitment was associated with more positive evaluations of service experiences and intentions to volunteer in the future (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007, 2012; Padanyi et al., 2010) Although, due to the interruption caused by the pandemic, the present study could not examine the impact of mandated service experiences on future volunteering (see limitations), the findings presented in this chapter could inform future research exploring these ideas. Unlike previous research (e.g., Stukas et al., 1999; Warburton & Smith, 2003), students in the present study expressed positives attitudes towards volunteering and many noted that they intended to volunteer in the future. Additionally, students who enjoy their service experiences may be more likely to commit to long-term volunteering (Hyde et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2017). These findings suggest that youths' experiences with mandated service may lay an important foundation for their overall volunteering trajectories (i.e., by encouraging or inhibiting future volunteering).

Despite recounting largely positive experiences, students also described the challenges they encountered while completing the requirement. Our sample was comprised of students from different high schools across the province; however, they described similar shortcomings of the requirement's implementation. Many students highlighted that improvements at the school-level, including additional resources and support, may have enhanced their mandated service experiences. Similarly, previous studies that examined the experiences of the first graduating class to complete the Ontario requirement found that students suggested that further support from their high schools may have facilitated their engagement (e.g., Henderson et al., 2014, 2019; Pancer et al., 2007). This consistency between our study and previous studies suggests there have not been major improvements to the requirement's implementation since it was first introduced

over 25 years ago. By addressing concerns raised by students with firsthand experience with the requirement, policy makers could improve the effectiveness of the initiative, which could contribute to a more meaningful and (potentially) transformative experience for youth.

The COVID-19 Pandemic: Volunteering Disruptions and Opportunities to Engage

While the outbreak of COVID-19 disrupted the data collection for this study, it also provided a unique opportunity to examine the impact of the pandemic on trajectories of youth volunteering. Recent data from Statistics Canada (2025) documented a decline in volunteer engagement across all age groups between 2018 and 2023, and some of this decline is associated with COVID-19 and the lasting impact of the pandemic. Aligning with the findings from Chapter 3, the present study found that several students stopped volunteering during the height of the pandemic (as seen in Figure 2). During this period, the pandemic and public health restrictions reduced both the availability and safety of in-person volunteer opportunities (AlOmar et al., 2021; Lebenbaum et al., 2024; Seah et al., 2021). Further, from a trajectory perspective, events may influence volunteering trajectories (Hill & Hammond, 2023; Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Ramey et al., 2022). Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a unique disruptive event due to its widespread impact (Snowden, 2019), the findings highlight how unexpected events may disrupt volunteering and shape decisions about present and future engagement, which also supports the importance of understanding *how* and *why* volunteer behaviours change over time.

However, the pandemic did not disrupt all forms of volunteer engagement. For instance, virtual (i.e., online) volunteering became an important way for youth to connect with and contribute to their communities during the pandemic (Armstrong-Carter & Telzer, 2021; Lachance, 2021). Emergency and disaster situations can also foster unique opportunities for volunteering and prosocial behaviour (Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Whittaker et al., 2015). In the

present study, during the height of the pandemic, some students engaged in informal volunteer activities, such as helping their friends and neighbours acquire essential supplies. Other students were mindful of the increased risks to health during this period (AlOmar et al., 2021; Seah et al., 2021) and sought virtual or in-person volunteer activities with limited direct contact with others. Consistent with Chapter 3, these findings highlight the complexities of volunteering decisions during the pandemic, which may not be present in other, non-pandemic, contexts.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study had several limitations. As noted above, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared while data collection was underway and therefore shifted the direction of this research. Additionally, the pandemic reduced the availability of many volunteer opportunities (AlOmar et al., 2021; Seah et al., 2021), and thus, many students who participated in the study during the height of the pandemic were unable to continue their engagement as a volunteer. As such, it is possible that, had the pandemic not occurred, more students would have persisted as volunteers through the transition to university. Future research could apply the volunteer trajectory model to examine these transitions without the pandemic interruption. I will also offer a more critical discussion of the strengths and limitations of the volunteer trajectory model in Chapter 6.

The findings presented in this chapter are based on a small number of interviews with a sample of predominately female undergraduate students from one Ontario university, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other student populations. This study, and many previous studies, focused on exploring the effectiveness of mandatory service initiatives by examining the retrospective experiences of recent high school graduates who are enrolled in university (e.g., Gallant et al., 2010; Henderson et al., 2007, 2012, 2014; Padanyi et al., 2010; Pancer et al., 2007). However, researchers have suggested that “university-bound” high school

students are more likely to be volunteers (Henderson et al., 2007, 2012, 2014, 2019; Pancer et al., 2007). Therefore, future studies should strive to explore the experiences and perspectives of current high school students and of youth who did not attend university to develop a deeper understanding of the impact and effectiveness of mandatory service initiatives.

Students self-selected to participate in the study and therefore may be more likely to volunteer in other domains of life. Data collection relied on students' retrospective reflections of their experiences completing the mandatory service requirement, which, for many students, occurred several years prior to the interview. Further, although every effort was made by the interviewer to ensure students provided honest reflections, discussions of prosocial behaviours, like volunteering, may be subject to social desirability biases (Metzger & Ferris, 2013).

Conclusion

Despite interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the present study contributes to advancing knowledge on volunteering trajectories and institutional transitions. Through the lens of the volunteer trajectory model, this study found that many students emerged or persisted as volunteers in high school, and more students persisted as volunteers after the transition to university than stopped volunteering. This research also contributes to the literature on compulsory community service by offering qualitative insight into the qualities of students' experiences with mandated service and the benefits and challenges of their engagement. Due to the timing of the onset of COVID-19, this study also unexpectedly explored the impact of the pandemic on some youths' volunteering trajectories and illustrated disruptions to and opportunities for volunteering during the height of the pandemic. Despite the limitations, this study could also contribute to informing policies intended to encourage youth engagement.

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Chapter 6:

General Discussion

General Discussion

Although past research has examined patterns of volunteering over the life course, little research has examined trajectories of youth volunteering, notably *how* and *why* youth volunteer behaviour may change over time. Therefore, to further understand patterns of youth volunteer engagement, this dissertation introduced a volunteer trajectory model (presented in Chapter 2) and applied the model to examine trajectories of youth volunteering following a disruptive event (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic; Chapters 3 and 5) and institutional transitions (i.e., high school to university; Chapters 4 and 5). This thesis also integrated perspectives from moral developmental theory, including social domain theory (Turiel, 2006), moral self theory (Blasi, 2004), and perspectives on real-life moral reasoning (Walker, 2014), to explore why youth choose to start, continue, and stop volunteering over time. This chapter synthesizes the findings of the studies presented in thesis and discusses the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of this research relative to the existing literature on youth volunteering and moral developmental theory. This chapter also discusses avenues for future research and the limitations.

Summary of Findings

Chapter 3 presented a mixed method study that used the volunteer trajectory model (presented in Chapter 2) and social domain theory (Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 2006) to examine youths' volunteer behaviours and decisions during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, very little was known about the impact of the pandemic on many aspects of human behaviour, including volunteering. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to (a) examine trajectories of youth volunteering following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and (b) explore how youth justified their decisions about volunteering during the pandemic. This study found that although some youth stopped volunteering during the pandemic, many emerged or

persisted as volunteers. Persistent and emergent volunteers were more likely to justify their decisions using moral reasons, while former and non-volunteers were more likely to use prudential justifications. This study extended past research on emergency and disaster volunteering, and was, to our knowledge, the first study to examine trajectories of youth volunteering during the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research also contributed to the social domain theory literature by illustrating how youth coordinate personal, social, moral, and prudential concerns when making decisions about volunteering in their real lives. This study was published in the *Journal of Adolescent Research* (Grant et al., 2024) and has since contributed to the scholarly discussion on trajectories of volunteering during the pandemic (e.g., Høgenhaven, 2025; Høgenhaven et al., 2025, 2026).

Chapter 4 presented a qualitative interview study that explored the persistence of youth volunteering. Specifically, this study examined (a) why youth volunteer, (b) how they justify their decisions about volunteering, and (c) how their reasons for volunteering change over time. Using reflexive thematic analysis, we identified five themes reflecting how personal interests, social contexts, moral motives, and students' evolving understanding of volunteering contributed to shaping their volunteer behaviours and decisions. The findings were discussed from a moral development perspective, illustrating the personal, social, and moral facets of youths' decisions about volunteering, from a social domain theory perspective (Turiel, 2006), and how moral development may occur through volunteer engagement, from a moral self theory perspective (Blasi, 2004). This study contributed to the existing knowledge on youth volunteer motives, and was, to our knowledge, the first study to integrate social domain theory and moral self theory to explore trajectories of youth volunteering.

Chapter 5 presented a mixed method study that was reframed to (a) examine trajectories

of youth volunteering through institutional transitions, and (b) explore the qualities of students' experiences with Ontario's mandatory community service requirement. Due to the onset of COVID-19, this study also explored the impact of the pandemic on a subset of students' volunteering. This study found that many students emerged or persisted as volunteers in high school, and many persisted as volunteers following the transition to university. However, several students also stopped volunteering after high school and following the onset of the pandemic. Using reflexive thematic analysis, we identified four themes highlighting the benefits and challenges of students' experiences with mandatory community service and two themes reflecting disruptions to and opportunities for volunteering during the pandemic. This study offered insight into the qualities of students' volunteer experiences and extended past research on compulsory community service by applying the trajectory model to examine patterns of volunteer engagement before and after the requirement. This study also explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth volunteering, extending the findings from Chapter 3.

