"I knew I needed to live what I realised was faith in me": Enacting and transcending religious identity through food aid volunteering

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Abstract

Volunteering can enhance both help-recipients' and volunteers' lives, so it is important to explore what motivates people to begin and continue volunteering. For instance, research underpinned by the Social Identity Approach recognises that group-related processes are consequential. Recent quantitative research within this tradition highlighted the potential importance of volunteering as a means of religious identity enactment, but no work has yet explored this idea qualitatively, which means that the richness and complexity of identity enactment as a motive for volunteering remains unexamined. Addressing this, we conducted interviews with volunteers ($N = 26$) within English religiously-motivated voluntary organisations that are responding to an important real-world issue: growing levels of food insecurity. Theoretically-guided Reflexive Thematic Analysis developed four themes showing that volunteering can facilitate enactment of different identities (i.e., religious, volunteer, and human), thus illustrating the nuanced and complex nature of identity enactment through volunteering. Theoretical and practical implications are explored.

Keywords: volunteering, social identity, identity enactment, food aid, volunteer identity, religious identity, human identity, social cure

Introduction

It is well-established that volunteering benefits people and societies. For instance, the UK's National Lottery Community Fund (2021) revealed that the two million volunteers associated with the charities it has funded since 2018 have contributed £4 billion to the economy. While these acts of volunteering have improved the lives of numerous help-recipients, they also improve the lives of the volunteers themselves. A large literature has highlighted the health/wellbeing benefits obtained from volunteering (for a systematic review, see Jenkinson et al., 2013), with volunteering even predicting health 20 years later (Pillemer et al., 2010). Social psychologists have thus attempted to understand what motivates people to begin and continue volunteering.

Research has commonly explored individual difference variables which may predict volunteering, such as personality traits, socio-economic status, and demographics (for reviews, see Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012). While important, this work neglects the wider social context within which much volunteering occurs. Specifically, volunteering frequently happens within groups, such as charities, organisations, teams, and mutual aid collectives. Thus, by neglecting the relevance of these group and identity dynamics, volunteer motivation research can only tell a partial story.

The Social Identity of Volunteering

The Social Identity Approach (SIA; Tajfel, 1978; Turner et al., 1987) focuses on the implications of group dynamics for people's thinking and behaviour. Although the SIA has been applied to understand the role of group-related processes in relatively short-term acts of helping such as emergency intervention and charitable giving (e.g., Albayrak-Aydemir & Gleibs, 2021; Levine & Manning, 2013; Ntontis et al., 2018; Zagefka, 2022), there is less literature applying the SIA to volunteering. However, research which has been conducted

highlights the important role played by social group membership in predicting volunteering intentions (e.g., Simon et al., 2000; Thoits et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2017).

The SIA can also be applied to understand volunteering's health-related benefits. The Social Identity Approach to Health (SIAH), otherwise known as the 'Social Cure' approach (e.g., Haslam et al., 2018; Wakefield et al., 2019) posits that meaningful group memberships can benefit health because they unlock stress-reducing psychological resources such as social support, sense of belonging, meaning in life, self-esteem, and perceived control. Such processes have been observed within voluntary groups (e.g., Bowe et al., 2020; 2021, Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2021, Gray & Stevenson, 2018).

Although identification is a key group-related process through which volunteering benefits volunteers' health/wellbeing, the present study explores another potentially important mechanism: social identity enactment through helping.

Social Identity Enactment Through Helping

There is a great deal of evidence that highlights a strong connection between religiosity and the specific prosocial act of volunteering (e.g., Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006; Yeung, 2018a). In particular, there is a large literature on religiosity as a motivator for prosocial behaviour (e.g., Saroglou et al., 2005). However the SIA has allowed for deeper insights into religiously motivated helping by showing within experimental paradigms that religious individuals are more likely to offer help to those they deem to be fellow ingroup members as opposed to outgroup members (e.g., Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011; Piotrowski & Żemojtel-Piotrowska, 2022), and to be less likely to help outgroups whom they perceive as threatening their values, as opposed to 'non-threatening' outgroups (Jackson & Esses, 1997). Social identity enactment provides another analytic approach to explore helping behaviour.

