Understanding Aid: Religious and Spiritual Undergraduate Students' Personal Narratives of Their Volunteer Experiences

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Abstract

For many, young adulthood is a developmental period marked by changes in personal values, beliefs, and faith. These changes often involve executing congruent values through belief-based practices and acts such as volunteering. Research conducted on participants from the United States of America has highlighted the experiences of religious undergraduate volunteers in religious post-secondary institutions. However, there is a paucity of research on diverse religious populations and little has been studied on the role of spirituality. As such, the purpose of this thesis was to understand the unique experiences of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate volunteers in Canada. In particular, this thesis sought to uncover the themes in volunteer behaviour, important values, and pertinent challenges experienced by this sample. Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted on a diverse sample of undergraduate students at the University of Ottawa. Interviews were analyzed using Thematic Analysis and four emergent themes were noted: spiritual maturity, volunteering particulars, experience acquisition, and relevant challenges. Results indicated that this religious/spiritual sample had unique volunteer narratives that shaped and were shaped by their identities and lived experiences. Results from this study can be used to support existing volunteer initiatives and address challenges faced by religious and/or spiritual volunteers.

Key words: religion, spirituality, volunteering, young adulthood, prosociality

Introduction

The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is one often defined by important personal and professional developments. During this time, many young adults move away from home, pursue academic and vocational interests, and begin exploring who they are as individuals (Arnett, 2000). This exploration has been shown to involve the alteration of previously held attitudes and beliefs, which were often promoted by families of origin, to reflect young adults' own personal worldviews (Arnett, 2000, 2004). In this regard, the pursuit for personal growth and self-discovery entails engagement with activities that are in line with one's developing beliefs and values. For many young adults, these activities have historically included religious and spiritual exploration (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014) as well as volunteering for organizations that support their intimate worldviews (Wilson & Musick, 1997).

Canadian research has shown that the majority of young adults between the ages of 15 and 34 are volunteers (Vézina & Crompton, 2012). A growing body of research has also shown that rates of volunteering among students have historically been rising (Jones, 2000), given that opportunities to volunteer have become more available (Sax, 2004; Smith et al., 2010) and many youth engage in mandated volunteering (Henderson, Brown, & Pancer, 2019). These findings are in line with the policies of many post-secondary institutions, which encourage volunteering among their student populations in order to foster community engagement and civic responsibility (Brewis & Holdsworth, 2011). Research done with this population has shown that students volunteer for a myriad of reasons, the most salient being to develop skills, increase employability, and to give back to their religious and cultural communities (Holdsworth, 2010; Moore, Warta, & Erichsen, 2014; Simha, Topuzova, & Albert, 2011). Indeed, research has historically shown that instrumental reasons (e.g., professional development) have been the

dominant motive for volunteering among the general population (Institute for Volunteering Research, 1997); and these motives have been shown to persist in modern society (Holdsworth, 2010). However, studies examining the motivations of religious volunteers have provided divergent conclusions based on individuals' intrinsic religious beliefs (Bernt, 1999).

Studies have shown that students who report higher levels of religiosity are more likely to volunteer (Gallant, Smale, & Arai, 2010; Gibson, 2008). Comparing religious students to their secular counterparts, a study by Hill and den Dulk (2013) found that students who were educated in Protestant high schools were more likely to volunteer and to continue volunteering than those educated at home or in non-religious environments. Interestingly, differences between religious denominations have also been reported. Johnson, Cohen, and Okun (2013) argued that religious beliefs and values are more highly internalized by Mormons, as such, they are more likely to act on religious teachings that emphasize helping those less fortunate. The authors found that intrinsic religiosity and volunteering frequency were higher among Mormon young adults than their Catholic and Christian counterparts.

However, research has also demonstrated that religious young adults' motivations to volunteer are not always altruistic. Webber (2012) found that young Catholics volunteered for either self-oriented reasons (e.g., for personal development) or social concern reasons (e.g., to help vulnerable populations). Those who volunteered for social concern reasons contributed more hours than those who volunteered for self-oriented motivations. The author argues that when intended goals are achieved, those who volunteered for self-oriented reasons have no need to continue volunteering; however, those who volunteered for social concern reasons have no specific goal to achieve through volunteering and can continue unceasingly.

Although the body of literature on the volunteering behaviours of religious students is growing, these studies have been primarily conducted on student populations from the United States of America. While international research exists (e.g., Fényes & Pusztai, 2012), such studies have failed to examine the role of spirituality and have heavily relied on survey data to propose conclusions on highly phenomenological experiences.

As a multicultural and multifaith country, Canada offers a unique milieu for research on how young adults amalgamate their religious/spiritual upbringings with their own personal experiences, values, and beliefs. Furthermore, it allows for an exploration into the experiences of religious/spiritual minority students, whose volunteer motivations have previously been shown to fluctuate between altruistic and instrumental (Holdsworth, 2010). Set against the growing body of literature from the United States of America, this study aims to offer a uniquely Canadian perspective on the volunteer behaviours of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students. In particular, this study hopes to shed light on how religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students make sense of their volunteer behaviours, articulate their motivations, and experience challenges.

Defining Terms

Given the abstract and more personal nature of the topics under study, an important consideration for this thesis is the operationalization of key terms. Volunteering, religiosity, and spirituality often have synonymous or equivalent terms that can be found in the literature. While generally possessing the same definition, terms that are thought to be interchangeable within research, such as 'volunteering' and 'community engagement' may reflect different elements of one overarching behaviour. In a similar vein, many authors have used 'religiosity' and 'spirituality' interchangeably within the literature, however, these terms have been shown to carry different connotations among the general public (Mattis, 2000). As such, the following

section will briefly present several definitions of 'volunteering', 'religiosity', and 'spirituality', before outlining the definitions employed in this study.

Volunteering. Emergent within the literature are several definitions of volunteering. One of the more general definitions in use describes volunteering as a task performed with free will, no financial compensation, and for the benefit of others (Cnaan, Handy, & Woodsworth, 1996). Some have argued that such outdated definitions rely too heavily on preconceived ideas of what is or is not a volunteer. In particular, Handy and colleagues (2000) argue that employing such a definition within current research allows for a wide variety of activities to be amalgamated into the category of 'volunteering', such as providing aid to an organization versus organizing a ski trip for friends. The authors contend that defining volunteerism requires a critical examination of the different types of volunteer work, volunteer relationships, volunteering intensity and frequency, and voluntary action.

Although not defining the act itself, Statistics Canada (Vézina & Crompton, 2012) defines volunteers as "persons aged 15 and over who did any activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization… This includes any unpaid help provided to schools, religious organizations, sports or community associations". One of the core flaws of this definition as it relates to Canadian volunteers is that it restricts the label of 'volunteer' to those aged 15 or older. In Ontario, high school students are required to contribute 40 hours of mandatory community service in order to graduate; these hours may be completed at any time during the four secondary school years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). During their first year, most students in the ninth grade fall between the ages of 13 or 14 years old. Employing the definition provided by Statistics Canada would exclude the volunteer contributions provided by youth in this age cohort from national representations. This definition also disregards informal volunteering, which is

performed outside of a formal organization and includes activities such as helping neighbours or friends (Lee & Brudney, 2012).

Volunteering tasks have included a variety activities, such as fundraising, teaching, bookkeeping, coaching, providing companionship, delivering food, maintenance and repair, and fire-fighting (Turcotte, 2015). These tasks include roles that are often excluded from more formal volunteer positions and are therefore not as readily recognized as volunteering. For example, routinely delivering food to an ailing neighbour does not need to be done through a formal organization, yet this is a form of volunteering that is often overlooked (Turcotte, 2015). Researchers who support informal volunteering argue that the habitual contribution of time offered by individuals performing these behaviours should constitute as a volunteer activity (Sinha, 2015). Other behaviours, such as sitting on a board of representatives, has been shown to fall under the general label of volunteering (Turcotte, 2015), but such forms of participation are mostly unfeasible by youth given their age or lack of experience.

Other difficulties in categorizing volunteering among young adults arise as some researchers include elements of civic engagement (e.g., attending political rallies, participating in a demonstration) into their definitions (e.g., Kerestes, Youniss, & Metz, 2004). Many of the behaviours commonly associated with civic engagement encompass activities outside of the scope of volunteering – although volunteering is often considered to be an essential feature of civic engagement (Jones, 2006). Furthermore, Adler and Goggin (2005) note that the term 'civic engagement' holds various conceptualizations depending on the age cohort of the population under study. The authors argue that younger cohorts are limited in their ability to participate and therefore the manner in which their civic engagement is understood differs from the implied definition prescribed to the behaviours of older cohorts.

The diversity of such definitions creates challenges for researchers attempting to study and measure rates of volunteering. The continued usage and distribution of these definitions within research influences the manner in which the general public understands volunteering (Handy et al., 2000). Given the suggestions recommended by Handy and colleagues (2000), the present study proposes to amalgamate various definitions of volunteering, so that it may encompass the many nuanced characteristics of the behaviour. As such, volunteering is defined as a performative behaviour offered by an individual for the benefit of others, taking place in either formal or informal settings, and without coercion or remuneration. For the purpose of this study, this includes any activity occurring consistently, occasionally, or episodically over the past 12 months.

Religiosity and spirituality. Defining and establishing differences between religiosity and spirituality continues to be a daunting task for researchers (Schlehofer, Omoto, & Adelman, 2008). As the definition of these terms differ across fields of study and no conclusive definition has been established, many scholars have attempted to understand how religious and/or spiritual individuals define these terms themselves. Mattis (2000) asked participants to describe the differences between religiosity and spirituality. She found that her sample defined religiosity as organized worship involving formal rituals performed in order to create intimate connections with God. Spirituality, however, was conceptualized as the internalization and expression of personal values, an outcome rather than a path, and an experience found in meaningful relationships. One of the key differences highlighted by the author was the notion of active choice. That is, within religiosity, one has a an established doctrine which they must follow, whereas spirituality offers personal choice and is therefore seen as more intentional (Mattis, 2000).

These results support earlier research conducted by Zinnbauer and colleagues (1997) who uncovered that while religiosity and spirituality shared common elements, their distinction was found in the relational experience and intentional action reported by participants. The authors found that spirituality was most often defined by participants as a relationship with some higher power and manifesting one's personal beliefs through action. Religiosity was instead conceptualized as one's devotion to religious doctrines and engagement with expected practices (e.g., Church attendance).

Further research by Schlehofer and colleagues (2008) found that respondents in their study conceptualized much overlap between religion and spirituality. Differences in defining these terms emerged as religion was more often associated with strict doctrine and spirituality was thought to be more abstract and less distinguishable. Participants noted, however, that being solely spiritual involved believing in a non-theistic higher power (Schlehofer et al., 2008). As such, the authors indicate that while their sample found commonalities between the two definitions, participants' definitions of pure spirituality allowed for a separation from religiosity. Meaning, one could identify as religious and spiritual, whereas another may view themselves to be spiritual but not religious. The authors report that there is some quality of being solely spiritual which lay people routinely identify as being non-theistic. This distinction has also been identified by other researchers, who argue that religiosity and spirituality are sometimes seen as polarities between a belief in God or a belief in some other non-theistic higher power (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999).

In order to honour participants' personal faith identities, the present study proposes definitions for use within this thesis. However, in respecting participants' agency and ability to self-identify, the definitions provided by respondents within the interviews were used with each

respective participant. Meaning, religiosity and spirituality are operationalized for consistency within this text, however participants' definitions of their own beliefs are honoured within the in-person interview process. To that end, the term religiosity is used within this study to refer to self-identified membership with an organized religion, belief and adherence to religious doctrines, and participation in religious activities. Spirituality is defined as a deeply personal worldview, a private system of morals and values, and/or a belief in transcendence and connection to something greater than oneself.

Theoretical Framework

Most authors agree that the volunteer behaviours exhibited by those who identify as religious/spiritual emerge from a manifestation of public or private religiosity, with a combination of the two being the most likely reality (Yeung, 2018). Public religiosity is comprised of all external behaviours meant to indicate one's membership to a particular religious or spiritual group (e.g., church attendance, observation of religious holidays and activities, prayer and worship rituals) (Yeung, 2018). Alternatively, private religiosity involves personally held beliefs and conduct performed as a result of one's own religious principles (e.g., belief in and adherence to doctrine, personal interest in scripture, etc.) (Yeung, 2018). Difference of opinion on which aspect of religiosity is most influential has led scholars to propose two theories that independently explain the mediating effect of private and public religiosity on volunteering behaviour: Value-Oriented Theory (VOT) and Network Explanation Theory (NET), respectively.

Value-Oriented Theory suggests that a religion's altruistic teachings and values mobilize its adherents to volunteer. Authors who support this theory argue that values such as love, compassion, and sacrifice promote the belief that volunteering and helping others is a moral obligation (Yeung, 2018). Compared to NET's external forces, VOT's intrinsic religious forces

compel individuals to do what they believe is morally right (Johnson, Cohen, & Okun, 2013). For example, Paxton, Reith, and Glanville (2014) found that private religiosity (in the form of religious salience, prayer, and belief) was a significant predictor of volunteering. Similar results were also uncovered by Prouteau and Sardinha (2015), who demonstrated that engaging in consistent prayer lead to higher levels of religious rather than secular volunteering. However, some authors believe that private religiosity is not enough to explain the high levels of volunteering exhibited by those who identify as religious; instead, they believe that public displays of religiosity and NET serve to bolster private religiosity and create an expected standard of prosocial behaviour (e.g., Fényes, 2015; Son & Wilson, 2012; Yeung, 2018).

Proponents of Network Explanation Theory, sometimes referred to as Normative Theory, posit that religious adherents are primed towards volunteering by their involvement with other members of their religious affiliation (Yeung, 2018). As such, rates of volunteering among religious adherents can be explained by external forces encouraging and compelling volunteer involvement, creating a social norm that is obeyed by members. Conformity to these social norms allows adherents to actualize the teachings of their religion while also ensuring that their behaviour does not deviate from what is socially expected of them (Son & Wilson, 2012). Support for NET has been widely demonstrated within the literature. For example, research by Krause (2015) found that receiving spiritual support from members of one's congregation is associated with higher frequencies of volunteer work. The author posits that the benefactors of spiritual support increase their volunteering due to a desire to comply with group norms and in order to be positively appraised by their peers. Further research has shown that parental religiosity and volunteer behaviour is positively associated with youth volunteering (Caputo,

2009). Additional studies have demonstrated that public rather than private religiosity better explains the relationship between religiosity and secular volunteering (Yeung, 2018).