Trajectories of Youth Volunteering: Examining Volunteer Behaviour Over Time

The studies presented in this thesis used a trajectory perspective to examine patterns of youth volunteer engagement in three unique yet overlapping contexts. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, past research on volunteering trajectories in adulthood suggests that life events and transitions may influence volunteering decisions (Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Nesbit, 2012; Niebuur et al., 2022). However, only a small number of researchers have examined trajectories of youth volunteering, and these studies found a decrease in civic and community engagement as youth transition from adolescence to young adulthood (e.g., Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). Therefore, to develop a deeper understanding of when, how, and why youth volunteer behaviours may change over time, this dissertation

developed a volunteer trajectory model designed to examine changes to and continuity of volunteering following the onset of events and transitions. As described in Chapter 2, the model specified four trajectories of volunteering based on an individual's volunteer status before and after the onset of an event or transition: (a) persistent volunteers, (b) emergent volunteers, (c) former volunteers, and (d) persistent non-volunteers. Chapter 3 applied the model to examine the impact of COVID-19 on youth volunteering and found that many students persisted or emerged as volunteers during the pandemic. Chapter 5 examined institutional transitions through the lens of the trajectory model and found that many students persisted and emerged as volunteers in high school. With the transition to university, many students persisted as volunteers, however, several students also stopped volunteering after high school and following the onset of COVID-19. The following sections provide a more in-depth discussion of these findings.

Emergent Volunteering: Opportunities to Engage in Service

As described in Chapter 2, events and transitions may offer opportunities for volunteer engagement. Much of the research on emergent volunteerism takes place in the context of emergency or disaster situations, which often foster opportunities for formal and informal volunteering (e.g., Rodríguez et al., 2006; Rotolo & Berg, 2011; Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Whittaker et al., 2015). Consistent with this past research, Chapter 3 found that many students emerged as volunteers during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, emergent volunteers were more likely to engage in informal volunteering (i.e., volunteering outside of a formal organization; Smith et al., 2016). This finding may reflect that many formal volunteer settings were inaccessible to volunteers during the pandemic (e.g., hospitals; Pickell et al., 2020). Further, some forms of informal volunteering (e.g., helping neighbours acquire essential supplies during the pandemic) may be more necessary or important in emergency contexts (Whittaker et

al., 2015). The pandemic also brought opportunities for virtual volunteering (Armstrong-Carter & Telzer, 2021; Lachance, 2021), and several students in Chapters 3 and 5 reported that they started to volunteer online during the pandemic.

However, emergent volunteering may also occur in non-emergency contexts. Chapters 4 and 5 qualitatively explored youths' retrospective narratives of their volunteer experiences and found that many students described that they emerged as volunteers due to formal community service requirements. Since this research was conducted at a large university in Ontario, many students also attended high school in Ontario and thus were mandated to complete 40 hours of community service to obtain their secondary school diploma (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023). Therefore, as illustrated in Chapter 5, some youth emerged as volunteers in high school, a finding that aligns with past research on Ontario's community service requirement (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007; Padanyi et al., 2010). However, this study also found that just over half of the students in our sample emerged as volunteers before high school. As noted in Chapter 5, this finding is largely beyond the scope of the present thesis, however, it does indicate an interesting avenue for future research on the emergence of youth volunteering. While Chapter 4 did not directly apply the trajectory model, several students described that informal expectations to engage in service imposed by their parents, teachers, or extracurricular activities encouraged the emergence of their volunteer engagement. Together, these findings highlight the role of key socialization agents (e.g., parents, teachers, and schools) for fostering the emergence of youth civic and community engagement (Astuto & Ruck, 2010; Hammond et al., 2023; Pancer, 2020).

Post-secondary institutions can also contribute to the emergence of youth volunteering. In Chapter 4, students highlighted unique opportunities for volunteering present in a university context. For instance, students described their roles as volunteers in research laboratories,

extracurricular clubs, academic committees, and student support initiatives (e.g., mentoring). Many universities, including the University of Ottawa, also encourage engagement through formal volunteer promotion initiatives (e.g., community service learning and the co-curricular record; Bringle & Clayton, 2012; Elias & Drea, 2013). Hill and Hammond (2023) examined participation in community service learning at the University of Ottawa and identified a small group of undergraduate students who emerged as volunteers during their university studies. Although, in the present thesis, most students in Chapter 4 and all students in Chapter 5 had emerged as volunteers before university, opportunities facilitated by the university were also important for many students' persistent volunteer engagement (discussed further below).

Former Volunteers: The Cessation of Volunteer Engagement

Historically, fewer studies have examined when and why people stop volunteering (i.e., the cessation of volunteering). However, from a trajectory perspective, life events and transitions may interrupt or disrupt volunteering (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Nesbit, 2012; Niebuur et al., 2022). In this thesis, Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 found that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted volunteering for some youth. The closure of many volunteer settings during the height of the pandemic reduced the availability of volunteer opportunities (Lebenbaum et al., 2024), and thus, some students reported their volunteer activities were no longer possible. The pandemic also introduced risks to health (AlOmar et al., 2021; Seah et al., 2021), and some students reported they stopped volunteering to protect themselves and others in their household from contracting the virus. While these barriers to volunteering may reflect unique features of the pandemic, the findings highlight how unexpected and widespread events have the potential to disrupt and inhibit volunteer engagement for some individuals.

Institutional transitions may also contribute to volunteer cessation. While community

service requirements are intended to have a uniform impact on volunteering trajectories (i.e., by making everyone into a volunteer), not everyone will persist as a volunteer once the mandatory aspects of service are removed. Chapter 5 found that some students stopped volunteering as they transitioned from high school, where community service was mandatory, to university, where volunteering was elective. However, as described in the preface and in Chapter 5, this study was disrupted by the onset of COVID-19, and many students in our sample transitioned to university during the pandemic. As such, decisions to stop volunteering were also informed by barriers to volunteering introduced by the pandemic (as discussed above). As outlined in Chapter 1, previous data from Statistics Canada and past volunteering research indicates that civic and community engagement, including volunteering, declines during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood (Malin et al., 2017; Ramey et al., 2022; Turcotte, 2015; Wray-Lake et al., 2017). While it is possible that some of the reasons why youth stop volunteering lies in the quality of their past experiences with service (as seen in Warburton & Smith, 2003), future research would be needed to further explore why some youth fail to engage after high school.

Persistent Decisions about Volunteer Engagement: Volunteers and Non-Volunteers

Although the onset of an event or transition may be associated with changes to volunteer behaviour (as highlighted above), some individuals' volunteer statuses remained consistent over time. In Chapter 3, despite the onset of the pandemic, many students persisted as volunteers. Similarly, in Chapter 5, many students continued to volunteer after they transitioned to university. However, as described in Chapter 2, unlike the volunteer categories outlined by Metcalfe et al. (2018), the trajectory model presented in this thesis did not examine whether persistent volunteers remained engaged in the same organization or started new volunteer activities following an event. As noted above, during the pandemic, many in-person volunteer

organizations were closed (Lebenbaum et al., 2024), and therefore students were unable to maintain their volunteering within these organizations. Similarly, the transition from high school to university often coincides with other life changes (e.g., relocating to a new city; Arnett, 2024), and, as such, access to prior volunteer activities may no longer be possible. Therefore, to persist as volunteers, many students in Chapters 4 and 5 noted they volunteered for different organizations over time.

To further understand the persistence of youth volunteering, Chapter 4 qualitatively explored undergraduate students' past and present experiences with and decisions about volunteering. Consistent with research on volunteer retention (e.g., Hyde et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2017), many students expressed that they were satisfied with their experiences as a volunteer and that their volunteer work fulfilled their motives, which also encouraged their persistent volunteer engagement. Students perceived volunteering as both beneficial for themselves (e.g., personal growth and professional development) and their communities (e.g., giving back and helping others). This finding suggests that the integration of personal and moral goals may be an important aspect of sustained volunteerism (e.g., Faletehan et al., 2021; Frimer & Walker, 2009; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Penner, 2002). Further, as described briefly above, several students acknowledged that their persistent volunteering was supported by their university or their volunteer organizations. Despite barriers to youth volunteering identified in the literature (e.g., time constraints and competing demands; Ballard, 2014; Bitton, 2025; Gage & Thapa, 2012), students mentioned that opportunities provided by the institution (e.g., community service learning) and support at their volunteer placements (e.g., schedule flexibility) facilitated their persistent volunteer engagement.

In contrast to persistent volunteerism, research examining why people persist as non-

volunteers remains more limited. Persistent non-volunteers were also not a primary focus of this thesis; however, the trajectory model identified a large group of persistent non-volunteers in Chapter 3 and a small group in the second part of the findings presented in Chapter 5. In Chapter 3, persistent non-volunteers reported personal and prudential reasons for their decision, similar to the reasons reported by former volunteers (discussed further below). In Chapter 5, the persistent non-volunteer category did not emerge until after the onset of three events (high school entry, COVID-19 onset, and university entry). Metcalfe et al. (2018) argued that cross-sectional studies on volunteering may indicate lower rates of volunteerism since they are often restricted to a shorter period of time. Although, in Chapter 5, a small number of students were classified as persistent non-volunteers, the trajectory model illustrates that these students had history of volunteer engagement. This study demonstrates how applying the model to a longer timeframe may yield different findings than those in shorter timeframes, as in Chapter 3. While much more research would be needed to understand the persistence of non-volunteerism, exploring this pattern of non-engagement could help inform policies designed to encourage volunteering.