This process (hereafter *identity enactment*) was a term first used by Wakefield et al. (2022) in the context of their work on religiously-motivated volunteering.

There is also research on the wellbeing-related benefits of religiously-motivated volunteering (e.g., Krause et al., 2017; Yeung, 2018b). However, there is no clear agreement regarding why religiosity may have these motivational and wellbeing-related benefits for volunteers. Consistent with the aforementioned work exploring social identity processes within volunteering, the SIA/SIAH would attribute these outcomes to volunteers' sense of identification with their voluntary group unlocking psychological benefits: a process likely to be enhanced if the voluntary group is aligned with the volunteer's religion (e.g., Christian Aid or Islamic Relief). However, Wakefield et al. (2022) explored an additional possibility: that volunteering with a religiously-motivated organisation allows religious volunteers to enact their membership of their religious group. Prosocial acts such as volunteering are normatively consistent with most religions, and thus could be a useful (and beneficial) way to enact membership of a religious group (indeed, it is common to hear religious people talk about how they enact their faith through prosocial acts). Wakefield et al. (2022) observed this in highly religious participants: the more participants identified with their religiously-motivated volunteering group at Time 1, the more they felt that their volunteering allowed them to enact their religious identity at Time 2, which itself was a positive predictor of volunteer engagement and mental health.

However, an important shortcoming of Wakefield et al. (2022) is that they did not reflect on what the process of identity enactment involves, or how it differs from other similar processes. In a bid to remedy this, we define identity enactment as similar to (but distinct from) two related concepts: *identity performance* (Klein et al., 2007), which involves people publicly expressing ingroup norms to an audience with the aim of affirming the identity or mobilising others to behave in identity-consistent ways, and *collective-self objectification*

(CSO; Drury et al., 2005; Pehrson et al., 2014), which involves crowd members actualising their group membership against the power of a dominant outgroup (e.g., during a protest) by behaving consistently with the group's norms (which in turn can promote positive feelings and encourage commitment towards the group's cause; Drury et al., 2005). Like both concepts, we consider identity enactment to involve people behaving in ingroup norm-consistent ways for the benefit of themselves as group members and/or their ingroup.

However, we also consider identity enactment to be distinct from CSO and identity performance. First, unlike CSO and identity performance, identity enactment explicitly occurs in helping/volunteering transactions: people use the act of helping/volunteering as the behaviour through which they enact their identity. Second, identity enactment does not require an audience. The concept of an audience viewing and understanding the actor's behaviour is crucial to both CSO and identity performance, yet while some of the items Wakefield et al. (2022) used to measure identity enactment explicitly mention an audience ("Doing this voluntary work allows me to show others that I'm a member of this religious group"), others do not ("Doing this voluntary work allows me to be a 'good' member of this religious group"). This leads us to propose that the identity-related significance of identity enactment may not have to be understood (or perhaps even observed) by an audience for it to benefit the actor: the actor's personal knowledge that they have engaged in enactment may be sufficient. Wakefield et al. (2022) were unable to explore this possibility due to their measure of identity enactment not containing items that explicitly explore the (lack of) need for audience observance/understanding. Moreover, the complexity and nuance of the concept suggests that surveys such as Wakefield et al.'s (2020) may only enable a partial exploration. There thus may be benefits to examining the topic by gathering rich experiential data from volunteers.