Given the phenomenological nature of the current research project, interview questions were posed with the intention of gathering participants' lived experiences. The interview guide contained questions on both private and public religiosity, allowing participants to come to their own conclusions on how these two religious dimensions interact to create their unique volunteer experiences.

Volunteering in Canada

In 2013, approximately 12.7 million Canadians aged 15 years and older performed volunteer work, devoting almost 2 billion hours of services (Turcotte, 2015). For most, volunteering their time is done primarily at a single organization, however, 22% of Canadians reported volunteering for three or more organizations over the past year (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009). In 2007, 84% of Canadians reported providing help to others without the involvement of a formal organization (Hall et al., 2009). These informal volunteering roles may include activities such as health care support, personal care with activities of daily living, driving, and picking up medications (Turcotte, 2015). Rates of informal volunteering have been reportedly the highest among those aged 15 to 34, who also provide such services on a daily or near daily basis (Hall et al., 2009).

It has also been shown that service provision and type of volunteer action performed vary by age. Survey responses from the General Social Survey revealed that the proportion of younger volunteers has remained stable since 2004 (Turcotte, 2015). Some speculate that higher instances of adolescent and young adult volunteering may be related to mandatory volunteering policies practiced by certain Canadian provinces (Turcotte, 2015). Generational differences can be seen

in the kinds of volunteer activities assumed by the younger and older cohorts. Data from the 2013 General Social Survey revealed that younger volunteers tend to adopt roles in the fields of education or research, sports and recreation, and social service (Turcotte, 2015), whereas older volunteers are more likely to be board members or provide companionship support through an organization (Hall et al., 2009). Some of these roles require years of experience, limiting the participation of young adult volunteers. Other challenges hindering volunteer participation among younger cohorts most notably include time commitments. Canadians falling within the 20 to 24-year-old cohort have identified a lack of time and financial burdens as the primary impediments interfering with their ability to volunteer at formal organizations (Vézina & Crompton, 2012).

Early life experiences have also been shown to influence volunteering later in life. For example, when asked about their experiences in primary and secondary schools, volunteers surveyed in the General Social Survey reported that they held active student government positions (61%), had parents who were active volunteers (58%), were active in their religious community (56%), and engaged in volunteer work in the past (55%) (Hall et al., 2009). Other demographic factors indicate that women are more likely to volunteer than men (Turcotte, 2015) and that the likelihood of volunteering increases with household income and education attainment (Hall et al., 2009).

When identifying the motivations behind their volunteer behaviours, 93% of Canadian volunteers reported a desire to contribute to their community (Hall et al., 2009; Turcotte, 2015). Other common reasons for volunteering include employing skills and experiences, being personally impacted by the organization for which they were volunteering, networking with others, improving job opportunities, and satisfying their religious obligations (Hall et al., 2009).

Volunteers reported an understanding that they would also benefit from their experiences, citing the acquisition of interpersonal skills, being able to work through conflict, improving communication skills, increasing their knowledge on subjects of interest, and acquiring specific skills (e.g., first aid, computer skills) as the central benefits they received (Hall et al., 2009).

However, many Canadians have found it difficult to enjoy these benefits due to challenges impeding their ability to volunteer or contribute further. Among all volunteers, common barriers to additional volunteering included time constraints, being unable to commit regularly, and the belief that they had already provided significant contributions (Hall et al., 2009). Those who did not volunteer at all indicated similar reasons for their lack of involvement, primarily citing time constraints, being unable to make a long-term commitment to an organization, and not being asked to volunteer as their main reasons (Hall et al., 2009). Non-volunteers also reported health-related concerns, being uninterested in volunteering, and not knowing how to volunteer as additional barriers (Hall et al., 2009).

The role of religion in volunteering has seen moderate interest by Canadian researchers. Research on Canadians' charitable giving shows that those who attend weekly religious services are more likely to be donors and donate higher amounts than those who attend services less frequently (Turcotte, 2015). Canadians also volunteered the majority of their time to religious organizations, evidenced by the fact that it received the highest percentage of dedicated volunteer hours in the Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (Hall et al., 2009). Those who attended weekly religious services were also shown to be exceptional volunteers; the primary characteristic reported by the top 25% of volunteers was weekly religious service attendance (Hall et al., 2009). Furthermore, although only 17% of Canadians who volunteered

identified as weekly attendees, they contributed 35% of all Canadian volunteer hours and 85% of all hours received by religious organizations (Hall et al., 2009).

Religiosity and religious communities are also important areas of engagement for Canadian immigrants. Research has shown that immigrants are less likely than Canadian-born citizens to be volunteers (Lasby, 2011), however, they have shown to contribute a greater number of volunteer hours (Hall et al., 2009). Immigrants are also more likely to volunteer for religious organizations, offering roughly 32% of their volunteer hours to their religious community (Hall et al., 2009). When asked to identify their primary motivations for volunteering, immigrants more readily listed their religious beliefs than their native-born peers (Hall et al., 2009).

Additional differences between immigrants and Canadian-born volunteers were found in the unique barriers restricting their volunteer behaviours. Immigrants were more likely to state an unawareness of how to volunteer, current financial struggles, and dissatisfaction with previous volunteer experiences as obstacles to volunteering (Hall et al., 2009). Scott, Selbee, and Reed (2001) found that like young adults, immigrant communities in Canada are more likely turn to volunteer opportunity to gain work experience. Through these volunteer positions, immigrants are able to learn and apply skills, acquire knowledge regarding Canadian work expectations and environments, and develop a sense of belonging within the greater community (Guo, 2007).

Mandatory volunteering in Ontario. Mandatory volunteering programs have been implemented in many Canadian provinces. In 1999, the Ontario government changed the high school curriculum to include a mandatory 40-hour volunteer program which students must complete prior to graduation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999). The intended purpose of this program was to encourage altruism among adolescents, aid in the development of skills, and

foster subsequent volunteer participation (Henderson, Brown, & Pancer, 2019). Concurrently, the government also reduced the number of years of secondary schooling from five years to four. As such, the graduating class of 2003 was comprised of two groups, one graduating after completing four years of high school and 40 hours of community service, while the second graduated after five years without having to complete the mandated program. Researchers showed a keen interest in evaluating the effectiveness of mandatory civic engagement with this cohort of graduating students. Of notable interest was the desire to determine whether the mandatory program was able to mobilize students who may not have volunteered of their own accord (Henderson et al., 2019; Henderson, Brown, Pancer, & Ellis-Hale, 2007).

Results on the effectiveness of mandatory civic participation have historically been inconclusive and varied. Some authors have argued that mandated volunteering has a positive effect on subsequent volunteer behaviour as it becomes a practice to which people habituate (Janoski, Musick, & Wilson, 1998); this relationship is strengthened when volunteering was remembered as a satisfying and positive experience (Gallant et al., 2010; Taylor & Pancer, 2007). Metz and Youniss (2005, 2003) found that mandatory volunteering increased respondents' intention to volunteer in the future when they had previously indicated no intention to continue volunteering. Others argue that the notion of mandatory volunteering is in itself contradictory and may hinder students' genuine desire to contribute in their communities (Allan, 2019; Helms, 2013) especially if they had not been previously inclined to volunteer (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). Some Ontario school counsellors have reported that many students simply volunteer to meet the requirement and fail to establish an altruistic moral identity (Allan, 2019). Additional studies indicate that the long-term effects of mandatory volunteering in high school are sustained two years after graduation (Hart et al., 2007; Metz & Youniss, 2005).

However, others suggest that these effects may lessen after eight years (Planty, Bozick, & Regnier, 2006).

Certain studies conducted on the mandated program in Ontario have pointed towards more positive results regarding the effectiveness of mandatory volunteering. Henderson, Brown, Pancer, and Ellis-Hale (2007) conducted a study on the double cohort of high school students who graduated in 2003. The authors were interested in exploring the possible differences in prosocial attitudes and action between the mandated and non-mandated groups. Their results indicated that both groups showed high rates of volunteering, with almost all of the mandated group and 90% of the non-mandated group reporting some form of volunteer activity during high school. The authors also found that both groups shared similar patterns of engagement with the volunteer sector, and that the cohorts showed no differences in the extent or the intensity of their volunteering. Additional findings supported the intent of the mandate, indicating that the program did not have a negative effect on students' volunteer behaviour and attitudes towards volunteering in university (Henderson et al., 2007). Indeed, results showed that community service of any duration during high school had a positive effect on students' attitudes towards volunteering in university.

Results discovered by Yang (2017) ran contrary to the aforementioned study's findings. The author compared students from Ontario who were required to take part in the mandated volunteer program to students in other parts of the country who were not. Findings indicated that those who were affected by the mandated program were less likely to volunteer after completing high school; this effect was strongest among students who reported no intention to go to university at 15 years old (Yang, 2017). Others have noted that the mandatory volunteer program

offers little structure and organization to students, as the implementation of the program is left largely to the school staff (Henderson, Pancer, & Brown, 2014).

A more recent study by Henderson, Brown, and Pancer (2019) examined the subsequent volunteer behaviours of mandated students in Ontario. The authors surveyed university students at the end of their four-year degrees and divided respondents on the basis of their volunteer activity in adolescence. The 'non-mandated' group included students who volunteered in the absence of the program; the 'self-starters' group was comprised of students who volunteered before being mandated; the 'forced service providers' group began their volunteering as a result of the mandate; and the 'non-volunteers' included respondents who did not volunteer in high school (Henderson et al., 2019). Findings from their study indicate that upon graduation from their four-year degree, the 'forced service providers' group more closely resembled the 'non-volunteers' in terms of their continued volunteer engagement during their post-secondary education.

It is important to note, however, that many of the studies evaluating the role of mandatory volunteering on prosocial attitudes and subsequent volunteering were done with university populations. Research has shown that education attainment has a positive effect on volunteering, wherein most adult volunteers have obtained either a post-secondary diploma, certificate, or a university education (Turcotte, 2015). As such, it is difficult to gather a holistic picture of the effectiveness of mandated volunteering in high school, given that its effectiveness with non-university or college-bound individuals has yet to be studied. Research examining the effectiveness of mandatory volunteering in Ontario is especially relevant to this study, as many of the participants interviewed had reported that they were required to complete the mandated program during high school.

Trends in Undergraduate Student Volunteering

Research has shown that adolescent experiences with volunteering define subsequent patterns of volunteer behaviour in adulthood (Planty et al., 2006). Such experiences have been shown to date back as early as childhood, wherein young adults with a current propensity to volunteer most likely had parents who were involved in volunteering (Perks & Konecny, 2015).

Volunteering patterns performed by young adults have also been widely studied. Research has shown that young people tend towards altering their volunteer commitment type, going from regular and long-term commitments, to those more episodic or occasional in nature (Smith et al., 2010). Some have speculated that occasional volunteering is more common among university students as these roles are often more flexible with scheduling and involve more personal rather than collective gains (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). Smith and colleagues (2010) gathered responses from over four thousand university students residing in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The authors found that roughly two thirds of all student volunteers surveyed were occasional volunteers; however, Canadian respondents reported higher levels of regular, rather than occasional, volunteering. Furthermore, the authors found that other young adults tend to be the beneficiaries of university students' volunteering services, as many devote their time as coaches, mentors, and tutors (Smith et al., 2010).

Many programs encouraging volunteering among young adults are often incorporated to higher education programs, such as the Higher Education Active Community Fund in the United Kingdom, Campus Compact in the United States, and Community Service Learning available at the University of Ottawa. These programs have been shown to offer structure and reflection, two necessary elements highlighted by Metz and Youniss (2003, 2005) for continued civic

involvement among young adults. Positive self-reflections generated after service completion have been shown to include dimensions of growth, such as personal achievement, prosocial and altruistic feelings, and professional development (Henderson et al., 2019). Such post-volunteer reflections have been recommended by critics of the mandated volunteer programs in Ontario, who argue that a lack of introspective activities hinder subsequent volunteering in high school students (Henderson et al., 2014).

Means to attaining employment. For many students, unpaid work has become known as a kind of hope labour (Allan, 2019), wherein students take on roles such as unpaid internships and volunteer positions in order to network and further their professional careers. Gaining important work-related skills and qualifications through volunteer placements has been shown to be a primary motivator expressed by young adults (Eley, 2003). Aspirations of upward mobility within an organization through volunteering are common hopes experienced by young people desiring to enter the workforce (Allan, 2019). These results have been found elsewhere, such as in the United Kingdom, wherein learning new skills was the second most important motive for volunteering reported by 16 to 24-year-olds (Low, Butt, Ellis Paine, & Davis Smith, 2007).

Interestingly, a study on the motivations of volunteers and non-volunteers indicated that the latter group was more likely to agree with statements affirming volunteering as a means to increasing employability (e.g., improving one's curriculum vitae for job or higher education applications) (Smith et al., 2010). The authors found that those who volunteered regularly were less likely to agree with these statements and more likely to agree with altruistic or value-driven statements. These results may indicate that the act of volunteering provides a unique experience of selflessness with which non-volunteers are unfamiliar.

Such instrumental motives for volunteering (e.g., obtaining employment, admission to graduate school) are not uncommon among university students in Canada and internationally (Holdsworth & Quinn, 2010), particularly among those in more competitive fields, such as medicine (Holdsworth, 2010). Ongoing volunteering has been seen as a means of keeping one's curriculum vitae up to date and therefore appealing to potential employers (Allan, 2019; Holdsworth, 2010). Studies have also shown that students believe that their investments of time will be returned in the future in the form of employment offers and social recognition by notable professionals in the job market (Allan, 2019). Volunteering positions have also become more intensive and highly skill-based in nature (Erdenechimeg, Bulganzaya, & Gantumur, 2005), with some students reporting that formal organizations will often conduct interviews before offering volunteer positions (Brewis, Russell, & Holdsworth, 2010).