Applying the Volunteer Trajectory Model: Strengths and Limitations

The volunteer trajectory model introduced and applied throughout this thesis illustrates how the onset of events and transitions may influence volunteer behaviour and provides a lens to examine changes to and continuity of volunteering over time. As discussed above, the model is useful for identifying patterns of engagement following the onset an event, for example, the persistence of volunteering following the outbreak of COVID-19 in Chapter 3. However, the model alone does not explain why people choose to continue, start, or stop volunteering. Chapters 3 and 5 illustrated that the onset of the same event may have a different impact on volunteer engagement for different individuals. For instance, in Chapter 3, all students

experienced the onset of the pandemic, however, some students emerged as volunteers, others stopped volunteering, and many persisted as volunteers or non-volunteers. Similarly, in Chapter 5, all students transitioned from high school to university, yet some chose to remain volunteers, while others discontinued their engagement. While the four categories outlined by the model seem to reflect real-life patterns of volunteer engagement, the trajectory model is likely best used in conjunction with other approaches to explore why changes to volunteer status may occur over time. For this reason, the present thesis used a qualitative approach to examine youths' lived experiences with volunteering and drew on perspectives from moral developmental theory to develop a deeper understanding of youths' volunteering decisions.

Exploring Volunteering Decisions from a Moral Developmental Perspective

Volunteering is a form of moral engagement, defined by its benefits to others (e.g., Stukas et al., 2015), however, little research has examined volunteering from a moral developmental perspective. Previous research suggests that youth perceive volunteering as an activity with moral aspects (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2015), and morality can motivate volunteer involvement (Moore et al., 2014). Therefore, the studies in this thesis used perspectives from moral developmental theory to examine trajectories of youth volunteering. The following sections provide an in-depth discussion of these findings.

Social Domain Theory and Volunteering Decisions

The studies presented in Chapters 3 and 4 applied social domain theory (Smetana, 2013; Turiel, 2006) to examine youths' decisions about volunteer engagement. Findings from these studies illustrated how youth used personal, social, and moral domains of reasoning to justify their volunteering decisions in a pandemic and non-pandemic context. Consistent with past research that used social domain theory to examine adolescents' judgements about civic and

community engagement (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009), the studies in this thesis found that youth justified their decisions about volunteering using personal and moral reasons. Personal reasons for volunteering highlighted personal interests and goals (e.g., personal development, career enhancement), while personal reasons for not engaging reflected a lack of interest or time for volunteering (e.g., prioritizing other activities). Students also framed volunteering as a moral behaviour and cited reasons for volunteering related to helping others. These findings align with previous volunteering literature that situates volunteer motives as self-oriented and other-oriented (e.g., Cornelis et al., 2013; Stukas et al., 2016; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015). During the pandemic, a small number of students also cited moral reasons for *not* volunteering that emphasized protecting the welfare of others. As discussed in Chapter 3, to our knowledge, moral reasons for not engaging have not been prominent in past social domain theory research and may reflect the unique complexity of volunteering decisions during the pandemic.

Prudential considerations that referenced personal health and safety were also present in youths' decisions about volunteering during the pandemic. As discussed in Chapter 1, social domain theory research often overlooks the prudential domain and considers issues pertaining to personal health and safety as an aspect of the personal domain. However, due to increased risks to health and safety introduced by the onset of COVID-19 (AlOmar et al., 2021; Seah et al., 2021), Chapter 3 explored prudential reasoning as a distinct domain. This study found that prudential justifications were frequently reported by former volunteers and persistent non-volunteers who explained that they chose not to volunteer during the pandemic to protect themselves from contracting the virus. Interestingly, a small number of students also cited prudential reasons *for* volunteering, describing that they chose volunteer activities with limited

direct contact with others. As discussed in Chapter 3, to our knowledge, this is the first study to find prudential justifications used in this way. Although Chapter 5 did not directly apply social domain theory, a subset of students in this study also considered their own health and safety in their decisions about volunteering during the pandemic. However, prudential reasoning was not found in Chapter 4, which was based on data collected four years after the pandemic was first declared. This suggests that decisions about volunteer engagement during the pandemic may have differed from a non-pandemic context and indicates that prudential considerations may have become less salient in the years following the pandemic's onset. Future research could explore prudential considerations associated with volunteering in other disaster or emergency contexts (e.g., hurricanes), which may have different implications for personal health and safety.

The social domain considers social conventions, rules, and norms and, like the prudential domain, has been less prevalent in previous social domain theory research on volunteering. However, the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that youth volunteering occurs within a social context and may be influenced by social rules and norms. In both studies, students described their experiences with Ontario's high school community involvement requirement, highlighting how formal requirements can enforce youth volunteer behaviour. However, students also noted informal expectations to engage to service, for example, volunteering with their parents. Further, in Chapter 5, post-secondary institutional conventions (e.g., volunteer promotion at the university) encouraged some students to engage in elective volunteering. The presence of social reasoning in this thesis may reflect that we asked youth about their real-life volunteer experiences and decisions, which may elicit different themes than hypothetical scenarios (discussed further below).

Together, the studies presented in this thesis highlight that decisions about volunteering

are complex and multifaceted. In the same way that the onset of an event may impact volunteer engagement in different ways for different people, it is also possible for people to engage in the same volunteer behaviours for different reasons (Turiel, 2006). For example, in Chapter 3, while all persistent volunteers chose to continue volunteering during the pandemic, some students justified this decision using personal reasons, while others cited moral reasons. An individual's decision to volunteer may also involve coordination between two or more domains of reasoning. Throughout the interviews in Chapters 4 and 5, students described how they coordinated and integrated personal (e.g., interests and goals), social (e.g., service requirements), and moral (e.g., helping others) considerations into their volunteering decisions both simultaneously and over time. However, in Chapter 3, only a small number of students used more than one domain to justify their decisions about volunteering during the pandemic, which may reflect limitations of open-ended survey measures. From this perspective, a qualitative approach may be better suited to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of real-life volunteering decisions.

Moral Self Theory and Evolving Volunteer Motives Over Time

As described in the preface, initially, a broader goal of this thesis was to explore youth volunteering through the lens of Blasi's (1983, 2004) developmental hypothesis, which proposed that moral motivations may change over time and through experience (see also Walker, 2004, 2014). From this perspective, youths' experiences with volunteering could promote a shift from external motives towards internally integrated motives their role as a volunteer becomes important to their sense of self. In Chapters 4 and 5, many students reflected on how they started to volunteer to fulfill community service requirements or obtain external rewards (e.g., career advancement, skill development). However, as they gained more experience as a volunteer, many students described how their motives began to change as they experienced the benefits of

volunteering for themselves and others. Further, some students described that they developed a deeper understanding of the impact they can have on their communities through volunteering.

These findings are conceptually similar to previous research on volunteering in older adulthood which found that participation in service may be associated with the development of a volunteer role identity (e.g., van Ingen & Wilson, 2017). From this perspective, volunteering may become important to an individual's identity, which in turn may motivate their persistent volunteer engagement (Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner, 2002). While students in the present studies demonstrated that they may have started to develop an understanding of themselves and the world through their service experiences, the typical university student is also in a key period of identity exploration and development (Arnett, 2016, 2024), and therefore, for many students, this transformation is likely ongoing. Although Blasi's theory is far less developed empirically, this perspective offered a novel lens to examine youths' volunteering decisions over time and contributes to informing research on volunteering from a moral developmental perspective.

Hypothetical and Real-Life Moral Reasoning

Historically, moral developmental theory has focused on evaluating moral judgments about hypothetical moral dilemmas, overlooking the role of moral reasoning in everyday decision-making (Walker, 2004, 2014). Therefore, an objective of this thesis was to examine youths' decisions about volunteering in their real lives from a moral developmental perspective. According to Walker (2014), decisions about real-life moral dilemmas differ from hypothetical dilemmas in that they are more likely to consider the consequences of an action on an individual's real life. From this perspective, findings from Chapters 3 and 5, in the context of COVID-19, illustrate that youth were considering the consequences of volunteering for both their personal welfare (prudential reasons) and the welfare of others (moral reasons). These

themes are largely absent from previous research on hypothetical volunteering, and despite emerging in the unique context of the pandemic, may likewise reflect the complexity of real-life moral reasoning. Real-life decisions are also embedded within a social context and may be influenced by social factors. For instance, Chapters 4 and 5 found that many students' decisions to emerge as volunteers were influenced by social rules and requirements (e.g., mandatory service). In contrast, social (or conventional) considerations have not been associated with volunteering in previous domain theory research (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009). Together, the findings from this thesis highlight how exploring moral reasoning in real-life contexts may offer further insight into how youth coordinate moral concerns alongside other concerns when making decisions about volunteering in their real lives.