The Present Study

The aim of the present paper was to address these issues by conducting interviews with UK residents who volunteer for religiously-motivated organisations; specifically foodbanks and community kitchens. We explore identity-based volunteering in these organisations because there is a growing dependence on this type of food aid provider, especially in the UK (Tyler, 2021). Before COVID-19 (which is when our research was conducted), over half of the UK's independent foodbanks were religiously-orientated (although the volunteers do not have to be religious themselves, and many are not) (Independent Food Aid Network, 2019). Moreover, demand for these organisations' services is increasing drastically as a result of austerity, the global pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis. For instance, during the pre-COVID-19 period (when the present study's data were collected), the Trussell Trust (which is the largest UK foodbank network and is based on Christian principles) reported a staggering 74% increase in foodbank use between 2015-16 and 2019-20 (Trussell Trust, 2020). This creates the context for the present study, as it involves complex group dynamics where religious and non-religious volunteers work together as members of a religious voluntary organisation which supports numerous help-recipients. These recipients are a potential audience to this volunteering, and their attitudes to it may be affected by their own (lack of) religiosity. These contextual dynamics provide us with the opportunity to explore volunteers' reflections on the nature and complexities of religious and non-religious identity enactment. Our research questions were therefore: i) How and why do religious and non-religious volunteers enact ingroup norms through helping behaviours? ii) What do volunteers' accounts reveal about their experiences of help-recipients' awareness of or responses to this enactment?

Method

Design and Participants

The present study involved twenty-six semi-structured interviews with people volunteering in one of three food insecurity-related organisations associated with specific religions (Christianity or Sikhism) in England before the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 1 provides demographic information. The foodbank volunteer interviews were also used as part of the data corpus for another paper (citation redacted) exploring a different research question.

[TABLE 1]

Procedure and Reflexivity

Interviews took place at the volunteering locations (i.e., foodbanks and community kitchens organised by Christian and Sikh organisations), and each was conducted by one of three researchers (two female, one male). None of the research team were long-term foodbank/community kitchen help-recipients or volunteers, however, several members of the team did spend some time volunteering in each location to help build research relationships and contextual knowledge of the help-giving contexts before data collection began. One of the research team (not one of the interviewees) was Christian, while the rest did not hold religious convictions. Participants read (or listened to the researcher reading) the Participant Information Sheet before providing informed consent. Researchers used an interview schedule (see Supplemental Materials) of broad topics to help structure the interviews. These topics included reasons for volunteering, volunteering experiences, and perceptions of help-recipients/other volunteers. Participants were thanked and debriefed at the end.

Interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from 7 to 41 minutes ($M_{length} = 25$ mins 40 seconds), as participants were interviewed on location whilst engaged in their volunteering

role. During interviews volunteers were asked to take a break from actively performing their duties. Thus, the length of break could not be too long in most circumstances. It is important to reflect on the potential benefits and challenges of collecting data in this context: while it provided access to volunteers and meant that the act of volunteering was likely to be at the forefront of participants' thoughts, participants might also have felt reluctant to voice certain views (e.g., regarding negative aspects of their experience), or felt that they needed to abridge their answers so that they could get back to work sooner. The interviewer attempted to minimise these issues (where possible) by interviewing participants in a relatively private/quiet area away from distractions and other people. Nonetheless, even with this strategy in place, we note the potential impact that the interview context may have had on participants' responses.

Analytic Strategy

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed via Theoretically-guided Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA; e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021), using NVivo software for coding. TA is a flexible analytic approach that involves identifying common patterns of meaning. It is compatible with both essentialist and constructivist ontologies and can be applied inductively (data-driven) and/or deductively (theory-driven) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We adopted a contextualist approach, which Braun and Clarke (2006, p.81) describe as "sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and (…) acknowledge(s) the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings (…)". We selected this approach because we were interested in participants' personal experiences and the wider social landscape within which these experiences occurred and were constructed. Additionally, our analysis involved both inductive and deductive approaches to coding because, as previously mentioned, we were interested in investigating volunteers' accounts of their personal experiences, behaviours, and

motives (inductive) whilst also using the SIA and SIAH theoretical approaches as a lens through which to make sense of these experiences (deductive). In practical terms, this deductive element involved us drawing on the social identity theoretical frameworks to assist us in analysing and interpreting participants' experiences as they related to SIA and SIAH processes. Specifically, that means we paid particular attention to instances in participants' accounts where they discussed SIA-related processes (e.g., group membership, group norms, enactment of group identity) and SIAH-related processes (e.g., group belongingness, social support).