Skills earned through volunteer experiences are often seen as tacit prerequisites for paid positions at hiring organizations. Many have therefore argued that volunteer roles which act as gateways to salaried positions reproduce the privilege held upper social classes who more regularly have the resources and means to volunteer (Allan, 2019). Research by Couton and Gaudet (2008) indicates that such social positioning creates inequalities in minority Canadians' access and opportunities to become volunteers. The authors argue that factors such as language, cultural expectations, gender norms, finances, and discrimination play a role in the systemic difficulties faced by Canadian immigrants attempting to gain experience. Hiring organizations and employment counsellors often view volunteering as an instrument of personal and professional growth (Allan, 2019), however this is not a reality that is equally feasible to all members of the population, particularly those who cannot afford to spend time performing unpaid labour (Smith et al., 2010). For university students, such marketable volunteer positions

are therefore contingent on existing stability or support from one's family (Allan, 2019), as the potential prospect of a job offers little in the way of acquiring a real livelihood for students living on their own. Given that job attainment expedites financial stability, it therefore follows that female ethnic minority students and those from less advantaged backgrounds were more likely to report volunteering for employment reasons than their majority population peers (Holdsworth, 2010).

Altruistic motivations. The other most commonly reported reason for volunteering among students is altruism. Early researchers argued that volunteering was wholly altruistic; however, others have postulated that true altruism does not exist in volunteering, as the volunteer will always receive some form of compensation, such as the pleasurable experience that comes with helping others (Smith, 1993). The dichotomy between egoist and altruistic motivations for volunteering continues to exist and has created the belief that students begin their volunteering journeys with only one interest in mind – either to build their CV or help others selflessly. Modern research has shown that pure altruistic motivations are very rarely reported by student volunteers; instead, students describe a combination of motivations which evolve alongside their volunteer experiences (Holdsworth, 2010; Simha et al., 2011).

A study conducted on undergraduate students from the United States of America found that altruistic motives (e.g., doing something meaningful, acting selflessly) were the third most frequently cited reasons for volunteering, after egoist reasons (e.g., gaining happiness, improving employability), and social justice reasons (e.g., community development, making a contribution) (Simha et al., 2011). These results were mirrored by Holdsworth (2010) who found that very few students reported purely altruistic reasons for volunteering, as most of the participants in her study understood that their decision to volunteer allowed them to help themselves while helping

others. Interestingly, the author found that students who held strong attachments to their immediate social network were more likely to be motivated by altruistic values than their peers. Student volunteers are also critical of the narrative surrounding international volunteering, which often depicts the volunteer as an altruist saviour (Holdsworth, 2010). Results from these studies also support the claim that while some volunteering may originate from altruistic motives, sustained volunteering relies on egoist reasons which serve to maintain one's interest (Ryan, Kaplan, & Grese, 2001).

Other scholars have found that altruism plays a role in many common motivations for volunteering (Burns, Reid, Toncar, Fawcett, & Anderson, 2006). Burns and colleagues (2006) found that college volunteers' altruistic motives were significantly related to career enhancement, personal development, conformity with social norms, escape from negative feelings, skill enhancement, and value-related reasons for volunteering. The importance of altruism in volunteering has also been shown to extend cross-culturally among student populations in twelve different countries (Handy et al., 2010). Of note, however, is the danger that many people tend to favour altruistic motives for volunteering as a way of appearing more socially desirable to others. The Altruistic Deception Construct, coined by Francies (1983) is a concept relating to participants' desires to report that their reasons for volunteering are altruistic, yet subsequent examination reveals that they are more closely affiliated with egoist reasons.

As such, early research into the motivations of student volunteers laid the framework for the current understanding of the role of altruism in volunteer motivations; that is, while volunteering was once thought to be wholly altruistic, modern research has demonstrated that students volunteer for a combination of reasons, and altruism is one among many.

Volunteering challenges. University students have been shown to encounter their own unique barriers to volunteering. In a study conducted with undergraduate students from six universities in England, Brewis, Russell, and Holdsworth (2010) found that the most reported barrier to volunteering noted by their sample was a lack of time as a result of school pressures (79.2%) and commitments to paid work positions (41%). The authors also found that students who were more likely to cite time constraints as barriers to volunteering were also more likely to be constrained by other responsibilities, such as work and family commitments. Other less commonly reported reasons for not volunteering among students include not knowing how to get involved, being unsure as to what they could offer, and a loss of interest in volunteering. Furthermore, Brewis, Russell, and Holdsworth (2010) found that many students were disinterested in volunteering after learning that some formal organizations require criminal records checks, trainings, application forms, and interviews to be completed before a volunteer position was offered. The authors argue that this process mirrors that of a job search, and that the formality of the procedures may cause students to re-evaluate their ability to commit to the perceived needs of the organization.

Similar results were found by Tansey and Gonzalez-Perez (2006), who conducted a study on a sample of student volunteers from the National University of Ireland. Their results revealed that students listed a lack of time (e.g., as a result of part time work or school commitments), a lack of personal vocation (e.g., no desire or motivation to volunteer), potential disadvantages (e.g., perceived absence of required skills), and a lack of knowledge relating to volunteer opportunities as the main four barriers to voluntary engagement. Further obstacles include the financial cost of additional commitment (Smith et al., 2010) and travel distance to volunteer placements (Lee & Won, 2011).

Other scholars have identified barriers to volunteering that may emerge as volunteers begin to experience their roles. For example, McCall and Iltis (2014) identified the unique barriers encountered by undergraduate volunteers interested in global health-related volunteer work with underprivileged and underserved populations. Of note, the authors identified language and cultural barriers, poor resources with which to work, and being unaware of how to address their perceived authority by the populations they wish to aid. McCall and Iltis (2014) also indicate that students' zeal to do something rather than nothing also affects the distribution of scarce resources such as clean water and food, and disrupts the ongoing work done by local community providers. Prior ignorance to these possibilities, followed by the subsequent witnessing of how their presence affects the community, may put off undergraduate volunteers from continuing to volunteer for global health initiatives.

Barriers to student volunteering also present themselves within formal organizations looking to accept new volunteers. Given that training opportunities and are often expensive, some organizations seeking volunteers may be hesitant to accept and train students who are unable to commit to the position on a long-term basis or who may find employment and need to leave abruptly (Hall, Hall, Cameron, & Green, 2004). Edwards, Mooney, and Heald (2001) conducted a study on community organizations' perceptions of student volunteers. The authors distributed surveys to staff at local community organizations, asking participants to report their level of agreement with statements made about students volunteers on a five-point Likert scale, wherein a value of five indicated the statement was definitely true and a value of one indicated that it was definitely false. The authors found that statements about students' respectful behaviour towards staff and clients were more often highly rated than statements about their important contributions to service provision and fundraising. Such perceptions may influence the

way in which staff at community organizations view the contributions of student volunteers, allowing for the continual allocation of more menial work to this population (Edwards et al., 2001).

Although many studies have focused on the barriers to volunteering experienced by undergraduate students, currently and to the best of the author's knowledge, no study has been conducted on the specific challenges faced by religious/spiritual undergraduate volunteers. It reasonably follows that religious/spiritual undergraduate students experience many of the same barriers to volunteering as their secular peers. Indeed, time constraints relating to school pressures and paid work positions are likely to also affect the rates of volunteering among religious/spiritual undergraduate students. The volunteering experiences of these students may also be limited or affected by other time-dependant activities, such as religious holidays, specific religious rituals, prayers, or religious institution attendance.

A recent study on non-student young adults by Hopkins, Olson, Baillie Smith, and Laurie (2015) sought to understand the way that young Christians engaging in international volunteering understood their experiences within the context of their developmental stage and religious ideals. The authors found that participants' highly immersive religious work while away home created a unique religious identity different from the one which they expressed at home. In other words, the religious ideals of these young adults were transformed by their international experiences, resulting in challenges relating to the re-negotiation of religious beliefs when they returned to their home countries. However, if successfully integrated into the volunteers' sense of self, this religious reshaping process was more strongly viewed as a tool for promoting resilience and private religiosity than a hinderance to further volunteering (Hopkins et al., 2015).

The relationship between volunteering and religious identity as a result of geographical relocation has also seen moderate interest by Canadian researchers. For example, Berger (2006) sought to uncover the differences in Canadians' volunteer behaviour as a result of religious affiliation. Twenty affiliations (including a "no religious affiliation" category) emerged; of note, the Eastern group encompassed Muslims (36%), Sikhs (16%), Hindus (28%), and Buddhists (20%). The author found that while the Eastern group reported feeling social obligations to volunteer, they were more likely than other groups to cite social barriers (e.g., not being solicited to volunteer, being unaware of volunteer opportunities, and insensitive cultural and religious recruitment experiences) as reasons for not volunteering. One proposed explanation for this finding was that members of the Eastern religious group were more likely to experience discrimination based on their status as visible minorities with low socio-economic status and social class (Berger, 2006). Religious/spiritual undergraduate students who are newcomers to Canada may also experience such forms of discrimination or may be unaware of volunteer opportunities in their community.

Since very little is known about the specific challenges faced by religious/spiritual undergraduate volunteers, the current study includes questions on barriers to volunteering experienced by this population in order to create a tentative foundation upon which future studies may be able to elaborate.

The Role of Religion/Spirituality

Historically, volunteering has shown to be heavily influenced by spiritual and/or religious practices and norms (Cnaan, Kasternakis, & Wineburg, 1993). Many faith groups also view contribution as a hallmark of religious/spiritual identity, believing that it is one's duty to provide aid to those less fortunate (Peucker, 2018). Much of the literature on the relationship between

religion and volunteering has concluded that church attendance is one of the primary avenues for volunteer engagement among religious populations (Park & Smith, 2000). Indeed, it has been shown that many religious volunteers are initially recruited through their organization, either by being explicitly asked to help or through internal opportunities presented through flyers or shared community space (Peucker, 2018). In an attempt to further research beyond church attendance, Park and Smith (2000) tested the influence of religiosity (religious attitudes enacted through religious participation), religious identity (a sense of identification with a religious faith), religious socialization (developmental exposure to religious values and norms), and religious social networks (connections with other adherents) on the volunteer behaviour of Protestants. The authors found that religiosity, specifically participation in church activities, had the strongest influence on religious adherents' tendency to volunteer for religious and non-religious organizations.

However, research conducted with younger cohorts more strongly advocates for the influence of religious socialization. Researchers argue that the social networks of religious communities offer a means of socializing younger believers to volunteer by instilling in them a sense of value when volunteering (Caputo, 2009). That is, religious young adults are more likely to volunteer if they believe that it is an important task commonly performed by socializing agents (Wilhelm, Brown, Rooney, & Steinberg, 2008). This internalization process has been shown to be strongly influenced by parental religiosity and prosociality (Caputo, 2009). It is believed that children attempt to imitate altruistic behaviours modeled by their parents, and are simultaneously taught religious values and norms which foster prosocial behaviours towards others (Wilhelm et al., 2008). A study by Gillath and colleagues (2005) found that secure parental attachments increase the likelihood of other-oriented thinking in childhood, and some

have suggested that these early attachments continue to influence religiosity and prosocial concerns throughout the lifespan (Saroglou, 2013).

Examining the development of religious/spiritual beliefs is important to comprehensively understand the influence of religiosity on young adults' volunteer behaviours. Within the extensive literature on religion and spirituality, few studies specifically examine the context of religious/spiritual development among emerging adults; instead, much of the research has been focused on the altruistic developmental pathways of children and adolescents (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014b). Lack of research on this population creates considerable drawbacks, as crucial information on the unique experience of religiosity/spirituality during this developmental stage is missing. As young adults attempt to construct a set of morals, values, and beliefs with which they identify (Arnett, 2004), they must also navigate contradicting ideologies proposed by those with whom they interact (e.g., members of their faith group, peers, friends, romantic partners, etc.). This is of particular relevance to Canadian young adults, given that Canada is a multicultural and multifaith society, allowing for the creation of abundant avenues for religious and spiritual questioning and exploration.

Volunteering and faith identity among undergraduates. Religious and/or spiritual development has been proposed to occur when young adults are able to construct a set of morals, values, and beliefs to which they prescribe and honour through intentional practices which provide purpose and transcendence (King, Clardy, & Ramos, 2014). Such intentional actions often include contributions of time and energy for the benefit of others. Research on the volunteer behaviours of university populations has predominantly been conducted with Catholic and Christian students residing in the United States of America.

Research conducted on more multifaith and multicultural populations have shown similar results. For example, a study on spiritually exemplary youth by King, Clardy, and Ramos (2014) found that almost all of the participants in their study reported that their spiritual beliefs motivated them to volunteer for others, with one respondent indicating that his behaviour was done out of compassion for others rather than a compulsion to appear 'good'. Similar results were found among Muslim respondents, who believed that their volunteer experiences increased their understanding and tolerance of others' religious beliefs (Peucker, 2018).

Research by Forbes and Zampelli (2014) examined the relationship between various forms of capital and volunteer behaviour. The authors found that individuals who were more active in their religious communities were more likely to volunteer and more likely to engage in higher levels of volunteering. Interestingly, they found that the importance of religion in respondents' lives – as determined by participants' self-reported agreement with the phrase, "Religion is very important in my life" – was not significantly related to likelihood or level of volunteering. The authors also report that Protestants and Catholics were marginally less likely to volunteer than participants of other religious faiths (i.e., Jewish and other Christian respondents) and non-religious participants. These results are striking as they contradict the dominant narrative within the literature which espouses the relationship between strong religiosity and volunteer behaviour.

The Present Study

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of the volunteering experiences of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students. Namely, the focus of this study is to identify the role of religion and/or spirituality in the volunteer behaviours of undergraduate

students attending a non-faith-based university. By exploring the ways in which students make meaning of their volunteer experiences and their religion, the current study hopes to uncover how participants articulate their personal volunteer narratives. Given Canada's multicultural and multifaith population, important consideration will be given to understanding students' diverse experiences, regardless of similarity of religious and/or spiritual belief. To this end, the following research questions were posed:

1) What are the themes and patterns in volunteering behaviour enacted by religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students in this sample?
2) What religious and/or spiritual values do students associate with their volunteering experiences?
3) What are the challenges experienced by religious and/or undergraduate student volunteers and what supports do they have/seek in order to overcome these challenges?