However, findings from this thesis are also consistent with some previous research on hypothetical volunteering scenarios. Metzger and colleagues conducted a series of studies that used a social domain theory perspective to examine adolescents' judgments about hypothetical civic activities, including volunteering (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; Metzger et al., 2019; Metzger & Ferris, 2013; Metzger & Smetana, 2009; Oosterhoff et al., 2015). These studies found that youths' judgments of volunteering reflected both personal (or discretionary) and moral (or obligatory) aspects. Consistent with these findings, the studies in this thesis also highlighted that students framed volunteering as a personal and moral behaviour and drew on these domains to justify their own volunteering decisions. McNeil and Helwig (2015) examined youths' judgments of hypothetical service requirements and found that requirements that incorporated personal autonomy (i.e., agency and choice) were evaluated more favourably. In Chapters 4 and 5, students described, in both a mandatory and elective context, that they chose volunteer activities that aligned with their interests and goals, and this was also associated with their persistent

volunteer engagement. Thus, while unique themes emerge in the context of real-life decisions, the findings also highlight how general themes can bridge hypothetical and real-life dilemmas.

Theoretical Contributions

Volunteering Trajectories and the Volunteer Trajectory Model

The research presented in this thesis contributes to advancing knowledge on volunteering trajectories by developing a volunteer trajectory model to examine patterns of volunteer engagement following events and transitions. The model was informed by previous research on volunteering trajectories (e.g., Hill & Hammond, 2023; Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018) and outlined four categories of volunteers: persistent, emergent, and former volunteers, and persistent non-volunteers. As discussed earlier in this chapter, these categories seem to reflect patterns of real-life volunteer engagement in emergency and non-emergency contexts. In Chapter 3, grouping students based on these categories facilitated comparisons of domain-based justifications between volunteer trajectory groups. At the time, very little was known about COVID-19 and its impact on volunteering, and this study was one of the first to examine volunteering trajectories in this context. This study contributed to extending previous research on emergency and disaster volunteering (e.g., Twigg & Mosel, 2017; Whittaker et al., 2015) and found that many youth were engaged in formal and informal volunteering during the height of the pandemic. Since the study was published (Grant et al., 2024), Høgenhaven and colleagues have expanded on our findings in a series of studies conducted in Denmark that examined volunteering during the pandemic and persistent volunteering after the pandemic (e.g., Høgenhaven, 2025; Høgenhaven et al., 2025, 2026).

Despite pandemic-related disruptions, Chapter 5 contributed to further advancing the model by applying it to examine volunteering following two institutional transitions. Previous

research on Ontario's mandatory community service requirement has not used a trajectory approach, and therefore, the trajectory model provided a novel lens to explore when youth start, continue, or stop volunteering as they transition between mandatory service and elective volunteering institutional structures. From this perspective, this study found that while many students emerged as volunteers due to the high school requirement, many students also had prior experience with volunteering, which, as discussed above, raises questions about when youth volunteering first emerges. This study also highlighted some limitations of the model when applied to more than one event or transition, and this will be discussed further below.

The trajectory perspective outlined in this thesis is distinct from previous retrospective and longitudinal studies examining volunteering trajectories (e.g., Hogg, 2016; Metcalfe et al., 2018; Niebuur et al., 2022) in that it focused primarily on examining volunteer behaviour following the onset of events or transitions rather than over the life course. While the studies presented in this thesis are bound to a shorter period of time (i.e., offering a "snapshot" of an individual's trajectory as a volunteer), the findings illustrate how the onset of events or transitions may influence volunteering trajectories. Although this thesis focused on youth, the trajectory model could also be applied to examine volunteering in other age groups and amid other events. For example, research on older adulthood has identified retirement as a key transition that may produce changes to volunteer behaviour (e.g., Nesbit, 2012; Niebuur et al., 2022), and perhaps applying the trajectory model could contribute to further understanding the impact of this transition. In principle, the trajectory model could also be extended further into past or future to examine patterns of volunteer behaviour over a longer period of time.

Moral Developmental Theory and Volunteering Decisions

As noted above, although volunteering is a form of moral engagement, little research has

examined volunteering from a moral developmental perspective. The studies presented in thesis contribute to the literature by bridging research on volunteering with broader moral developmental perspectives. Drawing on social domain theory, Chapters 3 and 4 illustrated how students used personal, social, moral, and prudential reasons to justify their decisions about volunteering. Similarly, Chapter 5 also found that students' reflections of their experiences with mandated service emphasized the personal, social, and moral facets of their volunteering. In Chapter 4, students' reasons for volunteering were also interpreted from a functional perspective (Clary et al., 1998). Consistent with social domain theory, this perspective illustrated a coexistence and coordination of personal and moral motives for volunteering. Together, these findings further support Walker's (2014) argument that framing motives for moral and prosocial behaviour as purely self- or other-oriented is an unrealistic expectation for real-life decisions (see also Cornelis et al., 2013; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2015).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, only a small number of studies have used social domain theory to examine volunteering and most of this research has focused on judgments about hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Alvis & Metzger, 2020; McNeil & Helwig, 2015; Metzger et al., 2019). However, the findings from this thesis illustrate that domain-based reasoning may also be present in real-life contexts, and social domain theory can contribute to further understanding real-life volunteering decisions. The focus of this thesis on exploring real-life volunteering was further supported in Chapter 5, when the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many aspects of youths' lives, including volunteering. During the interviews, students' discussions of their future volunteering became more hypothetical and less meaningful due to the uncertainties of the time period. This highlights that hypothetical reasoning is an important aspect of real-life decision-making (i.e., imagining the future impact of one's actions), yet how it is also unclear

whether judgments made in hypothetical contexts translate to real-life actions (i.e., Blasi's (1980, 1983) "judgment-action gap"; see also Krettenauer, 2024; Walker, 2004).

This research also contributes to the moral developmental literature by integrating social domain theory and moral self theory to examine trajectories of youth volunteering. Findings from Chapter 4 suggest that youths' reasons for volunteering may shift from personal to moral as they develop a deeper understanding of volunteering and the importance of their contributions in their communities. From a moral self theory perspective, it is possible that students are beginning to integrate their role as a volunteer into their identities, which in turn may be reflected in their motives for sustained volunteer engagement. To our knowledge, this is the first study to integrate these two largely compatible yet historically distinct moral developmental theories. These findings suggest an interesting avenue for future research exploring how and why moral identity development may occur *through* experience with service.

Qualitative Insights into Volunteer Behaviour

The research presented in this thesis was primarily qualitative and focused on exploring how youth experienced volunteering in their real lives by examining their experiences, perspectives, behaviours, and decisions. Together, the findings highlight the complexity of youth volunteering, such that volunteering plays a number of different roles in youths' lives, and these roles may change over time. Therefore, it is possible that this complexity contributes to the lack of agreed upon definition to characterize volunteerism, as outlined in Chapter 1 (e.g., see Hustinx et al., 2010). While qualitative research does have some key limitations (discussed below), in this thesis, the qualitative approach allowed for more in-depth insights into how and why youth volunteer behaviour changes over time. From a moral developmental perspective, the qualitative approach also illustrated how youth coordinate and integrate personal, social, and moral

considerations into their decisions about volunteering, a finding that has been largely absent in previous quantitative studies (e.g., Metzger et al., 2019; Metzger & Ferris, 2013).

Practical Implications

This research also has practical implications for policies and initiatives intended to encourage youth community engagement. Developing a deeper understanding of youths' experiences with volunteering may help organizations and policymakers design initiatives that align with goals of youth populations. For example, Chapters 4 and 5 found that many students wanted to explore their careers and develop their skills through volunteering, and this finding aligns with past volunteering research (e.g., Gage & Thapa, 2012; Güntert et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2014). However, in addition to fulfilling their personal goals, youth also wanted to make meaningful contributions to their communities through volunteering, demonstrating an integration of personal and moral goals (Frimer & Walker, 2009). Organizations who accept and rely on student volunteers should be aware of students' goals and provide opportunities that foster personal and community development. Similarly, post-secondary initiatives, such as at universities, should continue to promote and offer opportunities for volunteering (e.g., community service learning and the co-curricular record), facilitate connections to community-based organizations, and support students who choose to engage in service.

At the policy-level, Chapter 5 identified some limitations of Ontario's community involvement requirement, from the perspective of students who completed the program. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Henderson et al., 2014, 2019; Pancer et al., 2007), students in this study suggested that increased support and additional resources at the school-level may have enhanced their mandatory community service experiences. In order for compulsory service initiatives to achieve their goal of fostering civic development and

community engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023), it would be important to consider concerns raised by students who have direct experience with the requirement. From this perspective, improvements to the requirement's implementation may contribute to further enhancing youth development and persistent volunteer engagement.

Lastly, findings from Chapter 3 raised some unique questions about the safety of volunteering in some contexts. In this study, many students cited concerns related to their personal health and safety or the health and safety of their family members to justify their decision not to volunteer during the pandemic. However, some students overcame this barrier to engagement by seeking opportunities for virtual volunteering or activities that involved limited direct contact with others. Thus, in the context of the pandemic, increasing the availability and accessibility of safe volunteer opportunities may have increased volunteer engagement. This recommendation could also extend to non-emergency contexts. For instance, students may face other barriers to volunteer engagement (e.g., chronic illness, lack of transportation, caregiving roles) which could be mitigated by increasing the accessibility of volunteer opportunities (e.g., through virtual volunteering) or through accessibility accommodations at volunteer placements.