To ensure rigour, Braun and Clarke's (2021) six steps for Reflexive TA were conducted: data familiarisation via repeatedly reading transcripts and notetaking; data coding to capture both theoretical aspects (e.g., identity enactment) and data-driven aspects (e.g., personal experiences of interactions with help-recipients) within the data; sorting of codes into broad research question-relevant themes by the first author; reviewing of these initial themes by the research team; refinement and naming of themes; and selection of extracts to illustrate each theme. These extracts were then used in the write-up of the analysis, which drew on pre-existing SIA/SIAH theorising and empirical evidence. Participant pseudonyms are used, and place-names are redacted in extracts to protect participant anonymity. Ellipses (…) indicate where words have been removed from an extract for brevity.

Results and Discussion

Four themes were developed during analysis (see Table 2). Together, these provide a rich account of participants' motivations for volunteering, including their enactment of multiple social identities.

[TABLE 2]

Theme 1: Personal Religious Enactment as Volunteering Motivation and Reward

Participants talked about how volunteering allowed them to engage in behaviours and demonstrate values which they deemed as central to their religious beliefs:

Extract 1:

Samir: "So that's our duty, that's our moral obligation to be able to help people that are less fortunate than us. That's a, that's a fundamental of Sikhism."

This enactment of religious identity, described here in relation to the reflection of inner states such as felt values and morals rather than external religious performance, was often expressed as the primary motive for help-giving. As discussed in the Introduction, the helping context is integral to identity enactment, and differentiates it from CSO/identity performance. Indeed, sometimes the motive to engage in identity enactment was prioritised over the background of the help-recipient or the nature of their needs:

Extract 2:

Sanjeev: "when I volunteer it's for everyone, it doesn't matter what status you are, you know, whether you're homeless or whether you know if you're working class, middle class, upper class. It doesn't matter, it's for each and every one, that's the way our religion [Sikhism] has taught us is to help everyone, yes."

Both Sanjeev and Samir describe how their volunteering allows them to enact a core

tenet of their religious identity: the Sikh concept of *langar* (community kitchen), which states

that all who seek food should be fed, regardless of background, social status or wealth

(Pluralism, 2021). Again, it is evident that this is not done for an audience but is the

enactment of deeply held values and beliefs, and that it involves framing helping as an act

rather than as a performance. Reflecting on these learned values, Sanjeev talks about how his

ability to help everyone through his volunteering aligns with what "our religion has taught

us", while Samir describes such acts of giving as "our duty" and "our moral obligation", and

that they enable him to enact "a fundamental of Sikhism". Christian participants also talked

about how providing food to those in need allowed them to actively demonstrate their faith,

which Hannah describes as a major motivation for volunteering at her local foodbank:

Extract 3:

Hannah: "I was welcomed [at church] with so much, I don't know, affection, joy, and

so much help, guidance (…). I just felt it was right for me (…) but that is when I knew

I needed to do something you know, to live what I realised was faith in me."

For Hannah, the church she attends fulfils her need for social connection ("affection,

joy") and social support ("help, guidance"). However, she felt that this was not enough: she

wanted to do more than just "going through the motions" by attending church. Instead, she

felt she needed to demonstrably enact her faith through action ("to live what I realised was

faith in me"), and she achieved this through volunteering at her church's foodbank:

Extract 4:

Hannah: "I knew that it wasn't enough to just go to church on Sunday because that is just going through the motions. I had to make a difference in my life and hopefully in somebody else's. And I think most people here [at the foodbank] come from that perspective. They either feel that it is part of their Christianity, if you like, to live this way and to give whatever they can give. Or they've come out of gratitude for the help they have had and they want to do the same for somebody else."