Methods

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study as it allowed the researcher to gather rich and informative accounts of the experiences of religious/spiritual student volunteers. Phenomenological methodology has been used in previous studies on volunteering to honour participants' narratives as they make meaningful interpretations of their lived experiences (e.g., McAllum, 2014). In-person interviews were employed in this study in order to engage participants in meaningful dialogues about their volunteer experiences as religious/spiritual students. Although central and follow-up questions pertaining to the research interests had been established within the interview guide (see Appendix A), questions were adapted or omitted based on participants' responses. The semi-structured nature of the interview process allowed for

further exploration of key themes and improved the interviewer's understanding of participants' phenomenological experience of volunteering.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University (see Appendix B) and the University of Ottawa (see Appendix C)

Participants

The participants of the current study were undergraduate students enrolled to participate in the University of Ottawa's Integrated System of Participation in Research (ISPR) program. The ISPR program is primarily utilized by introductory psychology courses as a means of involving undergraduate students in the process of research. A description of the study (see Appendix D) was uploaded to the ISPR website and students were offered various timeslots in which to participate. In order to take part in the study, participants needed to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) Must have volunteered on campus, off campus, or through the Community Service Learning program over the past 12 months; (b) Must self-identify as religious or spiritual; and (c) Must be fluent in English.

A total of eight participants signed up to take part in this study. Some elements of the participants' demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, and cultural background) were collected through the ISPR system and are presented in Table 1. Four women and four men, ranging between the ages of 18 and 26 years old, were interviewed. The religious and spiritual affiliations of the participants varied; three identified as Muslim, two identified as Christian, two identified as Hindu, and one participant identified as possessing their own personal spirituality. The sample was also culturally diverse, with four participants identifying as Asian, three as Arab, and one was Caucasian.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Characteristics

Participant[1]	**Gender**	**Age**	**Religious/Spiritual Affiliation**	**Cultural background**	**Volunteer Placement**
Samantha	Woman	22	Christian	Arab	Hospital
Ali	Man	19	Muslim	Arab	Orphanage
Christina	Woman	26	Personal Spirituality	Caucasian	Humanitarian organization
Sonia	Woman	18	Hindu	Asian	Montessori school
Fatima	Woman	21	Muslim	Arab	Community centre
David	Man	19	Christian	Asian	Community events, Church
Neil	Man	18	Muslim	Asian	Mosque, Homeless shelter
Raj	Man	18	Hindu	Asian	Hospital

Interview Procedure

Participants enrolled in the ISPR system at the University of Ottawa were able to select an appointment time from a preapproved list of scheduled options offered between November 28th and December 5th, 2018. At arrival, participants were presented with a consent form (see Appendix E) which outlined the purpose of the research study, potential risks and benefits of participation, data collection and storage methods, and the procedures ensuring participants'

[1] Participant names have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

confidentiality and anonymity. Permission to create audio recordings of the interviews was obtained by each participant during the consent process.

Interviews took place at the Social Moral Development Lab at the University of Ottawa. Interviews ranged between 20 to 45 minutes, with most interviews taking approximately 30 minutes to complete. After the consent form was explained, participants were invited to share where they had been volunteering and their experience as volunteers. Participants were asked to describe advantages and disadvantages to volunteering as well as any personal setbacks they had experienced over the course of their volunteer positions. A discussion of religiosity and spirituality followed. Participants shared their religious/spiritual beliefs and were asked to reflect on possible connections shared between their volunteering behaviours and their religious/spiritual values. The interviewer then asked about the potential advantages and disadvantages that come with being a religious/spiritual person in a volunteer setting. At the end of the interview, participants were offered the chance to voice any other relevant information about their experience and were given space to ask any potential questions they had hoped to be asked by the interviewer.

Data Storage and Anonymity

All audio recordings, transcripts, consent forms, and other participant-related items were stored in a locked filing cabinet inside the data analysis office belonging to the researcher's supervisor at the University of Ottawa. All research items, including the collected data and consent forms, were only accessible to the researcher, the researcher's supervisors at Saint Paul University and the University of Ottawa. The researcher assigned codes to each participant which were used as identifiers throughout the study. In order to respect and ensure anonymity, participant codes will remain as the sole identifiers in any publications and/or presentations

given by the researcher. Similarly, identifying information regarding volunteer locations and the educational background of the participants were omitted and replaced with broad categories (e.g., the name of a local hospital was replaced with "a hospital") in the transcripts.

Data Analysis

All audio recordings were independently transcribed using Microsoft Word by the researcher. Following an inductive, semantic, and phenomenological approach to interpret the collected data (Patton, 1990), the transcripts were analyzed using a Thematic Analysis framework. Thematic Analysis offers a comprehensive and methodological system for coding qualitative data and identifying patterns and emerging themes throughout the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic Analysis has been widely studied and used in many contemporary studies (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2016; Pathy, Mills, Gazeley, Ridgley, & Kiran, 2011).

The following recommended steps from Braun and Clarke (2006) were employed during the analysis of the collected data: (1) transcription and familiarization with the collected data; (2) generating preliminary codes of interest throughout the data set; (3) compiling codes and identifying potential themes; (4) reviewing the relevance of the generated themes throughout the data set; (5) refining and defining themes in order to accurately convey the narratives present in the collected data; (6) conducting a final analysis, selecting interview extracts, and generating a scholarly report of the findings, limitations, and areas of further research.

Throughout the analysis, the researcher paid close attention to the ways in which themes and sub-themes accurately portrayed the overarching story at the individual level as well as within the data set as a whole. Furthermore, important consideration was given to recognizing and coding statements that ran counter to dominant narratives present in the interviews, as

exceptions to the story also play an important part in understanding the diverse lived experiences detailed by the participants.

Researcher as Instrument

As the researcher is actively involved in the process of instrument development, data collection, and data analysis, special attention was paid towards personal biases, assumptions, and experiences which may negatively affect the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. To address these issues, researcher reflexivity is required in order to ensure objectivity throughout all stages of the study (Kleinsasser, 2000).

To this end, researcher reflexivity occurred from the initial conceptualization of the study to the finalization of the written thesis. In particular, the researcher was mindful of personal biases and assumptions when creating the interview guide and during the interviews themselves. As discussions of religious and spiritual beliefs are highly personal, the researcher took care to ensure that participants felt safe, reminding respondents that they had the right to skip questions or choose not to answer should anything personal or especially vulnerable come up during the interview process.

Results

The purpose of this study was to gather rich and informative narratives about the experiences of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students who volunteer. Interviews with eight students of varying religious, ethnic, and volunteer backgrounds were transcribed; the results are presented below.

Themes, subthemes, and codes generated from participant interviews are highlighted in Table 2. Higher order themes consist of overarching and significant motifs present in the data, whereas sub-themes are used to identify related yet more particular topics discussed by the

participants. The codes identified in the table reveal patterns of key terms or phrases expressed by the participants which relate to the research questions under investigation. Following the Thematic Analysis procedures highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006) and further described by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the researcher reflexively moved between generating codes and themes in order to best reflect the messages present in the participant interviews. In total, four dominant themes, each with two subordinate themes and various codes emerged from the data and are outlined below.

Table 2

Themes and Codes on the Volunteer Experiences of Religious/Spiritual Student Volunteers

Dominant theme	**Subordinate theme**	**Codes**
Spiritual Maturity	Motivators	Helping others Family religiosity Experiencing values
	Developmental Shifts	Purpose in life Transcendence Challenging and changing beliefs
Volunteering particulars	High School Experiences	Mandated volunteering Volunteering with friends
	Trajectory	Early volunteering Current volunteering Future volunteering
Acquiring experience	Professional Enhancement	Employability Graduate programs Relevance to current studies
	Skill Development	Communication skills Leadership skills Coaching skills
Challenges	Negative Experiences	Disagreements Racism Dismissal based on age
	Conflicting Commitments	School commitments Work commitments Other volunteer positions

Spiritual Maturity

Participants indicated that their involvement with volunteering allowed them to enact their values and beliefs in meaningful and contributive ways. The interviews indicated that some of the participants were able to form distinctions between the religious and personal values they held, allowing for two the emergence of two parallel subthemes: motivators and developmental shifts.

Motivators. One of the central research questions posed by this study concerned the effect of intrinsic religious values on volunteer behaviour. Participants were asked to describe the religious/spiritual values with which they identified and then reflect on possible mediating effects these values have on their motivations to volunteer.

Helping others. The most salient response given by participants was outstandingly the notion of helping others. All participants had mentioned the importance of helping others in need; however, there was some discernment among participants regarding the relationship between the aforementioned value and religion. Some participants explained that one of the central messages espoused by their religious/spiritual beliefs was that helping those less fortunate than oneself was unequivocally good. Recognizing that their situations were more stable (e.g., financially, emotionally, residentially, etc.) than those of others was identified as a religious call to action by some participants:

> *So, to me, that's a good example of Christianity, we help other people because we are in a position to help that was given to us by God. So, I could see from there why I see Christianity as a good religion, because I'm exposed to people that are good Christians, and they share their blessings with others through money or by just being there for other people.* (Samantha)

> *... the more you continue, and you get used to [volunteering], you realize how important your religion is because you thank God for what he gave you and allowed you to help others.* (Ali)

> *... I got to see a lot of people who come from low income families. I got to talk to them sometimes, so, I really appreciated where I came from and my upbringing and stuff like that. That's the humility too, like you see where some people are in life and you start complaining about yours less.* (David)

However, the notion that a higher power had blessed them with stability so that they could help others was not seen as a religious responsibility by all participants. As indicated, some felt that the desire to help was a human response to witnessing the suffering of others. They argued that while their religion does encourage the provision of aid, such behaviour is independent of the existence of a higher power and can be deemed important by individuals who were not religious or spiritual. Ali, one of the participants whose views were presented above argues that:

> *...[religion] pushed me to volunteer, but I don't think it would be that way for everyone. I think you can not believe in God but still believe in the importance of helping others, like humanity.*

Internalizing values. When discussing the influence of their religious/spiritual values on their volunteer behaviour, participants noted a distinction between being educated on the importance of certain values and experiencing these values through informed action. Many of the interviews revealed that family members and religious communities had played a role in the

transference of certain values, such as the importance of helping others and being thankful. However, it was not until participants were able to experience the effect of these values for themselves, that they truly began to understand the significance of what they had been taught.

David, a Christian student who volunteered for local community events and with his Church, made the following statement when asked about how he was made aware of his values:

> *I mean, my parents did instill that in me, but like, it was more of a situation where like, your parents can instill something in you, but if you don't really want to do it yourself, you're not going to follow suit with whatever they're instilling. So honestly, it's just me being me. And me being cognisant of who I am as an individual and what I want to be as person.*

These sentiments were shared by others, who explained that intentional action, or the ability to embody values in meaningful ways, allowed for deeper internalization of beliefs. It was crucial that parents and other family members had been involved in the initial stages of this process; however, at the core of their ability to fully grasp these values was the mechanism of putting thought to action. Samantha, a Christian who volunteers at a hospital, explained that her ability to internalize her religious beliefs helped her find meaning and purpose in her volunteer experiences:

> *I don't think like, "Oh, my Christian values say this…" My parents taught me these values, but they were never like, "Follow this, do this, the Bible says it". They were just like, "As a good person you have to help others. Put people before you" … Volunteering makes me happy because I can feel that it aligns with my values… it makes me happy when I know that I'm spending my free time for others instead of like, going to the movies or something.*

Developmental shifts. Participants had shared the various ways in which their volunteer experiences occurred alongside meaningful realizations about the self, relationships with transcendent elements of life, and spiritual discovery.

Meaning and purpose in life. During the interviews, participants noted that their experiences had allowed them to meaningfully engage in volunteer work. One participant, Neil, a Muslim convert who volunteers at his local Mosque, described how he was able to find purpose in life and improve his self-esteem through his volunteer position as a youth basketball coach:

> *I was never good at anything that's considered 'conventionally' good, like school or work… While volunteering though, I found what I was good at. And even if it wasn't like a conventional thing that people want to be good at, I realized that coaching these kids was basically what made me feel good everyday. I would go in and see these kids all excited to start playing and think like, 'Okay, I was meant to do this'.*

Another participant, Ali, shared his own meaningful experience, noting that the simple act of knowing that someone depends on the work that only you can do was an incredible motivating force for his continual volunteering:

> *You really feel like you're okay with yourself. You have a use for yourself for other people like orphans – they don't have equal justice like us in the Middle East. They got help from us and I really feel like they appreciated what I was able to do for them… Sometimes, just knowing that someone is depending on you is enough to get you up and going.*

Transcendent experiences. Other participants reported more transcendent experiences, involving broader connections with their community or with the beneficiaries of the organizations at which they volunteer:

I think there is a reason for being alive. That there exists an energy to make an organism alive. I believe in that energy. I don't know exactly what I believe in, but that itself is a bit of a comforting feeling. That question of, "why are we even alive?" And because of that, I have some sort of spiritual belief… Through volunteering, I get to experience and do something that's not only for me, I'm doing something that is more important for others than for me. (Christina)

Another participant who volunteered at a hospital described what it was like to witness parents take a moment of respite while she offered to watch over their sick children:

I'll say, "I can stay with your kid, you can go for coffee". Just seeing how much that can impact them because what they needed at that time was a break. They can talk to their family, be alone, go meet a friend, just take care of their other needs, you know? And when you start doing it, you start to see how small things you do have lasting impacts on people you don't even know. (Samantha)

Development of personal religiosity/spirituality. Many of the respondents indicated that they were not simply passive adherents of their religious/spiritual beliefs. Indeed, participants reported that they were critical of some of the tenets espoused by their religion.