Limitations and Future Directions

The research presented in this thesis had several limitations. The participants of all three studies were predominately female undergraduate students recruited from one university in Ontario, Canada, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other university student populations. Similarly, the findings from Chapters 4 and 5 were based on qualitative interviews with a small number of participants. While this methodology allowed for in-depth insights into the experiences of these students, they do not necessarily reflect the experiences of wider student populations. Further, in the same way that "university-bound" high school students are more

likely to volunteer without service requirements (e.g., Henderson et al., 2007, 2014, 2019; Pancer et al., 2007), university students' volunteer behaviours are not representative of other youth populations. Many participants in this thesis were enrolled in the faculties of science and health science and expressed an interest in pursuing healthcare professions (e.g., attending medical school), and these goals may have influenced their volunteer behaviours and decisions. As such, future studies should explore volunteering trajectories in other youth populations to develop a wider understanding of youth engagement. For example, students who attend trade-based colleges or youth who have already entered the workforce may demonstrate different patterns of engagement and may report different reasons for engaging, or not engaging, in volunteer work. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, future research could also explore cultural differences associated with youths' volunteer trajectories, behaviours, and decisions.

To examine past volunteer experiences, the studies in this thesis relied on students' retrospective reflections of their volunteer behaviours and decisions. In Chapters 4 and 5, students' early experiences with volunteering occurred many years prior to the study, and thus, their recollections of their reasons for volunteering may have been incomplete. Future research should use a longitudinal approach to examine volunteer behaviours and decisions at multiple time points, as this may contribute a more in-depth understanding of volunteering trajectories over time. Discussions of moral and prosocial behaviours are also prone to social desirability biases (Metzger & Ferris, 2013). Although every effort was made to encourage students to share honest reflections, it is possible that students overreported their volunteer engagement or provided responses that made their decisions about volunteering appear more altruistic.

The findings from this thesis illustrate that understanding volunteer behaviour over time is complex. While the volunteer trajectory model presented here was useful for illustrating

patterns of engagement, it does increase in complexity with the addition of each event, which may also occur at different times for different individuals, as demonstrated in Chapter 5 (i.e., students transitioning to university before or after the pandemic). As such, the model is likely best suited to examine patterns of engagement at the population-level, where the entire sample experiences the onset of the same event at a similar point in time (e.g., the onset of COVID-19, as presented in Chapter 3). However, the model could also be used to examine individual-level trajectories. For instance, a future study with a small sample of participants could apply the model to illustrate each participant's trajectory as a volunteer, which would allow for an in-depth understanding of each individual case and allow for comparisons between participants. Despite its limitations, the model offers a new approach to examining patterns of volunteer behaviour over time and could be used a stepping stone to inform future volunteer trajectory research.

Conclusion

This thesis examined trajectories of youth volunteering and focused on exploring how and why youth volunteer behaviours may change over time. Through the lens of a novel volunteer trajectory model, this thesis examined patterns of youth volunteer engagement following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transitions to high school and university. To further understand volunteering trajectories, this thesis also integrated perspectives from moral developmental theory to examine the role of moral and other judgements in youths' real-life decisions about volunteering and explored how reasons for volunteering may evolve over time. Although the findings are bound to a particular point in time, amidst a widely disruptive pandemic, this research contributes to advancing knowledge on youth volunteering, volunteering trajectories, and volunteering from a moral developmental perspective, and may have practical implications for initiatives designed to encourage youth development and engagement.

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Appendix A:

Recruitment Text (Chapter 3)

Study name: Volunteer experiences during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic

Study type: Online External Study

Points: 0.5 point

Duration: 20 minutes

Description: Due to the impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic on volunteering, the purpose of this study is to examine the volunteer experiences of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participation in this study consists of completing a short online questionnaire asking participants about their volunteer involvement before the outbreak of COVID-19, how their volunteer positions were affected by the pandemic, their involvement in new formal and informal volunteer activities amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and the factors contributing to the decision to, or not to, volunteer during the pandemic. The questionnaire should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants will receive a 0.5 course credit through the ISPR system upon completion.

Principal Investigator: Stuart Hammond; **Co-Principal Investigator:** Emma Grant

Eligibility Requirements: Eligible participants must have engaged in some form of volunteering during the past year to participate in this study. This study is only available in English; eligible students must be able to complete the questionnaire in English.

Appendix B:

Consent Form (Chapter 3)

Title of the study: Volunteer experiences during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic

Dr. Stuart Hammond (Supervisor)
[contact information redacted]

Emma Grant (Co-Investigator/ Ph.D. Student)
[contact information redacted]

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the research team.

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Dr. Stuart Hammond and Emma Grant.

Purpose of the Study: Due to the impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic on volunteering, the purpose of this study is to examine the volunteer experiences of university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire examines students' volunteer involvement before the outbreak of COVID-19, how their volunteer positions were affected by the pandemic, their involvement in new formal and informal volunteer activities amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and the factors contributing to the decision to, or not to, volunteer, during the pandemic.

Participation: Your participation will consist of completing an online questionnaire in English which asks about your volunteer involvement before the outbreak of COVID-19 and your involvement in formal and informal volunteer activities during the pandemic. The questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Risks: Your participation in this interview could result in volunteering personal information, including information about your past or current volunteer positions which may cause you to feel some psychological or emotional discomfort or regret from disclosing personal information. You have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize this risk. You will be provided with contact information for counselling and health services at the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa Distress Centre, and the Crisis Line Ottawa.

Benefits: Your participation in this study will allow you to gain insight into your volunteer experiences. You will also be helping to advance knowledge the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering, the volunteer experiences of university students, and their involvement in volunteer activities during the pandemic.

Confidentiality and anonymity: This study will collect data through the Qualtrics software. Qualtrics has multiple levels of security to protect the confidentiality of the data including servers protected by firewall, daily security scans and password protected storage. The data you provide will be downloaded from Qualtrics to a secure computer. The downloaded data will be

kept on password protected computers during data collection and throughout the retention period. In addition, we will not collect any information on the computer on which you will take the questionnaire (IP address, etc.) All data will be stored on password protected computer hard drives.

For the purpose of this study no proof of identity or private information will be required. The data you provide will remain strictly confidential and will not be associated with your unique ISPR code. A separate file containing your ISPR code will be stored on a password protected computer for the duration of this study and will then be deleted. The data collected will be used for the purposes of the study outlined above and any other uses will undergo an ethics review. Your data may be used in future publications. No identifying or personal information about you will appear in any publication or presentation.

In order to minimize the risk of security breaches and to help ensure your confidentiality, we recommend the use of standard safety measures such as signing out of your account, closing your browser, and locking your screen or device when you are no longer using them or when you have completed the study.

Conservation of data: The data from this study will be kept strictly confidential and your answers will not be in any way related to your personal information. The electronic data collected will be kept in a secure manner on a password protected computer. Only the study researchers and research assistants, who have signed confidentiality agreements, will have access to the anonymous data. The data will be kept for 10 years after the study has been completed.

Compensation: As compensation for your participation in this study, you will receive 0.5 ISPR course credit. If you choose to withdraw from the study once in progress, you will still receive this compensation.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted and destroyed.

Acceptance: By choosing to participate in this study you acknowledge that you have read and understood the terms of your participation. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you understand that if you would like to withdraw you may do so without having to provide an explanation and without penalty of any kind. Additionally, you are aware that the data collected in this study is confidential with respect to your personal identity. You understand that the data collected in this study will be used for research purposes and may be published as part of a research article.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer at :

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity
Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland St., Room 154

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1N 6N5
(613) 562-5387
ethics@uottawa.ca.

If you wish to talk to a counselor about any of your feelings experienced during this study, please contact the following resources:

University of Ottawa Health Services
Website: uottawa.ca/health
Phone number: 613-564-3950

Counselling Services at the Student Academic Success Centre
https://sass.uottawa.ca/

Ottawa Distress Centre
Phone number: 613-238-3311

Crisis Line Ottawa
Phone number: 613-722-6914
24-hour toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991

Please keep a copy of this form for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

By selecting "I Agree" below you acknowledge that you have read the above description of the study and agree to participate in the above research conducted by Dr. Stuart Hammond and Emma Grant of the School of Psychology. Your endorsement indicates that you consent to participate in the study, and this is in no way constitutes a waiver of your rights. Please print or save a copy of this document for your personal information.

Click "I Agree" to indicate that you understand the information above and would like to participate in this study or "I Disagree" if you do not want to participate in the study.

- ○ I Agree
- ○ I Disagree

Appendix C:

Online Survey (Chapter 3)

Demographics:

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other (specify): _____
- ○ Prefer not to answer

What is your age in years?
Free response

How do you describe your ethnicity?
Free response

What is your current year of study at the University of Ottawa?

