



1. Background

Generation Me vs. We: Do *emerging adults* (EA), 18-29 year-olds in a lifestage characterized by identity exploration (e.g., Arnett, 2000), deserve the 'bad press' of being selfish and self-absorbed?

Volunteering and Service: Many EA engage in volunteering, and at the uOttawa and elsewhere, engage in *community service learning* (CSL), volunteering connected to university courses.

Characteristics of Caring: One reason some EA engage in volunteering and CSL are traits such as *empathy* or other *prosocial tendencies* (such as altruism).

Goal of study: To explore the role of empathy and other prosocial tendencies in EA decisions to engage in service and volunteering.

2. Methods

Sample: 95 students (78 female, $M_{age}=20.42$ years) students enrolled in developmental psychology courses with a CSL option (diverse ethnicities, majors and academic standing)

Procedure: Online surveys completed over semester

Measures:

Demographics: Basic demographics, volunteering and CSL enrollment, academic demographics (e.g., major), and work and housing factors (e.g., length of commute to university).

Empathy: Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1983) with four subscales:

- *Empathic Concern* (EC; e.g., "I often have tender, concerned feeling for those less fortunate than me")
- *Fantasy* (FS; e.g., "I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel")
- *Perspective Taking* (PT; e.g., "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective")
- *Personal Distress* (PD; e.g., "In emergency situations, I feel apprehensive and ill at ease").

Prosocial tendencies: Prosocial Tendencies Measures (PTM; Carlo et al., 2003), a 23-item, 6 subscale, measure:

- *altruistic* ("I often help even if I don't think I will get anything out of helping")
- *anonymous* ("I tend to help others in need when they do not know who helped them")
- *compliant* ("I never wait to help others when they ask for it")
- *dire* ("I tend to help people who are in a real crisis or need")
- *emotional* ("It makes me feel good when I can comfort someone who is very upset")
- *public* ("I can help others best when people are watching me")

3. Results

Demographics

Over half of students have some outside employment; for those employed, average hours work / week was approximately 15 hours. However, neither factor was correlated with volunteer status. (43 non-volunteers, 28 volunteers, 24 CSL participants).

Table 1: Correlations for age and volunteering status with empathy and prosocial tendencies

	Empathy (IRI)	Prosocial Tendencies (PTM)	Volunteering status
Age	PD -.224*	Public -.334**	N.S.
Volunteer or non-volunteer	FS .259* EC .337**	Compliant .255* Dire .269** Emotional .246*	---

Figure 1 – IRI subscales by volunteer status (divided by non-volunteer, CSL, and volunteer)