Neil, a Muslim convert, reported that he was raised by non-practicing Hindu parents. He explained that his sister's conversion to Islam was a spiritual turning point for him, as he was entering young adulthood and felt like there was something missing in his life. He explained that the self-discovery which accompanied his developing religious beliefs allowed him to create a more personal relationship with God:

I felt like I was able to explore the religion in the way that I wanted. Like, I went to the Mosques that I wanted to visit and spoke to the Imams that I wanted to speak to, so it was

more self-driven, I guess. It wasn't like Hinduism where people were telling me what to believe and how to be a good person. So, when I converted, it was like the first time I made such a huge decision on my own and I was like, actually happy with it.

When asked how this discovery influenced his volunteer behaviour, Neil emphasized the sense of community he felt when visiting Mosques:

It was like everyone wanted me to sit and pray with them. People were willing to teach me things about Islam. I started volunteering at the Mosque because I wanted to learn about Islam from other people my age and like, maybe they could help me while I helped them? It kind of just felt like a place that I could go to and not be judged for not knowing things.

Christina, who was the only participant in the study with a spiritual but not religious identity, explained how she came to her current beliefs at age 19:

I was raised by Catholic parents, but we didn't do religious things very often. I also didn't like certain aspects of the religion and what it teaches. I'm more fluid in my thinking. I'm not like, "This is right, this is wrong," when I see other people's perspectives. As I got older, I started to see how much depth there was to life and became more empathic for other organisms that are ignored in religions.

Christina also reported that the fluidity of her beliefs gave her comfort, as knowing the truth was not important to her, instead, she was interested in exploring what spirituality meant to her on her own terms. When asked how this worldview applied itself to her volunteer behaviour, she explained that her spiritual belief informed her program of study, which in turn influenced her motivation to volunteer:

I believe, if people are well, and they are feeling better, the world will be – it's such a cliché – but the world will be a better place. Like less hate, we will create more, and you maybe feel more effortless when you help people? You don't think about yourself and you feel better as a person that you helped another. It's a higher purpose than only being for you. Those are my values. And my values are mirrored in my education, which is social work. Social work made me think about volunteering more.

Volunteering Particulars

During the interviews, participants were asked to share their past and present volunteer experiences, while also reflecting on how they would like to volunteer in the future. Although only some of the participants were current volunteers, all reported a willingness to re-engage themselves as volunteers in the future.

High school experiences. Almost all participants had reported that they were involved in volunteering while in high school. Considering that some of the students interviewed did not come from Canada, not all of them were affected by the mandated program in Ontario.

Mandatory volunteering in Ontario. Given that the interviews took place at the University of Ottawa in Ontario, it was unsurprising to find that half of the participants had been required to volunteer as part of the mandated program in Ontario high schools. In total, four participants (Sonia, David, Neil, and Raj) had stated that they had been required to contribute 40 hours of community service in order to graduate high school.

The most notable opinion regarding the mandated program was that it did not accurately prepare students for volunteering and that the forced nature of the program made it highly unappealing. David explained that he had trouble finding a placement that matched his interests

and was located within walking or biking distance. He reported that the help he received from his school was minimal, explaining his frustrations thusly:

> *At times, it could be very boring since I didn't want to volunteer for that organization. I couldn't really find anything good that was also close to my house, so I had to settle for something else, basically. It wasn't bad, but I was bored and tired almost all of the time, so I feel like I got nothing out of it… I asked my school if they could help me find something more interesting, but they basically told me to suck it up and just get the hours.*

He went on to explain that most students either tried to complete their hours during the first year of high school or they were hastily attempting to complete their hours during their final year, which was his own experience:

> *I was running out of time to get my hours and I was about to graduate, so I was kind of rushing. And like, I wouldn't have time to be able to focus on school… I had to do a lot of hours on like, Saturdays, Sundays, when I had time off. I didn't really have time for myself on those days, so I always had to stay up and finish my homework at night.*

These comments were shared by Neil, who explained that he was unhappy with his experience since he was forced to volunteer during his final year of high school due to personal struggles at home:

> *I hated it. I put it off until like, grade 11, and then my sister converted [to Islam]. She was still living at home and I was scared that our parents might snap one day and do something when I wasn't home. I was in grade 12 when she moved out, so I had to do them all then. I know that it was my fault for putting it off, but just the fact that I was forced to do it after everything, like trying to apply to university, it was a lot. I just picked places that had lots of hours up for grabs and tried to do them all in a week.*

When asked if he had spoken to his school about his home situation, Neil explained that he did not feel comfortable reaching out to school staff since he felt that they would misunderstand the situation.

Sonia, who attended a Catholic high school, had a different experience. She explained that although the staff at her school had helped her find a position which interested her, she struggled with the concept of forcing students to volunteer when they were not ready or interested:

> *You shouldn't have an obligation to volunteer; it doesn't make any sense. Like, if we want to volunteer, we should, for our own benefit and for the benefit of others. Not to just have 40 hours and say we did it. I don't like that. If you ask people now what they did for their hours, they don't really remember because it didn't mean anything to them. So like, if it doesn't mean anything, then why even do it, you know? You're not going to think like, "Oh, I should pick that up again. I enjoyed doing it".*

Her statement reflected another core sentiment expressed by others, which was that forcing people to volunteer when they were unprepared or uninterested would only result in poor subsequent volunteer engagement.

Raj, who described his experience with the mandated program as positive, had his own comments about the effectiveness of the program and the way that student volunteers are perceived by others:

> *…But I also see why some people hated it. Because like, you have to do all this work and record your hours on a sheet that most people end up losing. And then when you go in, like in the hospital, there was an interview, but I know for some positions they just accept students, so the people who work at those organizations don't like the volunteers because*

they think they're just there to goof off and not like, do any work. And then if you're just there to get the hours then you basically like, show them that students don't take volunteering seriously.

Raj's comments indicate that even though some students intend to work hard at their placements, the legacy of experiences established by previous students may taint employees' impressions on the professionalism of student volunteers.

Volunteering with friends. Raj's comment about volunteers pursuing positions with their friends was also discussed by some of the participants in the study. In particular, religious/spiritual volunteers expressed both benefits and disadvantages of volunteering with friends.

Samantha explained that inviting her friends to volunteer with her at the hospital was frightening at first, since she had opened up to them about feeling sheltered from the hardships that others faced. However, she went on to explain that hearing about their similar reactions allowed her to feel as though they had bonded in a newly discovered way:

…I have two of my friends that even volunteer there and have continued to volunteer since I suggested it to them. It's nice because when I talked to them about how sheltered I felt before, it was kind of scary, since I knew we came from different backgrounds. And then like, hearing them say that they were exposed to the same things, it was comforting, I guess? Like it brought us closer. Like when they told me they had the same reaction, I was like, "Okay, I'm not the only one who felt like that".

For her, the knowledge that her friends had similar responses allowed for feelings of increased connection.

Such positive responses towards volunteering with friends were also shared by David, Raj, and Ali. David and Raj mentioned that volunteering with friends allowed for a reduction in feelings of anxiety and unease when assuming the role of a volunteer for the first time:

> *I like to be productive and to be a part of something, especially if my friends are doing it too. I would have liked to be part of something like a movement, you know? What we did was kind of boring, but I liked that we were all there together, because we were really comfortable together and could joke around.* (David)

In Raj's case, being able to volunteer with his Hindu friends allowed him to enjoy his time volunteering, while also reaffirmed his religious values:

> *Yeah, it helped to keep me motivated in the beginning. Like, being able to see my friends outside of school and do things with them that helped others. It was like nice to be able to do that with them… And also having similar friends who were taught and believed in the same things when we were younger helped to endorse what my parents taught me.*

Ali, however, was the only participant to report both positive and negative volunteer experiences with friends. He explained that although his role as a volunteer began with his friends and largely continued with them, he was met with occasional instances wherein arguments occurred:

> *One time I had an argument with a friend, and he said, "Do whatever you want, I'm going home". I was angry that we lost one person, like a helpful hand, but I was more angry with the way that he spoke to me. This happened in front of everyone, so I was mad and it kind of felt like he did that to disrespect me.*

When explaining how these arguments were resolved, Ali mentioned his faith, explaining that he was able to utilize his beliefs to ground himself and adopt his friend's point of view. In

doing so, he explained that he was able to self-soothe and approach his friend from a place of understanding rather than anger. This allowed for the development of a strengthened bond when the two were able to reconcile.

> *We always try to think of the best solution, and I knew that leaving was not the best solution, so I tried to figure out why he was angry… I closed my eyes and asked Allah to help me figure it out… it was like I could see how I was acting, and I was like, "Okay, you were bossing him around first". When he came back, I apologized, like I meant it, and then I told him that I would like to have his opinion on things. I think it helped us as team leaders after.* (Ali)

As such, incorporating the element of friendship to the experience of volunteering was shown to strengthen bonds, reduce feelings of discomfort, and reaffirm religious values, and provide an environment for healthy relationship repair.

Volunteering trajectories. Patterns of volunteer commencement among religious/spiritual volunteers varied, with some starting in childhood, some in early adolescence, and other in high school. All of the participants interviewed believed that the period of their life wherein they began volunteering was inconsequential to subsequent volunteering and current desires to continue in the future. However, the location of the volunteer position and the beliefs regarding the nature of community service appear to have influence on the participants' motivation to volunteer in the future.

Ali credits his desire to continue volunteering in Canada to the process of moving from skill development, to the experience of significant emotions, to his personal faith in Islam.

> *I learned teamwork and volunteering there. Like, I know that I can use what I learned back home and start volunteering here. I just moved here, so I'm not stable yet, but when*

I can, I plan on starting to do things the same way, with volunteering. I want to help another community here.

When asked if he felt a sense of responsibility to volunteer, he noted:

Now I do. I didn't have it when I was like 15 or 16 years old, when I started, but now I do. It became a part of my weekly routine and I see it as a duty for me. The kids expected us to show up every week, and you felt guilty when you didn't.

Finally, he shared how his religious faith would maintain his motivation to pursue volunteer opportunities in Canada:

… because even our Prophet Muhammad, he took like nine tenths of what he had and gave that to others; he only kept what he needed. Muslims see him as like, a leader or like a role model. We try to do the same thing that he did, obviously not the same things, because we can't, but we try to be like him. So when I can be more stable and take care of myself, I want to be able to help others again.

Ali was able to note that future volunteering would require security and personal stability. Almost all of the participants interviewed in this study recognized that subsequent volunteering would require self-care. That is, the interviews revealed that the religious and spiritual student volunteers recognized their personal limits on voluntary engagement. When asked, "Are there times when we should not help others?" participants replied thusly:

Yeah, I feel if somebody does not want your support, and you've given them resources that they can go to, and they just really don't want your support, then okay maybe I just don't want to be affecting somebody's life like that. I don't want to be toxic or get upset myself. If that's what they want, then you let them know that if ever they need help, then you're there. To me, that's fine. I'm not going to beg someone, "Let me help you!"

Because then, like, I would probably have some kind of unhealthy complex to help others or something. (Samantha)

I mean, not help others to the point where you are compromising your own well-being and your mental health. I think it should be: help others the way you would want to be helped, but also to the best of your ability. Like help others when you know that it's something that you want to do and can do, not just to like, look good or because someone asked. No matter what, you need to deal with your own needs first. (Fatima)

Like, if it's something that someone should be doing on their own to learn or grow, then we shouldn't jump in. Like sometimes people need to learn how to do things on their own and take initiative. So, for example, you should help teach someone how to tie their shoes, but you shouldn't always be there for them trying to tie their shoes for them. (Raj)

When asked to describe how this would affect their own subsequent volunteering, the participants provided the following responses:

…I think that knowing what I can handle and why I want to volunteer is important. I don't want to stop, obviously, but I think that remembering the values that I have and knowing how my help is appreciated by others would help keep me motivated in the future… Also, knowing that if someone doesn't want my help, that doesn't mean that I'm a bad volunteer or person. I think I might have taken it personally when I was younger, but I know now what I'm actually like. (Samantha)

I think that everything you do, whether it's for yourself or for someone else, has to have an intention… you need to do things with a logical mindset, thinking like, "Am I actually being helpful right now or am I just trying to show off?" You can't do that if you're going through your own emotional stuff or like life stuff… I think that having the ability to look inside myself and figure out what I'm going through is going to be helpful when I feel overwhelmed or something when volunteering (Fatima)

I don't see myself ever completely ending my volunteering, but I think taking breaks for school, and friends, and family is important… I think that supporting people is important and I want to help people, like my friends and stuff, as much as possible, but also realize when I'm putting too much into it when I probably shouldn't be… I don't think that being a good person means helping other people all the time, it's not so black and white. I don't think people should have to apologize or feel bad for taking care of themselves first (Raj)

However, other participants, such as Sonia, argued that helping others was a behaviour that should be performed without limits, and that the only time when help should not be offered or provided was when the receiver had made it very obvious that the aid was not welcomed:

We should always help people, no matter what, even if it's your friend or your best friend, or like, it's your enemy too; you should still help anybody because everybody needs help in one way or another. The only time when we shouldn't help is if the person or the organization or whatever tells you that they don't want your help. So, at that point you sort of just move on and see what else you can do for other people.

As such, the majority of participants discussed the importance of prioritizing self above the other when it came to helping behaviours. The participants were able to reflect on the limits of their ability to help and volunteer, recognizing that providing aid is dependant on their own capacity to help without suffering personal loss. Furthermore, participants such as Samantha and Raj were able to articulate their views on the role of self-reflection and mindful observation in the creation of personal boundaries of helping.

Acquiring experience

Many participants in this study indicated that one of the benefits they received at their volunteer placement was the acquisition of profession experience or other relevant skills needed for employment. Although it was not a primary motivator for all, many had explained that their desire to volunteer at a particular location was influenced by elements of professional growth which they could gain while helping others.