- ○ First year
- ○ Second year
- ○ Third year
- ○ Fourth year
- ○ Fifth year or higher
- ○ Graduate student

What is your current major (e.g., psychology)?
Free response

Past Volunteer Experiences:

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, were you volunteering with an on- or off-campus organization?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

[If yes]

> What type of volunteer organization(s) did you volunteer with?
> *List all below*
>
> How many hours, on average, did you contribute to volunteering per week?
> *Free response*

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, how were you completing your volunteer activities? *Select all that apply*

- ○ In-person
- ○ Online
- ○ Other (specify): _____

Was your volunteer position influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

[If yes]

Please describe below in what way(s) your volunteer position was affected.
Free response

Formal Volunteering During COVID-19:

Did you get involved in any new formal volunteer activities (e.g., with an organization) since the beginning of the COIVD-19 pandemic (since March 2020)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

[If yes]

What type of formal volunteer organization(s) did you volunteer with?
List all below

How many hours, on average, did you contribute to volunteering per week?
Free response

How did you complete your volunteer responsibilities? *Select all that apply*

- ○ Online
- ○ In-person
- ○ Other (specify): _____

Why did you choose to volunteer with this/these organization(s) during COVID-19?
Free response

[If no]

Why did you choose not to get involved in any formal volunteer activities during COVID-19?
Free response

Informal Helping During COVID-19:

Did you engage in any informal volunteering (e.g., helping an elderly neighbour with shopping) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020)?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

[If yes]

Please list and describe the informal volunteering you engaged in below.
List all below

How many hours, on average, did you contribute to informal volunteering per week?
Free response

How were you engaging in these activities? *Select all that apply*

- ○ Online
- ○ In-person
- ○ Other (specify): _____

Why did you choose to engage in informal volunteering during COVID-19?
Free response

[If no]

Why did you choose not to get involved in any informal volunteering during COVID-19?
Free response

Appendix D:

Recruitment Text (Chapter 4)

Study name: Why do you volunteer?

Study type: Standard (lab) study

Duration: 60 minutes

Points: 2.0 points

Description: The purpose of this project is to examine university students' experiences with and decisions about elective volunteering in university. We are interested in interviewing undergraduate students who are currently volunteering with an on- or off-campus organization. Participants in this study will be asked to discuss their past and present experiences with volunteering, their reasons for and decisions about volunteering, and any other topics that come up naturally within the interview. During the interview, participants will also be asked to complete a short online survey consisting of a demographic questionnaire and a series of questions about possible reasons for volunteering.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place online via Zoom videoconference. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Please note that this study is only available in English.

Principal Investigator: Emma Grant; **Supervisor:** Dr. Stuart Hammond

Eligibility Requirements: Participants MUST: (a) be currently volunteering with an on- or off-campus organization; (b) be able to converse in English; and (c) participate in the study using a computer with a microphone and a stable internet connection

Preparation: Please have your ISPR code available

Appendix E:

Consent Form (Chapter 4)

Title of the study: Why do you volunteer? Exploring university students' experiences with and decisions about volunteering

Emma Grant (Principal Investigator / Ph.D. Candidate)
[contact information redacted]

Dr. Stuart Hammond (Supervisor)
[contact information redacted]

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the research team.

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted as part of Emma Grant's Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Dr. Stuart Hammond.

Purpose of the Project: The purpose of this project is to examine university students' past and present experiences with volunteering and their reasons for and decisions about elective volunteering in university. This study will offer insight into undergraduate students' volunteering and the factors contributing to students' decisions to volunteer or not volunteer.

Participation: Your participation in this study will consist of answering interview questions about your past and present experiences with volunteering, your motives for volunteering, and your decisions about volunteering. The interview will last approximately 60-70 minutes and will take place online via Zoom videoconference. Your responses during the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis by members of the research team. As part of Zoom's features, recordings include both audio and video, however, only audio recordings will be used for analysis purposes. The interview will be conducted in English.

During the interview, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey through the Qualtrics software. The survey will consist of a demographic questionnaire and the Volunteer Functions Inventory, a measure used to assess volunteer motives. You will be compensated with 2.0 ISPR points for your participation in the study. Compensation will be prorated based on each task involved in this study; 0.5 point for the online survey and 1.5 points for the interview.

Risks: We do not anticipate that there are serious risks from your participation in this study. Some people may feel uncomfortable talking about themselves and their experiences, however, every effort will be made by the researcher to minimize this risk and ensure you are comfortable throughout the study.

Benefits: Your participation in this study will allow you to gain insight into your volunteer experiences. You will also be helping to advance knowledge on university students' volunteer experiences, volunteer motives, and reasoning about volunteering.

Confidentiality and anonymity: Your contributions to this project will remain strictly confidential. The data you provide will be given a unique study code, separate from your ISPR identity code, to ensure your anonymity. A separate file containing your ISPR code will be stored on a password protected computer for the duration of the study and will then be deleted. Only the abovementioned researchers and research assistants who have signed confidentiality agreements will have access to the anonymous data. The data collected will be used for the purpose of the study outlined above and any other uses will undergo an ethics review. Your data may be used in future publications and presentations. All identifying or personal information (e.g., names, personal identifiers) will not be shared or used in any future publications or presentations.

The interview will be audio-recorded to be transcribed once the interview is completed. As part of Zoom's features, recordings include both audio and video, however, only audio recordings will be used for analysis purposes. The video recordings will be deleted as soon as the interview is completed. During transcription, the researcher will de-identify any identifying information discussed during the interview. Once your interview has been transcribed, researchers working on this project will not have access to any of your personal information.

The online survey will collect data through the Qualtrics software. Qualtrics has multiple levels of security to protect the confidentiality of the data including servers protected by firewall, daily security scans, and password protected storage. The data you provide will be downloaded from Qualtrics to a secure computer. The downloaded data will be kept on encrypted password protected computers during data collection and throughout the retention period. In addition, we will not collect any information on the computer on which you will take the questionnaire (IP address, etc.). All data will be stored on encrypted password protected computer hard drives. To minimize the risk of security breaches and to help ensure your confidentiality, we recommend the use of standard safety measures such as signing out of your account, closing your browser, and locking your screen or device when you are no longer using them or when you have completed the study.

Conservation of data: The data from this study will be kept strictly confidential and your answers will not be in any way related to your personal information. Any hard copies of the data collected (e.g., interviewer notes) and the hard drive containing the electronic data (e.g., online survey data, audio recordings, and transcripts) will be kept secure in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home or in a locked research office at the University of Ottawa. The online survey data downloaded from Qualtrics, the audio recorded interviews downloaded from Zoom, the interview transcripts, and interviewer notes will be password protected and stored on the researchers encrypted and password protected computer and password protected hard drive. The data will be retained for 10 years after the study has been completed, after which, the electronic data will be securely deleted, and the physical data will be destroyed.

Compensation: As compensation for your participation in this study, you will receive 2.0 ISPR points. Compensation will be prorated based on each task involved in this study; 0.5 point for the online survey and 1.5 points for the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the study once in progress, you will still receive compensation (i.e., if you withdraw before the interview, you will still receive 0.5 point).

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted and destroyed.

Acceptance: By choosing to participate in this study you acknowledge that you have read and understood the terms of your participation. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you understand that if you would like to withdraw you may do so without having to provide an explanation and without penalty of any kind. Additionally, you are aware that the data collected in this study is confidential with respect to your personal identity. You understand that the data collected in this study will be used for research purposes and may be published as part of a research article.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant or the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer:

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity
Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland St., Room 154
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1N 6N5
(613) 562-5387
ethics@uottawa.ca

Please keep a copy of this form for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Consent to Participate

By selecting "I Agree" below you acknowledge that you have read the above description of the study and agree to participate in the above research conducted by Emma Grant and Dr. Stuart Hammond of the School of Psychology. Your endorsement indicates that you consent to participate in the study, and this is in no way constitutes a waiver of your rights. Please print or save a copy of this document for your personal information.

Click "I Agree" to indicate that you understand the information above and would like to participate in this study or "I Disagree" if you do not want to participate in the

- ○ I Agree
- ○ I Disagree

Appendix F:

Online Survey (Chapter 4)

Demographics:

What is your gender?

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ None of the options describe my gender identity. I identify as: _____
- ○ Prefer not to answer

What is your age in years?
Free response

How do you describe your ethnicity?
Free response

What is your current year of study at the University of Ottawa?

- ○ First year
- ○ Second year
- ○ Third year
- ○ Fourth year
- ○ Fifth year or higher

What is your current major (e.g., psychology)?
Free response

Past Volunteering:

Volunteering is defined as a voluntary activity that benefits others without direct financial compensation to the individual (Wilson & Musick, 2007). This study examines **formal volunteering**, whereby an individual volunteers in a formal setting (i.e., through a group, club, or organization). Volunteer activities may take place occasionally (e.g., helping with a specific event) or may be sustained over a longer period of time (e.g., weekly commitment). Based on this description of formal volunteering:

Did you volunteer before starting university?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

[If yes]

How old were you when you volunteered for the first time?
Free response

Where was your first experience with volunteering? List or describe the organization(s) below:
Free response

Select the option that best describes your first experience with volunteering:

- ○ Required/mandatory (e.g., high school community service)
- ○ Optional/elective (e.g., by choice or interest)
- ○ Other (describe): _____

Current Volunteering:

Where are you currently volunteering? List or describe the organization(s) below:
Free response

How long have you been volunteering with your current organization(s)?
Free response

How many hours do you spend volunteering per week, on average?