For Hannah, this volunteering is an act which represents her version of being Christian in a way that just attending church does not. Volunteering is therefore part of what she considers not only an enactment of her identity, but also indicative of what she believes should be an injunctive norm for Christians. This act not only benefits the foodbank attendees, but also benefits her (and her fellow Christian volunteers) by enabling enactment of religious identity: something that has "made a difference" to her. This is consistent with Wakefield et al.'s (2022) finding that volunteers' perceived sense of being able to enact their membership of their religious group through volunteering was a positive predictor of mental health and volunteer engagement.

Like Samir and Sanjeev in Extracts 1 and 2, Hannah describes volunteering as a fundamental demonstration of her faith ("part of their Christianity"). This demonstration may involve selfless giving, or it may involve communicating gratitude and reciprocating support that the individual has received themselves.

The sense of meaning and positivity that Hannah described herself as obtaining from enacting her religious identity through volunteering was also discussed by others. For instance, Lakvir talked about how religious enactment gave him feelings of pride:

Extract 5:

Interviewer: "(…) working here at the kitchen in particular, as a volunteer… does it demonstrate the values that the [Sikh] religion represents?"

Lakvir: "Absolutely. Because, you are helping humanity, you see? You are giving, giving out; you are making food for somebody and then you are serving out to people who are less fortunate (…) and you feel that sort of proud, you feel proud."

As with Samir and Sanjeev in Extracts 1 and 2, Lakvir draws on his Sikh faith when describing his motivations for volunteering and emphasises the pride he feels in "helping humanity" (especially those "who are less fortunate"). This is consistent with the positive emotions of pride and joy described by Drury et al.'s (2005) activist participants after behaving consistently with their collective action group's norms during protests.

However, one question this raises is whether the feelings of pride, meaning, and positivity that our participants describe are dependent upon help-recipients understanding and appreciating these acts of volunteering for what they are (i.e., religious identity enactment). Within our data, most participants agreed that it does not matter if help-recipients are unaware of the religious motivations behind their acts of volunteerism: it is personal enactment of religious identity that is key. Again, this reveals a distinct pathway to helping behaviour that involves identity enactment rather than identity performance: participants are volunteering because it helps them feel they are embodying the essence and values of their group, rather than because it illustrates something about them or their group to others. Indeed, some participants talked about their desire to ensure that their help-giving did not over-

emphasise their religious faith, and that the acts spoke for themselves instead. This idea was

discussed by Nicholas, a Mormon volunteering within the Sikh community kitchen:

Extract 6:

Interviewer: "Do you think it allows you to demonstrate your Christian values,

coming here and volunteering?"

Nicholas: "Erm, yeah I suppose it does, yeah, but, but like the Sikh people here, you

don't do it for any show, you just do it because you feel it's the right thing for you to

do".

Nicholas' response to the interviewer's question indicates that he identifies

commonalities between himself, a Mormon, and the Sikhs with whom he volunteers (we will

explore this idea of superordinate identities transcending religious identities (e.g., Gaertner et

al., 1996,) in more depth in Themes 3 and 4). Specifically, he feels that both Mormons and

Sikhs can demonstrate their religious identities through volunteering at the community

kitchen, but that both groups are motivated to behave this way because "it's the right thing

for you to do", not because they want to "do it (…) for show". Thus, for Nicholas, the

religious identity enactment he achieves through volunteering satisfies his own needs, and

this satisfaction is not dependent on help-recipients making the link between his volunteering

and his Mormonism (thus supporting a key distinction we made in the Introduction between

identity performance and identity enactment: the latter does not require an audience).

Nicholas' response also implies he believes that interactions with help-recipients that are

motivated by a desire to explicitly display one's positive Christian traits ("for show") actually

contradict Christian norms.