Professional enhancement. Gaining experience for potential jobs, graduate programs, or other volunteer positions was one of the central benefits of volunteer acknowledged during the interviews. Participants reported an understanding that volunteering was often sought out as a means of exploring potential fields of interest, particular positions, or acquiring prerequisite experience for additional positions or graduate programs. Indeed, some of the participants in this study acknowledged that they were partially motivated to volunteer for the sake of improving or gaining work-related experiences:

> *I want to be like, in the field. I'm currently in science, so helping at the hospital taught me a few things about the health field… I knew I wanted to work in a hospital and so I wanted to know how they operate and like what people in different roles have to do. So,*

learning and working in a hospital environment was beneficial to helping me figure out what my career in the future would be like. (Raj)

Like, for example, let's say you want to get a job at like, 14, 15, 16. It's better to go out and volunteer somewhere and have that volunteer experience. And then, when you go to a job interview, you're not going to have work experience, but they're going to see that you took the initiative to actually do something. And if you did a good job, then you may be able to get a reference from wherever you volunteered. (David)

… especially if the program is competitive. Like any program you apply to now, that's what they're looking for. People don't want to train you; they want someone else to do it… And now on all the school applications, they say you need to have volunteer experience. (Samantha)

However, participants in this study were critical of students who used volunteering exclusively as a means of attaining employment. Although some were sympathetic towards the financial plight of those who were struggling or were unable to find work without experience, the majority of participants argued that engaging in volunteering for the sole reason of CV enhancement was dishonest:

I know like so many people from my old school that applied to med school, and I knew that they weren't volunteering out of the goodness of their heart, they were volunteering because it looked good on their resume. It bothers me because I'm like, "You could actually find something that you enjoy, instead of forcing yourself to just get some hours". But at the end of the day, they're the ones who aren't happy and are only doing

something for their resume, when other people are just enjoying it. So, it's like, wrong to only use your volunteering for you, when you should be doing it to help others too. (Samantha)

Hopefully it just leads them to finding something that they like so that they can actually volunteer for the right reasons. But I just think it's wrong, because you know that their heart isn't in it. If all you're trying to do is make your own life better, then find something else, you know? Like I believe that one part of volunteering can be to help yourself learn new things and get experience, but it shouldn't be the only reason. Like someone who actually cares about the work could be in that position instead of someone who only cares about themselves. (Fatima)

I think it's just a bad attribute to their personality. How selfish do you have to be to only 'care' about caring for others so long as it benefits you? (Christina)

Skill development. Skill development was also seen as an inevitable consequence of volunteering. Many reported that regardless of volunteer placement, there was always something to be learned or gained through the experience:

… you learn things every time you volunteer. I could be 50 and volunteering and still learn things about how to interact with others, and how different people do things. (Raj)

… whenever you volunteer, you always learn something new. So, like I mentioned, I learned how to interact with people, you know. I'm benefitting from it now whenever I apply it to things and I'll keep doing it in the future with new experiences and new people.

So like, put it together, you'll just keep learning new things. It's just like working in new jobs. Yeah, [the learning] can be about the field or can be about like, relationships, and stuff like that. (Sonia)

The most disclosed skill developed through participants' volunteering was communication. All students interviewed in this study explained that their ability to effectively communicate, to understand, and be understood by others had improved since they began volunteering:

I learned how to socialize with people better. I got to meet new people most of the time, so I had to learn how to work in a team of people I don't know. So like, learning how to talk to them, how to solve conflict and problems. Just be better with people. (Ali)

… learning how to interact with certain people. Not everyone gets along the same way, so maybe for different people, you kind of have to learn… how the way you phrase things matters? Like you don't connect with everyone in the same way, so if you want to interact with them in certain social environments, you need to figure out how to make that connection possible. (Raj)

You hear about what people are going through and you sort of learn how to help them calm down and think things through objectively. Some of the people who visit [our centre] just needed someone to sit with them and talk to them. By being there for so long, I basically learned how to talk to people to give them comfort. It's nice because I can see a difference in how people perceive my speech from when I started until now. (Fatima)

One participant commented on the fact that she continued to benefit from her improved communication skills outside of her professional pursuits:

> *You just feel better when you know how to talk to people. Like my friends come to me more often for advice and stuff, and they always say that I'm good at looking at things calmly. I also sometimes talk to myself like I would to someone else; it helps a lot before exams when I'm stressed.* (Fatima)

The development of leadership skills was noted by two participants. Both were involved in managing large teams of people and explained that interacting with same-age peers from a more directive place was difficult. However, they were able to learn that leadership requires patience and understanding. Ali, who managed multiple teams of volunteers, noted that cohesion was dependant on his ability to make sure that people understood what exactly was being done:

> *I learned leadership from volunteering. As in, I learned how people my age, when they gather together, it's really hard to manage us (laughs)… And although they [other volunteers] didn't want to listen to me at first, when nothing was being done, I was like, "Okay, we're wasting our time and the kids aren't getting what they need, so we need to figure something out". I realized that everyone needed to know what the plan was, so I made people explain things to each other… doing that helped people work better.*

Neil recounted a similar narrative of development with his own leadership qualities. He explained that although he was identified as an exemplary basketball player, he was unsure about his fit as the coach. As mentioned in the previous section on meaning and purpose in life, Neil's ability to adapt to his new role occurred as he gained self-confidence and a sense of purpose:

> *I found that trying new skills or things that I thought I couldn't do helped me understand that I could actually do all these things – I just didn't like, realize that I could do them?*

Like obviously I was chosen to help for a reason, but I didn't have any real experience coaching, so I didn't know if how I was teaching them to play was actually helping them. I don't really know what changed, it just feels like one day I knew that I could do it – like I knew and the kids knew.

Challenges

One of the interests of this thesis was to uncover the unique challenges faced by religious and spiritual undergraduate volunteers. As mentioned in the introduction, given that their educational and vocational experiences may be similar to secular students, the interviewer ensured to ask participants about the challenges they faced in their unique roles as religious or spiritual volunteers.

Negative experiences. Negative experiences took on various forms in the participants' volunteer experiences. Issues such as disagreements, racism, and disorganization were the main challenges reported by the participants. Interestingly, however, none of the interviewees reported a desire to cease volunteering as a direct result of these experiences.

Ali noted that the volunteer team to which he belonged had many Muslims affiliated with different sects. He explained that this was not typically a problem, however, during Ramadan or evening prayers, some team members would get into arguments about when to break their fast or when they should all collectively pray:

It wasn't a big deal until like Ramadan or Maghrib [evening prayer]. *Thankfully we didn't always go until the evening, but sometimes when we were cleaning up and it got late, someone would want us to go pray but someone else would say like, "The adhan* [call to prayer] *hasn't happened yet". So, it was mainly just disagreements like that.*

Although not directly involved in disagreements, Raj's unique situation as a convert in a religious volunteer setting was something he described as both a benefit and a challenge:

> *I would be learning something, like using prayer beads to practice reciting, and someone would tell me I was doing it wrong. But then another person would come up and tell me that I was actually doing it right, and they would just start arguing. So, sometimes I felt like I had just caused this huge argument, and I'm not good with confrontation so I didn't know how to react.*

Some participants who were visible minorities noted that their volunteer experiences were marred by distasteful and racist comments made by the people with whom they volunteered. Of note, Fatima and Sonia explained what it was like to witness racism and be on the receiving end of it as well:

> *Sometime people would just look at me, and I know that they would be looking at my hijab, and they would ask questions like, "Aren't you hot under that?" or say things like, "I wish I was forced to wear that so that I can leave the house without worrying about my hair". It's little things like that said by adults that made me really angry – like you're a grown person, you should realize that saying stuff like that isn't appropriate… There would always be someone trying to figure out why I was so dark for a South Asian, asking me questions like, "Are you part African?" You really learn how to bite your tongue.* (Fatima)

> *When I was there, I noticed racism towards the brown kids… If the teachers were white, they would sometimes like the white kids more. Some of them thought the white kids were more well-mannered and smart versus the brown kids, and they would say that right in*

> *front of us during lunch break. And I'm sitting there, obviously a brown person, having to hear what this lady is saying and being like, unable to do anything because she's friends with the volunteer coordinator.* (Sonia)

When asked how she was able to cope with these racist experiences, Sonia explained that her parents and friends encouraged her to speak up and supported her through the process of reporting the racist teachers. She stated that although the remainder of her time at that school was made difficult by the other teachers, she was able to understand that her actions most likely protected students from being emotionally affected by what was said.

Christina noticed that volunteering for a formal organization with people who only wanted to be there to build their CVs often create confusion and disorganization. She explained that while she was fine with their motivation to volunteer (as she had also reported more egoist reasons), she found their lack of care for the work and the beneficiaries as extremely disrespectful:

> *No one actually cared about what was going on, people were honestly just there to hang out or like make it look like they were volunteering, but they would just take pictures and post it to Instagram… I know other people were upset too, but after some time, they just stopped caring, which says something about our ability to help the people looking for our services.*

Conflicting commitments. Just like their secular peers, religious and spiritual students in this study reported that their ability to volunteer was affected by additional commitments requiring their time, such as school, work, and other more important volunteer positions.

> *I like volunteering, and I want to get back to it, I just want to get settled in Canada first. I want to keep doing what I was doing back home.* (Ali)

I already volunteer somewhere once a week after class, and that's working for me right now. I want to get back to volunteering over the weekend, but I also want to see how this place plays out. I also don't want to commit to something that's like too serious, especially with assignments and exams. (David)

I'm trying to find a job. I need to take care of my own well-being and pay off these student loans before I can start helping other people. (Christina)

My family wants me focus on my family. My niece was born a month ago and my sister is staying with us for a while. I like spending time with her and the baby, so I don't really mind not volunteering for a while. (Raj)

As such, participants in this study report similar reasons for not volunteering as can be found in the literature. Pressures from school, work, and other commitments take precedence in religious and spiritual undergraduates' lives; however, participants are able to recognize the importance of lifestyle balance in their school, work, family, and volunteer responsibilities.

Discussion

The focus of this thesis was to understand the lived experiences of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students. In particular, this research study intended to explore the values, benefits, and challenges that participants associated with their personal volunteer narratives. Expanding on these topics allowed for a rich discussion on how this sample of religious/spiritual undergraduate students understood their relationship with volunteering and what it meant for

them to identify as volunteers. The participants showed diversity in age, culture, religion and/or spirituality, and volunteer experience.

Results from the interviews indicate that the sample was able to identify particular markers of spiritual maturity, share certain volunteer experiences, demarcate their volunteer trajectories, articulate experience and development, and show resilience in the face of particular challenges. Results from this study enhance existing literature on the volunteering experiences of undergraduate students, as certain novel elements relating to the participants' religious/spiritual identities were observed. Four emergent themes presented themselves through the interviews: spiritual maturity, volunteering particulars, acquisition of experience, and challenges to volunteering. Although elements of these dominant themes can be found in existing literature (e.g., Holdsworth, 2010; Simha et al., 2011), the current research project adds unique insight into the role of religion/spirituality as it affects these domains. As such, this study augments existing scholarship on the lived experiences of undergraduate volunteers by providing a unique religious/spiritual lens.

Although this study was aimed at both religious and spiritual students, only one of the participants identified as purely spiritual. Spirituality and more abstract forms of transcendent non-religious beliefs have become more popular in recent years (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017). Canadian demographic data has shown that the majority of the population identifies as Christian (Statistics Canada, 2016). However, an increasing number of Canadians are choosing to identify as spiritual (Angus Reid Institute, 2017) and research on emerging adults' spirituality has shown to be more complex than previously assumed (Watts, 2018). Although it is difficult to generalize from the current study's small sample, it may be that the distribution of religious- and spiritual-

identifying student volunteers reflects the broader number of spiritual but not religious young adults in Canadian society.

Participants in this study overwhelmingly reported that they placed great importance on the value of helping others in need. Some expressed that their position of privilege (e.g., being financially stable, healthy, sheltered, etc.) was afforded to them by their higher power in order for them to help others. The concept of privilege in volunteering has been discussed elsewhere in the literature. Interestingly, Nenga (2011) found that youth volunteers from affluent backgrounds tended to evade discussions of class privilege and were most likely to acknowledge privilege when they had been working with one organization for a prolonged period of time. Differences between the present study and that of the aforementioned author indicate that the research on privilege and youth volunteering remains inconclusive.

Other participants in the current study had indicated that the notion of helping others can come from simply witnessing human suffering, thereby making it independent of formal religious teachings. Such views have previously been interpreted from a spiritual but not religious standpoint. Schlehofer and colleagues (2008) argue that extending concern for humanity, rather than just those within one's immediate environment, can be coded as a spiritual belief. This was indeed the case for Christina, who identified as spiritual but not religious, and Ali, who was Muslim, yet noted that religiosity was not the sole avenue through which care-driven volunteering could be accessed.

Interestingly, participants were able to distinguish between understanding and experiencing values. For this sample, experiencing values involved an internalization process wherein they were taught a value by their parents or community, and then made the conscious decision to enact these values in their daily life. This process of intentional action allowed

participants to experience these values for themselves, and later develop personal relationships with the values they felt were most important. Further volunteer experiences strengthened these bonds and allowed participants to identify meaning and purpose in life. These results are distinct from existing research, which argues that extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivations to volunteer influence purpose in life. Okun and Kim (2016) studied the interaction between prosocial motivation, frequency of volunteering, and purpose in life among young adults. The authors found that those who reported higher levels of pressure-based motivations (i.e., a desire to fulfill social obligations to volunteer) rather than pleasure-based motivations (i.e., obtaining pleasure from helping others), volunteered more frequently and had higher purpose in life scores. Their results posit that young adults have higher levels of purpose in life when they respond correctly to social obligations to help. The current study, however, supported more recent research (Yeung, 2018), and found that religious and/or spiritual participants stressed intrinsic motivations as their impetus for volunteering.

Volunteering among youth has been previously been shown to act as a means of connecting with something greater than oneself, especially among religious and spiritual youth (King et al., 2014). Such transcendent experiences were also shared by the participants in the current study. Both spiritual and religious participants articulated that volunteering necessitates an offering of help that intimately comes from within. Even if the offer is personally considered to be inconsequential, participants noted that when it is received, it is amplified and creates lasting effects that extend well beyond the self and the helping relationship. In other words, participants found that their volunteering experiences allowed them to interact with others in a way that supported recognition of their broad sphere of influence on the world.