- ○ Less than 1 hour
- ○ 1 to 3 hours
- ○ 4 to 6 hours
- ○ 7 to 10 hours
- ○ 11 hours or more

Select the option that best describes your current volunteering:

- ○ Required/mandatory (e.g., required as part of a course)
- ○ Optional/elective (e.g., by choice or interest)
- ○ Other (describe): _____

Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1998):

Thinking about your current volunteering, please indicate how important or accurate each of the reasons for volunteering were for you in doing volunteer work (1 = *not at all important/accurate*; 7 = *extremely important/accurate*).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My friends volunteer.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People I'm close to want me to volunteer.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering makes me feel important.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People I know share an interest in community service.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me forget about it.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
By volunteering I feel less lonely.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can make new contacts that might help my business or career.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can learn more about the cause for which I am working.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering increases my self-esteem.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering allows me to explore different career options.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel compassion toward people in need.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands-on experience.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel it is important to help others.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering will help me to succeed in my chosen profession.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can do something for a cause that is important to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering makes me feel needed.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering experience will look good on my resume.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteering is a way to make new friends.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I can explore my own strengths.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix G:

Interview Guide (Chapter 4)

[N.B. Given the conversational nature of the semi-structured interview, probes and follow-up questions may be added or removed throughout the course of the interview process based upon the participants' responses]

Opening Comments & Consent

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is _____, and I am [*provide some details about yourself*, *e.g., fifth-year Ph.D. Candidate in Experimental Psychology*]. The purpose of today's interview is to discuss your past and present experiences with volunteering and your reasons for and decisions about volunteering. Our conversation will help to shed light on undergraduate students' volunteering and the factors contributing to students' decisions to volunteer or not volunteer. Participation in this study should take roughly 60 minutes.

The study involves two parts: 1) A short online survey which includes a short demographics questionnaire and a series of questions about possible reasons for volunteering. 2) An interview about your experiences with volunteering and your decisions about volunteering.

Through the Zoom chat, I will send you a link to review the consent form for this study and complete the online survey. The consent form outlines the purpose of the project, what you can expect from your participation, the risks and benefits, the steps we will take to keep your responses confidential, anonymous, and secure, and the compensation for your participation.

Please take your time reading through the details of the consent form and, if you choose to participate, please complete the survey questions. Please let me know if you have any questions at any time.

Survey Link: [redacted]

[Allow participant to review the consent form and complete survey and answer any questions that arise. This should take approximately 10 minutes of the total time.]

[Once the participant completes the survey and returns their attention to the Zoom meeting]

Thank you for completing the survey. Do you have any questions before we move into the interview? *[Answer any questions]*

As a reminder, the interview will be audio recorded and transcriptions of the interview will be generated by the research team. As part of Zoom's features, recordings include both audio and video, however, only audio recordings will be used – the video recordings will be permanently deleted as soon as the interview is completed. The audio recordings will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. The data you provide may be used in future publications or presentations, however, any personal or identifying information will be removed.

Please remember, you can refuse to answer a question or choose to stop at any time during the interview. You will receive 2.0 ISPR points as compensation for your participation.

Do you have any questions so far? *[Answer any possible questions]*
Do you consent to continuing with the interview?

Start Audio Recording Here *[Zoom will ask the participant for consent to record the meeting]*

Interviewer: Today is (date), I am here with participant # ___. Before we begin the interview, I would like to confirm that we have reviewed the consent form, I have answered any questions you have about the study so far, and you have given informed consent to continue your participation in the interview. *[Wait for participant's verbal consent before continuing]*

Icebreaker
Interviewer: To start off, could you please tell me a little about yourself? This can include your interests, hobbies, subjects that you like to study, program of study, year of study.

[Discussion on this topic should only take about 1-2 minutes of the total time]

Interview Questions
Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that with me. As I mentioned, the interview is designed to ask you a few questions about your journey as a volunteer through your volunteer experiences and reasons for volunteering.

To begin, before we talk about your specific experiences…

1) Overall, when you think about volunteering, what comes to mind?

Follow-up questions:
- What do you think are some important characteristics of volunteering?
- How have you come to this understanding?

Now we will shift to discussing some of your experiences with volunteering…

2) To begin, can you tell me about your first experience with volunteering?
- What volunteer activities did you participate in when you first started volunteering?

[If multiple volunteer activities are mentioned, ask relevant follow-ups for each activity]

Follow-up questions:
- What kinds of things did you do? What were some of your responsibilities?
- How frequently were you volunteering with this organization?
- How did you start volunteering with this organization?
    - How were you put into contact or find out about the volunteer opportunity?
- Thinking back to when you first started volunteering with this organization, what motivated you to start volunteering?

    - Was this something that you started by choice or was it required?
- How old were you when you started?
- How long did you volunteer with this organization?
    - Why did you decide to continue volunteering with this organization?
    - Why did you decide to stop volunteering with this organization?

3) Before we move on to discussing your current volunteering, do you have any other past volunteer experiences? And if yes, can you tell me a little bit about them?

[If yes, for each volunteer activity]

- How frequently were you volunteering with this organization?
- How did you start volunteering with this organization?
    - How were you put into contact or find out about the volunteer opportunity?
- Thinking back to when you first started volunteering with this organization, what motivated you to start volunteering?
    - Was this something that you started by choice or was it required?
- How long did you volunteer with this organization?
    - Why did you decide to continue volunteering with this organization?
    - Why did you decide to stop volunteering with this organization?

4) Now we will transition to discussing your current volunteering. Can you tell me about the volunteering you are currently participating in?

[If multiple volunteer activities are mentioned, ask relevant follow-ups for each activity]

Follow-up questions:

- What kinds of things did you do? What are some of your responsibilities?
- How frequently are you volunteering with this organization?
    - Have you found it difficult to incorporate volunteering into your life as a university student? Why or why not?
- How did you start volunteering with this organization?
    - How were you put into contact or find out about the volunteer opportunity?
- Thinking back to when you first started volunteering with this organization, what motivated you to start volunteering?
- How long have you been volunteering with this organization?
    - Why have you decided to continue volunteering with this organization?
    - Have your reasons for volunteering with this organization changed over time?
        - Why or why not?
    - What has kept you going?
- How long do you think you will continue volunteering with this organization?
    - When do you think your volunteering might wrap up? Why?

5) Thinking about all the volunteer experiences (past and present) we have just discussed; do you think your reasons for volunteering have changed over time? Why or why not?

Follow-up questions:

- If yes, why do you think your reasons for volunteering have changed?
- Do you think your past experiences with volunteering influenced your decision to volunteer today? Why or why not?
- What kinds of things, if any, do you think you've learned throughout your experiences with volunteering?
- Have you experienced any barriers to volunteering? Please describe.
    - If yes, how have you overcome these barriers?

6) Why do you think it is important, or not important, for you to volunteer?

Follow-up questions:

- How have you come to this understanding (of the importance/not importance) of volunteering?
- When you're thinking about starting a new volunteer position, what factors contribute to your decision to start volunteering?
- When or why would it be OK for you stop volunteering?
    - What factors would contribute to your decision to stop?

Wrapping Up/Debriefing

[Summarize what was discussed during the interview]

Interviewer: We are coming to the end of the interview, but is there anything else you would like to share that you didn't get a chance to say during the interview before we wrap up?

Follow-up questions:

- Are there any questions you wished we had asked?
- Do you have any feedback you would like to give?

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study and share your experiences with me. Before you leave, I would like to remind you that the consent form has the contact information of the ethics department and the researchers involved in this study, should you have any questions.

Thank you again for your participation.

Appendix H:

Recruitment Text (Chapter 5)

Study name: Volunteer experiences in high school and their relation to university volunteering

Study type: Standard (lab) study

Points: 1 point

Duration: 1 hour

Description: We are interested in interviewing undergraduate students who attended high school in Ontario and participated in Ontario's provincially mandated high school community service program (i.e., 40-hours of community service required for graduation). Participants will be asked to discuss their experiences with mandatory community service, their current, or intended, volunteer behaviours, their attitudes towards volunteering, and any other topics that come up naturally within the interview. Interviews should take roughly one hour. Participants will receive one course credit through the ISPR system upon completion. The interviews will take place virtually using videoconferencing tools (e.g., Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or FaceTime).

Principal Investigator: Stuart Hammond; **Co-Principal Investigator:** Emma Grant

Eligibility Requirements: Undergraduate students who completed high school in Ontario and participated in Ontario's mandatory high school community service program.
Eligible students must also be able to converse in English.

Appendix I:

Consent Form (Chapter 5)

Title of the study: Volunteer experiences in high school and their relation to university volunteering

Dr. Stuart Hammond (Principal Investigator)
[contact information redacted]

Emma Grant (Co-Principal Investigator, Ph.D. Student)
[contact information redacted]

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Dr. Stuart Hammond and Emma Grant.

Purpose of the Interview: The purpose of this project is to explore the relation between young adults' experiences in Ontario's provincially mandated high school community service program and their volunteering in university. The interview will explore University of Ottawa undergraduate students' past volunteer behaviours, their experiences with mandatory community service programs, their current, or intended, volunteer behaviours at the university level and their attitudes towards volunteering

Participation: My participation will consist of answering interview questions about my high school volunteer experiences, my attitudes towards volunteering and my current, or intended, volunteering in university. The interview will last one hour and will take place in a psychology laboratory at the University of Ottawa. My responses during the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis by members of the research team. I will be compensated with one (1) ISPR course credit.

Risks: My participation in this interview could result in me volunteering personal information, including information about my past or current volunteer positions which may cause me to feel some psychological or emotional discomfort or regret from disclosing personal information. I have received assurance from the researcher that every effort will be made to minimize this risk. I will be provided with contact information for counselling and health services at the University of Ottawa, the Ottawa Distress Centre, and the Crisis Line Ottawa.

Benefits: My participation in this study will allow me to gain insight into my volunteer experiences. I will also be helping to advance knowledge on students' experiences with mandatory community service programs and its relation to volunteering as an undergraduate student.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used for the abovementioned research study and that my confidentiality will be protected. My responses will be audio-recorded in order to be transcribed once the interview is completed.