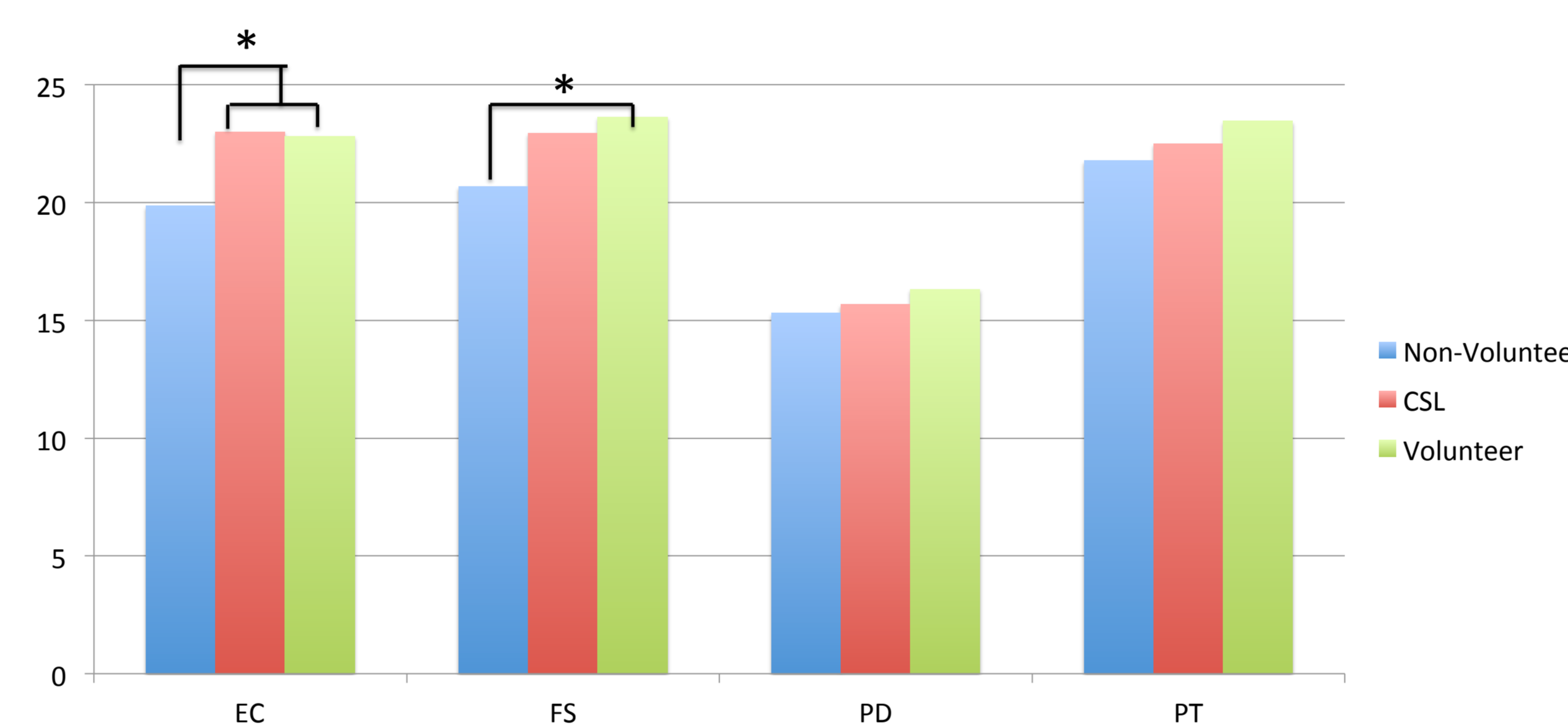
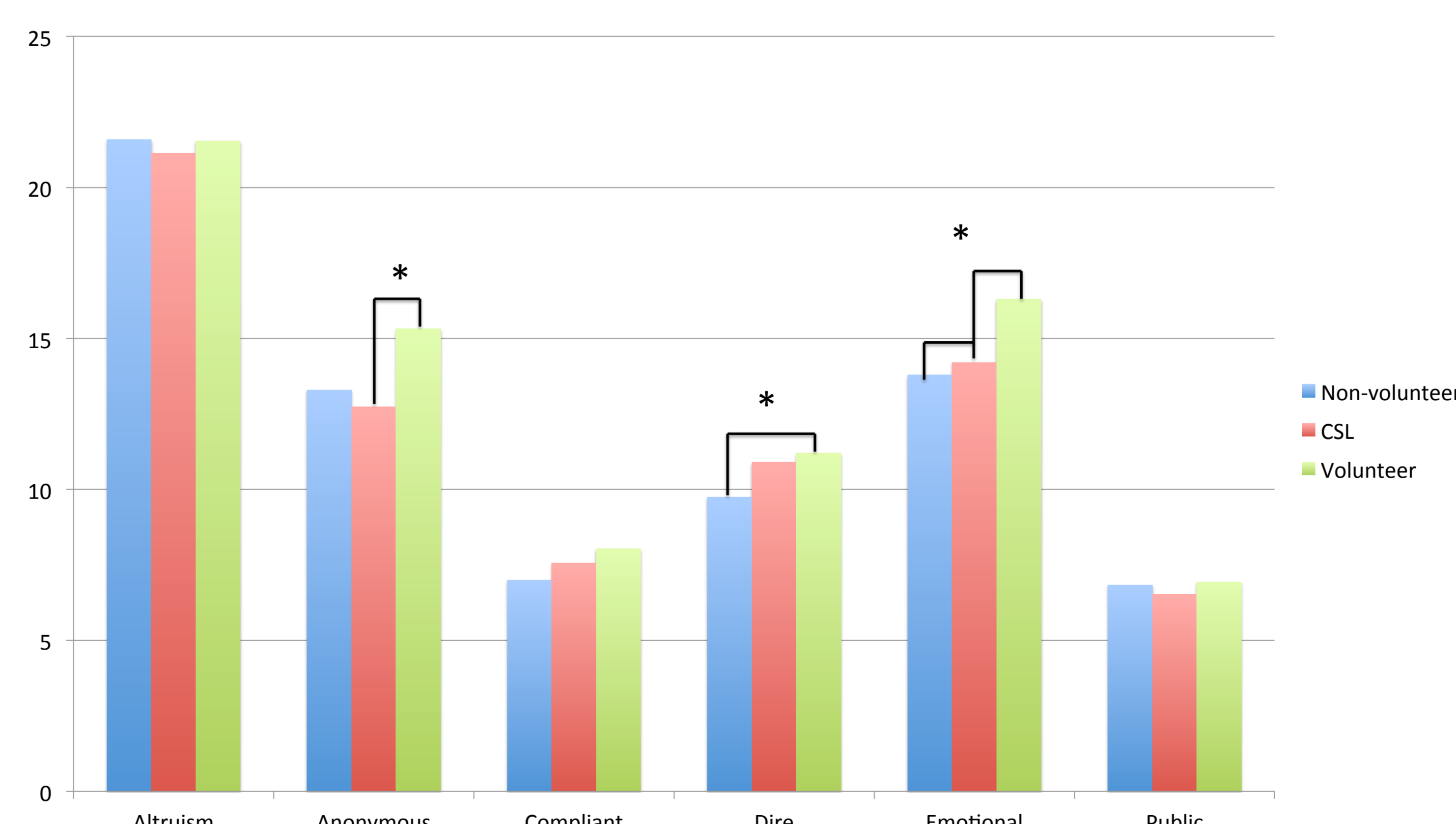