The current study also found that volunteering had helped participants develop personal religiosity and spirituality. Indeed, young adulthood is an important developmental period in one's life, wherein maintenance or alterations of previously held beliefs can take place (Arnett, 2004; Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014). Such alterations were present for two participants, who reported that internal instability and incongruence with familial beliefs led to religious and spiritual self-discoveries. However, their self-driven paths diverged in novel ways. For example, Neil reported that the opportunity to learn about Islam at his own pace, paired with the chance to socialize with same-age Muslim peers allowed him to develop his religious beliefs in a safe environment. His process of spiritual development exemplifies the framework proposed by Benson and Roehlkepartain (2008), who outline awakening, interconnection, and action as the key interconnecting factors relating to youth spiritual development. Alternatively, Christina noted that her journey involved introspection, an increase in empathy for non-human organisms, and the pursuit of a university program which would allow her to help others. Her spiritual growth reflect results found in existing research, which highlights the role of educational choices and personal practices in the development of adult spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Therefore, it can be understood that Neil's self-driven journey to spiritual maturity included interpersonal elements, whereas Christina's was more intrapersonal.

A common experience shared by half of the participants consisted of mandatory community service completed during secondary school. Participants were quick to criticize the mandatory Ontario program by emphasizing how creating an obligation to volunteer removed a fundamental component of the behaviour – the voluntary choice to help. Previous research conducted on the program has shown similar conclusions (Henderson et al., 2014), however participants in this study broadened the scope of this discussion by noting that their experiences

provided them with no meaning or sense of purpose. As such, participants related the forced nature of the program to hastily selected volunteer jobs, which offered little in terms of fulfilment and gratification. This was in stark contrast to their current volunteer experiences, which appeared to provide participants with a sense of meaning and autonomy. Therefore, participants' strong positive feelings regarding their current volunteer positions may increase their sense of congruency with their actions and philosophies. Such results are in line with previous qualitative research, which has shown that young adults tend to view volunteering while in post-secondary institutions as a way to manifest mature personal values and reflect more personal beliefs (Simha et al., 2011).

Religious belief paired with the abovementioned positive attitudes towards current volunteering experiences appeared to influence the future volunteering intentions of the participants. For some, this expressly involved their religious/spiritual faiths. For example, Ali noted that he would like to continue volunteering and emulate the behaviours of the Muslim Prophet once he was more settled in Canada. Subsequent volunteering trajectories of other participants in this study were similarly based on attitudes regarding boundaries and self-care. Of note, Samantha, Fatima, and Raj were all able to recognize instances wherein helping others at the expense of their own well-being was incongruent with how they understood volunteering. Meaningful volunteering was expressed differently by all three, yet they each emphasized important aspects of the boundaries of help, such as personal limitations, knowing when help is unwanted or inappropriate, being aware of intentions, and ceasing help when feeling overwhelmed. One participant, however, noted that helping should occur whenever possible, and when it was explicitly rejected, one should find other ways of helping.

Indeed, cultural and religious norms may have had an influence on the participants' volunteer experiences, given that the sample was religiously and culturally diverse. Research has shown that religious immigrants often feel pressured to help due to social obligations present within their specific cultural and religious communities (Abo-Zena & Barry, 2013). Furthermore, volunteering has been shown to help religious immigrants feel productive in their host society (Abo-Zena & Barry, 2013), this is especially important in countries where false narratives of immigrants as lazy and unproductive are shared. Further, studies indicate that cultural minority communities tend towards more informal forms of helping (e.g., caregiving for a loved one, offering to babysit children); these tasks are most often performed by women and tend to go unreported in the literature, as they are seen as a part of one's role rather than forms of prosocial behaviour (Couton & Gaudet, 2008). All but one of the participants in the current study self-identified as racial minorities; two participants were also newcomers to Canada. As a result, all participants, whether born in Canada or elsewhere, may have been influenced by the norms of the cultures to which they belong.

Further, microaggressions and overt forms of racism establish unequal opportunities for minority populations to obtain professional experience necessary for desired vocational positions (Guo, 2007). When asked about how volunteering had affected their professional lives, participants in the current study responded by highlighting opportunities for professional development, such as necessary experience for work and graduate programs, and skill development. Participants reported that they were able to explore their fields of study and get a sense for how their education applies in vocational settings. Interviews also revealed that volunteering served as a means of security for competitive positions in education and the workplace. Further, participants noted that they were able to learn important communication,

leadership, and coaching skills. These skills continued to grow and impact various areas of the participants' lives in meaningful ways, such as conflict resolution (Ali, Raj), offering empathy (Fatima), self-soothing (Fatima), and improving self-confidence (Neil).

However, participants disapproved of volunteers who engaged in helping behaviours for the sole purpose of improving their curriculum vitae or increasing their employability. Such criticism has been shown elsewhere in the literature (Anderson & Green, 2012) and general trends in undergraduate volunteer research indicate that young adults tend to view the obtainment of professional skills as one of the many positive consequences of volunteering (Holdsworth, 2010). Volunteering and similar forms of helping have been understood as actions that are intended to benefit the recipient, yet some sort of benefit is provided to the volunteer as well, be it a positive emotion, acquiring a skill, or the knowledge that someone was helped as a direct result of their actions (Simha et al., 2011). Participants in the current study were able to articulate the difficulties that come with trying to create a volunteer environment that is purely beneficial to the recipient. Interview responses from participants such as Samantha and Fatima revealed that while they viewed educational and occupational benefits as inevitable assets, they believed that volunteering for the "right" reasons involved an understanding of time as both valuable and meaningful. In other words, true volunteering requires an element of care for the work and its benefactors, a sentiment which cannot be realized if one is simply volunteering for their own benefit.

Participants also reported encountering challenges and difficulties which negatively impacted their volunteering experiences. Of note, some of these challenges involved issues of religion and race. For example, Ali expressed his frustrations with team disagreements which would often occur during temporally significant periods of the day for Muslims. This frustration

may be the by-product of the harsh transition between the cohesion that existed when the group was engaged in volunteering, to a more disjointed sense of organization when the group was arguing about important elements of their faith. Meaning, Ali found that disagreements arising from differing religious practices within the same religion were hard to repair, especially when there had previously been a sense of allegiance among the group. Interestingly, Raj also found that disagreements caused by diverging religious practices created tension at his volunteer placement during prayer breaks. His dual roles of volunteer and religious convert uniquely positioned him as both a beneficiary and benefactor of help. However, tension between adherents often left Raj situated in the centre and unaware of how to resolve the conflict. As such, interviews from both participants offer insight into the unique challenges faced by religious undergraduate volunteers who volunteer with other members of their faith.

Additional grievances were highlighted by Fatima, who found that her intersecting racial and religious minority identities created a unique set of obstacles during her volunteer placements. She recounted how both her religious attire and skin colour were inappropriately commented on or questioned by the adults with whom she worked. Fatima's tendency to "bite [her] tongue" is often a tactic used by minority young adults as a way to avoid confrontation (Mitchell, Every, & Ranzijn, 2011). Such experiences of micro-aggressions have been shown to negatively affect mental health and affect (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014). Likewise, Sonia had also witnessed racist exchanges between the adult staff at her volunteer placement, and found herself unable to reproach what was being said due to the employees' seniority and role within the institution.

It is important to note that while participants reported a strong desire to speak out against the remarks made to or around them, they were aware of the potential consequences they may

face if they spoke up. Research has shown that young adults perceive the burden of educating others about discrimination even when they do not consider themselves to have all the necessary knowledge to speak on the issue; navigating these interactions can also lead to feelings of uncertainty and lack of safety (Mitchell et al., 2011). Both Fatima and Sonia were aware of the possible risks associated with speaking out against staff or older volunteers (i.e., loss of volunteer position, hostile relationships, embarrassment, etc.). Although Sonia was able to report what she had witnessed, the support she received from her family and friends was integral to her ability to continue volunteering in spite of the negative consequences she experienced as a result. Such support may not exist for other minority student volunteers who are new to Ottawa and do not have an established social network.

Some of the more common challenges reported by this sample reflect existing findings within the literature, such as conflicting commitments with work, school, and personal life (Simha et al., 2011). Given that this was the first year of university for many, some participants reported that they reduced their hours or took a break from their volunteer positions in order to get a sense of how school pressures would affect their time management. Others expressed family commitments, Canadian settlement and integration needs, family pressures, and finances as current factors affecting their ability to volunteer more hours. Participants were able to differentiate volunteering from other activities such as hobbies, and display a recognition that volunteering is a commitment that must be made when the demands of other areas of one's life are satisfied.

Other interesting findings offered by this study include the number of participants who volunteered for the welfare of other same-aged peers. Existing research has shown that volunteer positions commonly adopted by young adults tend to benefit other young adults or youth

(Edwards et al., 2001). These findings were also apparent in the present study, wherein four out of the eight participants reported that that their volunteer duties focused on providing aid to other young adults in some way. Common responsibilities involved delivering food and clothing, engaging youth in various recreational activities, and establishing educational supports for youth. Some researchers argue that such trends exist because organizations that commonly accept emerging adult volunteers are looking for same-age peers to assist with programs dedicated to youth (Edwards et al., 2001). The participants in this study who were more actively engaged with work benefitting youth were also younger than those who were volunteering for more adult populations. For example, Ali, Sonia, David, and Neil all fall between the ages of 18 and 19 and reported volunteering with same-age or younger peers. Older participants in this study were over the age of 20 and were more likely to be involved with administrative duties.

Additional differences seen in the participants' volunteer experiences included the level of interpersonal contact they received with the community they sought to help, which appeared to affect the perceptions they held regarding the impact of their service. These highly interpersonal interactions created a space for participants to witness the direct effect that their behaviour had on beneficiaries, while simultaneously supporting personal motivations and meaning-making. For example, Ali expressed that his ongoing face-to-face contact with the children he was helping allowed him to find purpose and was a strong motivating force in his desire to continue volunteering. Even less routine contact was perceived as meaningful, as noted by Samantha, who found that helping strangers during their hospital visits allowed her to recognize the positive impact she had on others. Contrastingly, Christina expressed that her more independent role in a humanitarian organization meant that she had less direct contact with the communities that received her help. Through this experience, she was able to realize that her

contribution did not feel as effectual as she would have liked and now has a better sense of what she is looking for in a volunteer position. Participants appeared to derive some sense of meaning and purpose from their face-to-face interactions with beneficiaries, suggesting that such forms of volunteering create a space for meaning and motivation to prosper for this sample of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate volunteers. Similar results have been found in the literature to some effect. For example, Forbes and Zampelli (2014) found that participants in their study were less likely to volunteer if they believed that their actions would have minimal impact on the community they were intending to serve. As such, it follows that informal volunteering would include more direct contact, resulting in more opportunities to witness and validate one's efforts.

Another aspect of non-direct volunteering which was excluded from the present study, yet is commonly found throughout the literature, is charitable giving. Although not an emergent theme in this research project, one participant did discuss monetary donations at length in her interview. Sonia, reported that her family actively engaged in charitable giving, often donating "thousands of dollars to homeless shelters". She indicated that while she is hesitant to simply give out money, she finds that paying for a meal is more congruent with her intention to help.

Many scholars have focused on charitable giving or donations as an area of interest in their research on voluntary behaviour. For example, Statistics Canada has overseen the production of multiple national reports on volunteering and charitable giving as common elements of prosocial behaviour (Hall et al., 2009; Turcotte, 2015). Others have commented on the amount of donations offered by members of various faith groups (Wang & Graddy, 2008). Following a similar decision made by Rodell (2013), the current study choose to exclude charitable giving from its analysis as it is a more passive form of support, and many young adults do not have the means to regularly offer financial donations (Wang & Graddy, 2008). Further,

this study aimed to understand more personal and robust volunteering experiences, which lay outside the scope of participants' income.

It is important to note that while this study focuses on undergraduate students, this population should not be assumed to be synonymous with 'young adult volunteers'. Being an undergraduate student does not necessitate any kind of age requirement, as many middle-aged and older adults choose to pursue baccalaureate degrees later in life. Indeed Smith and colleagues (2010) note that research with undergraduate student populations often focuses on developmental changes that commonly occur during this period, while simultaneously leaving the issue of older students unaddressed. Participants in the current study reflect Arnett's (2000) age boundaries for emerging adults (18 to 25 years old), with the exception of Christina, whose age falls one year off the aforementioned distinction. This is important to note for the current study as it sought to understand the volunteering experience of religious/spiritual emerging adults who are also undergraduate students. The co-occurrence of these three identities (i.e., emerging adult, religious/spiritual individual, and undergraduate student) was used to examine the possible ways in which they interact to create a unique developmental narrative of volunteering for the participants in this study.

Strengths

The current thesis contributes to the growing body of literature on the volunteering experiences of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate students. Much of the scholarship has focused on religious undergraduate students in the United States of America. There has also been a distinct lack of research examining the role of spirituality in the volunteer experiences of this population. Furthermore, existing studies have primarily drawn conclusions from analyses on large data sets (e.g., Aydinli et al., 2016; Forbes & Zampelli, 2014), precluding more rich and

personal data on the experience of volunteering while identifying as a religious and/or spiritual undergraduate student.

This study aimed to address these gaps by conducting semi-structured interviews with eight participants from diverse religious, spiritual, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Giving participants a voice to articulate their personal experiences allowed for rich and multifaceted narratives on volunteering, religion/spirituality, and student-status. The interaction of these three identities informed the unique lived realities of the participants and offered a glimpse at how they understood their volunteering experiences. As such, a significant strength of this thesis can be derived from the methodology and how it augments current scholarship.

Participants from the current study were highly diverse, reflecting various religions/spiritualties and cultural groups. The multicultural and multifaith characteristics of the present sample offers a uniqueness to the existing literature, which has primarily been dominated by research on Caucasian Christians and Catholics (Abo-Zena & Barry, 2013). Furthermore, this small sample seems to reflect the diversity currently present in, and projected for, Canadian society. Given the number of participants who completed secondary school in Ontario, this study also offers modern praise and criticisms for the mandated community service program present in all Ontario secondary schools.