During the transcribing process, the Co-Principal Investigator will de-identify any identifying information brought up during the interview. Once my interview responses are transcribed, researchers working on this project will not have access to any of my personal information. My responses will then be given a unique study code, separate from my ISPR identity code, in order to ensure my anonymity.

Conservation of data: Audio recordings will be transferred onto a password protected removable hard drive. Interview transcriptions along with other study materials (e.g., consent forms, removable hard drive) will be kept secure in a locked cabinet in a locked research office at the University of Ottawa. All data collected will be kept for at least 10 years, after which it will be deleted and the hard drive on which it was stored will be destroyed. Only the abovementioned researchers and research assistants who have signed confidentiality agreements will have access to the anonymous data. My responses may be used in future research publications or conference presentations; however, no personal or identifying information about me will appear in any publication or presentation.

Compensation: As compensation for my participation in this study, I will receive one (1) ISPR course credit. I understand that if I choose to withdraw from the study once in progress, I will still receive this compensation.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted and destroyed.

Contacts

The following people are involved in this research project and may be contacted at any time if you have any further questions about the project, what it means, or concerns about how it was conducted:

Dr. Stuart Hammond, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, [email redacted]

Emma Grant, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, [email redacted]

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer at:

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity
Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland St., Room 154
Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1N 6N5
613-562-5387
ethics@uottawa.ca

Please keep this form for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you wish to talk to a counselor about any of your feelings experienced during this study, please contact the following resources:

University of Ottawa Health Services
Website: uottawa.ca/health
Phone number: 613-564-3950

Counselling Services at the Student Academic Success Centre
https://sass.uottawa.ca/

Ottawa Distress Centre
Phone number: 613-238-3311

Crisis Line Ottawa
Phone number: 613-722-6914
24-hour toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991

Appendix J:

Interview Guide (Chapter 5)

The interview guide for the present study has been adapted from Pancer et al. (2007).

The interview questions will address three categories:

1. Past volunteer experiences (i.e., during high school and/or earlier). Including reflections and perceptions of the Ontario high school mandatory community service requirement.
2. Current or intended volunteer behaviours (i.e., university volunteering)
3. Attitudes towards volunteering

[N.B. Given the conversational nature of the interview, appropriate additional questions and follow-up questions may be added or removed throughout the course of the interview based upon the participants responses]

Introduction & Consent

Interviewer: I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is _____ and I am a *[provide some details about yourself, e.g., year of study and program]*. This [*time of day, i.e., morning, afternoon, evening]* I would like to talk to you about your past high school community service experiences and your current, or intended, volunteering. More specifically, we will be talking about the possible relationship that may exist between your high school volunteering experiences and your attitudes towards volunteering. Our conversation will help to shed light on volunteering and social engagement in undergraduate students. This interview should take roughly one hour of your time.

The piece of paper that I am handing you right now is a consent form, which will outline what you can expect from your participation in this interview. It also has information on how we are going to keep your responses confidential, anonymous, and secure. These interviews are going to be audio recorded in order facilitate transcription by a member of our research team and all identifying information will be removed from the transcript. The recording and anything else you say will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team. All of the study materials, for example, the recordings, your consent form, etc. will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a locked room, so only researchers involved in this project will have access to your de-identified data. Do you have any questions so far? *[Answer any possible questions]*

Please read over the consent form and sign at the bottom of the third page if you would like to continue with the interview. You can refuse to answer a question or choose to stop at any time.

[Give them time to read and sign the form]
[After they have signed the consent form]: One copy is for you to keep, and the other is for us.

Interviewer: Before we start, I would like to confirm that you did complete high school in Ontario and participated in the mandatory community service program?

Icebreaker

Interviewer: To start off, would you mind telling me about *[e.g., a few of your interests? Hobbies? Subjects that you like to study? Program of study? Year of study?]*

[Discussion on this topic should only take up about 1-2 minutes of the total time]

Interview Questions

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that with me. Now as I mentioned we have set up this interview to ask you a few questions about your involvement as a volunteer in high school and your current, or intended, volunteering in university, but feel free to mention any experiences you have had with volunteering, either in high school or earlier. I hope that you can be as honest as possible, but just remember that if any question makes you feel uncomfortable or if you do not feel like answering, please just say "Skip" and we can move on to the next question.

Past Volunteer Experiences

1) How did you complete your mandatory community service requirement in high school? What volunteer activities did you participate in?

[If multiple volunteer activities were mentioned, ask relevant follow-up questions for each]

Follow-up questions:

- What was the organization you worked with the most?
- How long did you volunteer with them?
- How many hours total would you say you volunteered with this organization?
- What kinds of things did you do? What were some of your responsibilities?
- How did you come to volunteer with them, that is, how were you put in contact with the organization, was it through school, friends, family or some other way?
- What expectations did you have regarding your positions?
    - Where those expectations met?
- In retrospect, how do you assess that experience, was it a positive or negative experience? How do you feel about this experience?
    - *If positive:*
        - What did you like about it?
        - Was there anything you disliked?
    - *If negative:*
        - What did you dislike about it?
        - Was there anything you liked about it?
- What do you think is the most important thing you took away from your experience?
- Do you think you would have gotten involved in this organization has it not been a requirement for your high school diploma?
- Was this your first experience with volunteer work? Did you participate in any volunteer activities prior to high school?

2) Thinking about the way you completed your volunteer requirement:

- Did you complete it in a fairly short span of time, or did you spread it over a long period?

- Did you complete more than the required 40 hours?

Reflections and perceptions on the Ontario high school mandatory service requirement

3) Do you think it is a good idea to have a mandatory community service requirement in high school?

Follow-up questions:

- Is there anything you would change about the program that would make the program better?
- Do you feel like you learned anything as a result of your volunteer work?
    - *If yes,* what kinds of things?
- Did your volunteer work influence your ideas about what kinds of career you want to pursue, or the university programs you applied for?
    - *If yes,* in what way?

Current Volunteer Involvement

4) Since coming to university, have you continued your involvement in any of the community volunteer activities or organizations that you mentioned?

If yes, follow-up questions:

- Which ones?
- How much time do you spend working there?

5) Since coming to university, have you gotten involved in any new kinds of community volunteer activities?

If yes, follow-up questions:

- What are they?
- How much time to you spend working there?
- How did you come to volunteer with them, that is, that is, how were you put in contact with the organization, was it through school, friends, family or some other way?
- Do you think your past volunteer experiences (i.e., during high school) influenced your decision to participate in this activity?
    - *If yes*, in what way?
    - *If no*, why not?

If no, follow-up questions:

- Do you intend to participate in volunteer activities during your time at university?
- Are there any places you that you're considering volunteering with or might like to volunteer with in the future? Which ones?
- Do you think your past volunteer experiences (i.e., during high school) has had an influence on your desire to volunteer in the future?
    - *If yes*, in what way?
    - *If no*, why not?

Volunteering and COVID-19

[N.B. This subset of questions was added due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Only participants recruited after the outbreak of COVID-19 responded to these questions during the interview]

6) Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, were you volunteering with an on- or off-campus organization?

If yes, follow-up questions:

- What type of volunteer organization(s) did you volunteer with?
- How long did you volunteer with them?
- How many hours, on average, did you contribute to volunteering per week? How many hours total would you say you volunteered with this organization?
- How were you completing your responsibilities as a volunteer? Was it in-person or online?
- Was this volunteer position influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic? In what ways?

7) Did you get involved in any new formal volunteer activities (e.g., with an organization) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020)?

If yes, follow-up questions:

- What type of volunteer organization(s) did you volunteer with?
- How many hours, on average, did you contribute to volunteering per week?
- How were you completing your volunteer responsibilities? Was it in-person or online?
- Why did you choose to volunteer with this organization during COVID-19?
- Are you still involved as a volunteer with this organization, today?

If no, follow-up questions:

- Why did you choose not to get involved in any formal volunteer activities during COVID-19?

8) Did you engage in any informal volunteering (e.g., helping an elderly neighbour with shopping) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (since March 2020)?

If yes, follow-up questions:

- What kind of activities did you engage in? Please describe them for me
- How many hours, on average, did you contribute to informal volunteering per week?
- How were you engaging in these activities. Was it in-person or online?
- Why did you choose to engage in informal volunteer activities during COVID-19?

If no, follow-up questions:

- Why did you choose not to get involved in any informal volunteer activities during COVID-19?

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your experiences with volunteering, with this last set of questions we wanted to discuss your thoughts about volunteering in general.

[N.B. the next set of questions will only be asked if time permits – interviews will not be longer than one hour]

Attitudes Towards Volunteering

9) Do you think that more people should be volunteering in their communities?

- Why?
- What does it achieve?

10) Do you feel people have a responsibility to help others in their community?

- Why?
- How did you come to feel this way?

<u>Wrapping Up/Debriefing</u>

Interviewer: We are coming to the end of this interview, but is there was anything else you would like to share that you didn't get a chance to say in the interview before we wrap up?

Follow-up questions:

- What feedback would you like to give?
- Are there any questions that you wish we had asked?

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to participate and share your experiences with me. Before you leave, I would just like to remind you that the consent form has the contact information of the ethics department and the researchers involved in this study, should you have any questions. The consent form also includes the telephone numbers for various counselling and mental health services in Ottawa.

Thanks again for your participation.