Figure 2 – PTM subscales by volunteer status (divided by non-volunteer, CSL, and volunteer)



*relationship is significant at the alpha level 0.05

**relationship is significant at the alpha level 0.01

4. Conclusion

DISCUSSION

Over half of EA sampled engaged in volunteer or CSL
Challenges picture of EA as self-absorbed
Some aspects of empathy and prosocial tendencies predict volunteer and CSL status

Caring for others and the ability to empathize with people in stories, and some prosocial tendencies such as a proclivity to help in emotional situations, predict service

Volunteers and CSL participants differ somewhat
Volunteers appear to differ greatly from non-volunteers, whereas CSL participants seem to fall between both groups

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There is a considerable base rate of empathy across groups

Demographics alone are not strongly correlated with empathy and prosocial tendencies. Although the groups differed in some aspects of empathy and prosocial tendencies, overall they are quite similar, suggesting that EAs are empathic overall (e.g., in terms of perspective-taking, etc.).

Age does not predict volunteer behaviour

Age was not correlated with community involvement therefore other factors may have more to do with community participation than age or generational characteristics.

Empathy and prosocial tendencies are in development throughout Emerging Adulthood

As EAs age, their personal distress (a reverse score of empathy) decreases and the need to demonstrate prosocial behavior publicly decreases.

Therefore, the "Generation Me" stance should be further challenged in the literature.

Volunteers show more empathy than non-volunteers and students who volunteer beyond their CSL experience are more empathic and prosocial than those who volunteer in CSL only

People with more empathy are more likely to volunteer. CSL participants differ from long-term volunteers possibly because they are volunteering for the first time or for different reasons (e.g., CV building). Differences between volunteers and CSL participants should be further investigated in order to evaluate the benefits of CSL placements at the University of Ottawa.

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