Limitations

The limitations present in the current study mirror those of other qualitative research projects. Notably, the limited number of participants restricts the generalizability of the data, such that the results found herein cannot be assumed to reflect the overarching experiences of all religious and/or spiritual undergraduate volunteers. A greater number of participants would be needed in order to yield results that can be more appropriately be attributed to this population.

Although rich and informative, the self-report nature of interviews can create an environment for desirability bias to negatively impact the validity of the results (Krumpal, 2013). Given that the interviewer was actively engaging the participants verbally and non-verbally, it may be possible that some of the interviewees embellished their experiences in order to appear more altruistic or helpful.

Interviews were conducted in English, a second language for two of the participants, one of whom wondered if he was relating his true thoughts and feelings to their full extent. Indeed, given the diversity of the sample, future studies would benefit from expanding the interview process and including additional languages such as French and Arabic. Such expansions may also allow for increased diversity in the recruitment of religious and/or spiritual participants.

Implications for Future Research

Research on the experience of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate volunteers has been significantly dominated by quantitative research, resulting in a lack of in-depth qualitative data intimately focused on volunteers' own narratives. As such, future studies should utilize qualitative or mixed method approaches in order to bolster existing quantitative research and broaden the scope of the literature. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be used to examine trends in religious and/or spiritual participants' volunteering, and to explore how religious and/or spiritual identities affect and are affected by volunteering. Continuing to explore experience by numbers rather than words would only serve to maintain the exclusion of important themes and topics of discussion for this population.

For example, almost all of the participants in this study were able to articulate their boundaries and limits of helping. However, continual exploration of this topic is necessary to understand how those with blurred boundaries come to understand their responsibilities as

volunteers and their responsibilities to themselves. Exploring how boundaries are established and maintained may benefit participants who come from more collectivist cultures, wherein the expectation of help underpins many social interactions. Through this, future researchers may be able to highlight key areas of growth and establish workshops wherein boundaries are taught to high school students who are mandated to volunteer.

Additionally, research on the ways that religious and/or spiritual college students understand their volunteering experiences would also provide insight into how their experience differs from those attending university. Given that colleges typically include more trades-oriented programs than universities, such research may shed light on how students attending post-secondary institutions differentially understand and utilize their volunteer roles and experiences.

Furthermore, additional research on the unique challenges faced by religious and/or spiritual volunteers will be paramount to ensure their comfort and safety when volunteering. Of note, participants in the current study highlighted Islamophobic and racist instances of discrimination reportedly perpetrated by adult superiors. Additional research into the kinds of discrimination faced by this population would benefit both current and upcoming volunteers, religious and/or spiritual or otherwise. Future studies are encouraged to examine effective ways of empowering young volunteers and educating staff on micro-aggressions and other forms of discrimination. The aim of such research would then be to create safe environments wherein young religious and/or spiritual volunteers would be able to carry out their duties without having to be hypervigilant to discrimination.

Finally, religious and/or spiritual participants in this study expressed how finding meaning in their volunteer experiences fostered both a sense of purpose and a motivation to

engage in subsequent volunteering. Further research into how these qualities can be replicated in non-religious/spiritual volunteers may allow for improved secular volunteer engagement, fulfillment, and commitment.

Conclusion

The current study responded to a significant paucity of research on the experiences of religious and/or spiritual undergraduate volunteers. Results indicate that the sample displayed certain commonalities in their volunteering behaviour; valued transcendence and opportunities for meaning making; and faced unique challenges relating to their religious and/or spiritual identities. The interaction between participants' identities as undergraduate students, as volunteers, and as religious and/or spiritual adherents created unique narratives of experience that would have been unknown had one of these characteristics not been under investigation.

Indeed, as Canadian society becomes more secular in nature (Pew Research Centre, 2013), creating a space for open discussions on religion and spirituality within research is becoming increasingly difficult. The concept of spirituality is especially excluded from the literature as it is more abstract in nature and is yet to be commonly operationalized (King & Koenig, 2009). However, researchers and clinicians must understand that for some, religion and spirituality are deeply integrated into daily experiences, such that they shape and are shaped by other important areas of one's life. As such, honouring the participants' lived experiences in order to foster a greater understanding of how they make sense of their volunteering behaviours was of significant importance to this study. Without this consideration, the author believes that participants' narratives would be incomplete. As young adults, participants in this study will surely find that their faith and beliefs will change based on their ongoing experiences and

interactions with influential others; however, finding meaning and establishing purposeful actions is a gift that is likely to remain constant.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

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 volunteerism and your religious/spiritual identity. More specifically, we will be talking about the possible relationship that may exist between your beliefs and your behaviours. Our conversation will help to shed light on social engagement in religious/spiritual undergraduate students. This interview should take roughly 40 minutes 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.

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?]

[*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 I would like to ask you a few questions about your volunteer experiences. Feel free to mention experiences had within the past year 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.

Question 1: *Tell me a little bit about where you have been volunteering.*

- Follow up (IQ) 1: What did you like about your experience(s)? What did you dislike?
- IQ2: How many hours per week do you volunteer?
- IQ3: What expectations did you have regarding your position(s)?
- IQ4: From the experience(s) that you have described, what stood out the most for you?
- IQ5: What do you think is the most important thing that you took away from your experience(s)?
- IQ6: How have you started to look at the world differently since volunteering?

Question 2: *What are some of the challenges that you have faced as a volunteer?*

- IQ1: Did these challenges make it difficult for you to continue volunteering?
- IQ2: Despite these challenges, were you still motivated to continue volunteering?
- IQ3: How did you meet these challenges?
- IQ4: Were you supported by others?
- IQ5: How do you believe that these challenges facilitated personal growth?

Question 3: *What was your relationship like with others at your volunteer position(s)?*

- IQ1: Who would you turn to for support at your position(s)?

- IQ2: What was the most meaningful relationship that you were a part of?
- IQ3: What was going through your mind when you were disagreeing with someone?
- IQ4: Did you ever feel like there was a competitive atmosphere at your position(s)?

Question 4: *What are the merits or benefits that you receive from volunteering?*

- IQ1: Do you see yourself continuing to benefit from your experience(s) once you've stopped volunteering?
- IQ2: Do you see yourself being able to share these benefits in some way?
- IQ3: Were you aware of these benefits before you started volunteering?
- IQ4: Were these benefits the primary motivators fueling your desire to start or continue volunteering?

Question 5: *Now I'd like to shift to a discussion about your religious/spiritual beliefs. Would you mind sharing what you value about your religion/spirituality?*

- IQ1: How do these values play out in your daily life?
- IQ2: Where did you learn these values?
- IQ3: How have your beliefs and/or values changed throughout your life?

Question 6: *How does your religious/spiritual belief influence the way you see the world?*

- IQ1: How do you view the importance of human connection?
- IQ2: According to your beliefs and values, when should we help others? When should we not?
- IQ3: Does your religion/do your spiritual beliefs say anything specific about volunteering?

Question 7: *What role does your religion/spirituality play in your motivation to volunteer?*

- IQ1: Do you find yourself thinking about your religion/spirituality at your volunteer position(s)?
- IQ2: What is the percentage, out of one hundred, that religion/spirituality occupies in your desire to volunteer?
- IQ3: Do you believe that your volunteering experience(s) would be the same if you had a different religion/spirituality?

- IQ4: Do you notice any differences in motivation to volunteer between yourself and your non-religious/spiritual peers?
- IQ5: Do you feel a sense of duty to volunteer?
- IQ6: Do you believe that the number of hours you volunteer is related to your religious/spiritual beliefs?

Question 8: *A little while ago you mentioned these values [list]. Would you mind telling me how volunteering has challenged or confirmed these values?*

- IQ1: How did you feel at the time?
- IQ2: What are the benefits of being a religious/spiritual person within volunteer settings? What are the drawbacks?
- IQ3: Do you believe that your religious/spiritual values have made volunteering a more meaningful experience for you?

Question 9: *We are coming to the end of this interview, but I would like to know if there was anything else you would like to share before we leave?*

- IQ1: What feedback would you like to give?
- IQ2: Is there any question that you wish we had asked?

Wrapping Up:

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.

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27-08-2019
dd-mm-yyyy

Bureau de la recherche et de la déontologie
Office of Research and Ethics

Comité de la déontologie | Certificat d'éthique
Research Ethics Board | Ethics Certificate

<u>REB File Number</u> 1360.10/19

Principal Investigator / Thesis supervisor / Co-investigators / Student

Last name	Name	Affiliation	Role
Ismail	**Mariam**	**Faculty of Human Sciences**	**Student-Principal Investigator**
Stinchcombe	Arne	Faculty of Human Sciences	Thesis Supervisor
Hammond	Stuart	UO-School of Psychology	Co-researcher

<u>Type of project</u> Master Thesis
<u>Title</u> Understanding Aid: Religious and Spiritual Undergraduate Students' Personal Narratives of Their Volunteer Experiences.

Approval date	Expiry Date	Decision
27-08-2019 (dd-mm-yyyy)	26-08-2020 (dd-mm-yyyy)	1 (Approved)

<u>Committee comments</u>
The Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the project.
The researcher is invited to use the reference number 1360.10/19 when recruiting participants.

1. In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board (REB) has examined and approved the application for an ethics certificate for this project for the period indicated and subject to the conditions listed above.

2. The research protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB. This includes, among others, the extension of the research, additional recruitment for the inclusion of new participants, changes in location of the fieldwork, any stage where a research permit is required, such as work in schools. Minor administrative changes are allowed.

3. The REB must be notified of all changes or unanticipated circumstances that have a serious impact on the conduct of the research, that relate to the risk to participants and their safety.
Modifications to the project, information, consent and recruitment documentation must be submitted to the Office of Research and Ethics for approval by the REB.

4. The investigator must submit a report four weeks prior to the expiry date of the certificate stated above requesting an extension or that the file be closed.

5. Documents relating to publicity, recruitment and consent of participants should bear the file number of the certificate. They must also indicate the coordinates of the investigator should participants have questions related to the research project. In which case, the documents will refer to the Chair of the REB and provide the coordinates of the Office of Research and Ethics.

Louis Perron
Chair
Research Ethics Board

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Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-10-18-1219
Titre du projet / Project Title	Religious emerging adults' views on community participation
Type de projet / Project Type	Recherche de professeur / Professor's research project
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	12/11/2018
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	11/11/2019

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Stuart HAMMOND	École de psychologie / School of Psychology	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Mariam ISMAIL	École de psychologie / School of Psychology	Assistant de recherche / Research Assistant

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout évènement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completedfour weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Kim THOMPSON
Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer
Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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Appendix D

Recruitment Script for ISPR

Study name: Religious emerging adults' views on community participation

Study type: Standard (lab) study

Points: 1 point

Duration: 1 hour

Description: We are interested in interviewing religious/spiritual students who are currently volunteering or have volunteered within the past year. Students partaking in Community Service Learning (CSL) will also be eligible to take part in the study. During the interview, participants will be asked a series of questions about their religious/spiritual beliefs and their volunteering experiences. Participants will be asked to discuss their past and present experiences, their motivations for volunteering, the benefits/disadvantage of volunteering, and any other topics that come up naturally within the interview. Interviews will be held on Wednesdays and Fridays and should take roughly one hour. Participants will receive one course credit through the ISPR system upon completion. Principal Investigator: Stuart Hammond, Research Assistant: Mariam Ismail

Eligibility Requirements: Undergraduate students who personally identify with a religious faith or spiritual belief system. Participants must be current volunteers on or off campus or must have had a volunteer experience within the last year. Eligible students must also be able to converse in English.

Appendix E

Consent Form

Title of the study: **Religious emerging adults' views on community participation**

Mariam Ismail (M.A. Student)
misma023@uottawa.ca
(School of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Saint Paul University)

Dr. Arne Stinchcombe (Thesis Supervisor)
astinchcombe@ustpaul.ca, astinchcombe@brocku.ca
(School of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Saint Paul University)

Dr. Stuart Hammond (Co-Supervisor)
stuart.hammond@uottawa.ca
(VNR 6018, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, 613-562-5800 ext. 4467)

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Mariam Ismail, supervised by Dr. Arne Stinchcombe and Dr. Stuart Hammond. This research project has been accepted by Saint Paul University's Research Ethics Board.

Purpose of the Interview: This interview will be used to study volunteering behaviours and experiences among students who identify as religious/spiritual. The interview will explore University of Ottawa undergraduate students' experiences with volunteering, motivations to volunteer, barriers to volunteering, advantages and disadvantages associated with volunteering, and the role of religion/spirituality within the broader framework of social engagement.

Participation: My participation will consist of answering interview questions about my volunteering experiences and personal religious/spiritual values. The interview will last one hour and will take place in a psychology lab 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: I understand that the risk associated with my participation in this research project is minimal. My participation in this interview could result in me volunteering personal information, including information about my religious/spiritual beliefs, my personal values, and my well-being, which may cause me to feel some emotional discomfort. 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, Saint Paul University, the Distress Centre of Ottawa, and the Crisis line.

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 social engagement behaviours among religious/spiritual undergraduate students.

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 research assistant 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. Transcriptions along with other study materials (e.g., consent forms, the removable hard drive) will be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet in 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.

Acceptance: I, ________________________________, have read the consent form and agree to participate in the interview conducted by Mariam Ismail.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or the thesis supervisors.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON, K1S 1C4.
Tel.: (613) 236-1393

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant

Signature:

Date:

Interviewer:

Name:

Signature:

Date:

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:

Mariam Ismail, School of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Saint Paul University, misma023@uottwa.ca

Dr. Arne Stinchcombe, School of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Saint Paul University, astinchcombe@ustpaul.ca

Dr. Stuart Hammond, Department of Psychology, University of Ottawa, stuart.hammond@uottawa.ca

If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Saint Paul Research Ethics Board at:

Office of Research and Ethics
Saint Paul University
223 Main Street
Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1S 1C4
613-236-1393

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

Saint Paul University Counselling Centre
Website: https://ustpaul.ca/en/centre-for-counselling-home_360_120.htm
Phone number: 613-782-3022

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

Distress Centre Ottawa
Phone number: 613-238-3311
24-hour toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991

Crisis Line Ottawa
Phone number: 613-722-6914