Consistent with this, when Samir discussed the topic of religious identity enactment, he made a clear distinction between aiming to impress others and aiming to behave consistently with the norms which are integral to one's personal religious faith or moral ethos:

Extract 7:

Samir: "(…) You get the days where you have some difficult service users- I don't think they take too much interest in what the cause [a Sikh-based voluntary organisation] actually is. Rather they need the service, and they use the service. But that doesn't matter. We haven't come here because we want the recognition, this isn't about recognition, it's not about being famous, about 'alright we're making Sikhs famous by doing this'. We just, every person that's stood in that kitchen now has got a certain value, a core value."

Samir talks about how it "doesn't matter" if help-recipients lack awareness of the Sikh motivations that underpin the community kitchen at which he volunteers, because valuing such things would suggest that volunteers are doing it for "the recognition" and to make Sikhs "famous", which, like Nicholas in Extract 6, is not something he wants (and, similar to Nicholas, implies that possessing such a motivation would, for Samir, be inconsistent with Sikh norms). Instead, Samir talks about how volunteering allows him and his fellow volunteers to enact their "core value", and that it is this enactment (regardless of whether it is recognised or understood by those they serve) that is key.

Interestingly, this lack of a desire to use volunteering as a tool for showcasing one's faith is recognised by non-religious fellow volunteers, such as Julie, who also volunteers at the Sikh community kitchen:

Extract 8:

Julie: "I don't feel like that they [Sikh volunteers] are trying to (…) push a religion or like share Sikh values; there is obviously the sweaters that they've got, that have got the 'Happiness, Kindness' on the back, but I don't; there is none of this 'so, you have to get the leaflet [about Sikhism] to get food' or, or that, so I think, they, they just actively promote the fact that, you know, we are helping, versus to 'we are Sikh and we are helping; we are helping because we are Sikh'; it's just 'we are helping people'."

Supporting the accounts of religious volunteers such as Nicholas in Extract 6 and Samir in Extract 7, Julie talks about how Sikh volunteers engage in positive behaviours (happiness, kindness, helping) rather than explicitly encouraging their help-recipients to link these behaviours to Sikhism or to the values that Sikhs hold (e.g., by forcing them to accept literature on Sikhism). Julie also talks about her belief that the Sikh volunteers do not use their volunteering as a tool for evangelism, or to "push a religion" onto others: something explored in Theme 2.

Theme 2: Religious Enactment Must Not Be Perceived as Pushiness

The lack of need for help-recipients to understand and appreciate volunteers' religious identity enactment links to an idea expressed by most participants: help-recipients do not have to be religious themselves to seek and receive religious-oriented help, and that they

should not be pushed by volunteers into adopting such beliefs. Although this sentiment was expressed by volunteers of all faiths, exploring it highlighted fundamental differences between Sikh and Christian religious norms, which led to different enactment-related dilemmas and challenges for these two groups. For instance, Sikh participants were keen to point out that non-evangelism is a fundamental norm of Sikhism:

Extract 9:

Balan: "We, we don't push kind of religious messages to the people who are having the food, we don't do that. What we will do is, we will talk to them and if they ask us, absolutely we will inform them; you know, we are Sikhs (…); this is a principle of [name of organisation], this is what we do; we will explain it to them; we won't; absolutely not tell them, you know, religiously you've got to do this, or religiously you've got to do that. Yeah, anyone who is coming into the kitchen [to volunteer]; we respect the building, and the building is a Sikh temple, and the kitchen is a Sikh temple; anyone who come into the kitchen must cover their head; so, there are some principles that we will abide by for respect. When we are in town and serving, again, you know, we will respect the Sikh principle as we are doing it, but we never force any of the religious beliefs or anything onto anybody."

Supporting Julie's account in Extract 8, Balan highlights his organisation's lack of pushiness regarding the promotion of Sikhism. While he will inform interested help-recipients about Sikh values, it is not something he would do unprompted: indeed, his words imply that he considers such behaviour to be inappropriate and anti-normative ("we never force"). This is also true for non-Sikh volunteers, who are expected to be respectful of the Sikh faith by covering their head while cooking in the temple and adhering to the Sikh

principles of kindness and helpfulness, but who are not encouraged to embrace Sikhism.
Interestingly, while Balan uses the word 'we' to describe the Sikhs with whom he volunteers
("we are Sikhs"), he also uses it to describe all people who volunteer at the Sikh community
kitchen, even those who are not Sikhs ("anyone who come into the kitchen must cover their
head; so there are some principles that we will abide by for respect"). As with Nicholas'
account in Extract 6, this suggests the existence of a superordinate identity (specifically a
volunteering identity), which transcends religious faith (e.g., Gaertner et al., 1996):
something explored in Theme 3.

While evangelism is not commonly practiced within Sikhism, it is a cornerstone of
Christianity (Christianity.com, 2021). This means that facilities such as foodbanks could be
spaces for Christian volunteers to promote their faith to help-recipients. Nonetheless, various
Christian participants also emphasised the importance of ensuring help-recipients did not feel
pressured into engaging with their faith, and that any promotion of faith occurred
incidentally:

Extract 10:

Felicity: "There was a young lad a couple of weeks ago and he was like 'Well I know,
I know it's [the foodbank] about Christians and I don't believe in God and, you know'.
And it's like 'Well it doesn't matter. Whether you believe, it doesn't matter, that's not
for you to worry about our thing'. But then in the end he went away with, he went off
clutching a Bible so [laughs] he must have been, he must have been looking for
answers. But yes, he went off with a Bible so. Yes. I think whoever was talking to him
[in the foodbank] was like 'Well we're here on a Sunday you can always come and
you know see how you fit in'."

Felicity's account highlights a situation where a help-recipient's mention of religion created a clear ingroup-outgroup divide for her between Christian volunteers and non-Christian help-recipients: the phrase "that's not for you to worry about our thing" indicates Christian ingroup norms (such as believing in God) do not have to be shared by a help-recipient in order for helping to be successful ("it doesn't matter"). However, the fact that the help-recipient left with a Bible suggests the potential for him to "fit in" to the Christian ingroup at a later point if he chooses to join the faith. Nonetheless, Felicity's laughter and use of the phrase "but then in the end" suggests that she is aware of the potential contradiction between the help-recipient being told that he does not need to worry about not being Christian, but him leaving with a Bible (which he was presumably given by a volunteer).

As highlighted by Felicity in Extract 10, the fact that many community foodbanks are located on church grounds tends to provide help-recipients with an awareness of the Christian underpinnings of the voluntary work. As with various other Christian participants, Felicity appreciates help-recipients' general awareness of Christianity, and, like Balan in Extract 8, is open to providing receptive help-recipients with information about her faith, which may extend into explicitly faith-based support and guidance. However, she reported that she avoids overly pushy evangelism by letting the help-recipient raise the topic (as she did with the young male help-recipient whom she described in Extract 10):

Extract 11:

Interviewer: "Do the users, the foodbank users, do they know about this [Christianity of the foodbank]?"

Felicity: "No because it doesn't really matter does it? (…) But yes, I think, the people

who use the foodbank know that it is organised by Christians. But it doesn't matter,

we're not trying to grab them. You know if they want to come in and they want to talk

about God and stuff then somebody will sit and talk to them, but we're not, not out to

drag them in you know [laughs]."

Although Felicity is aware of the need to avoid breaking the norm of avoiding

'pushiness', her laughter in Extracts 10 and 11 suggests she experiences positive emotions

when conversations about Christianity are nevertheless cued and therefore do occur with

help-recipients: the ability to enact, but also to see her faith shared in this way is a positive

outcome for her.

Like Felicity in Extracts 10 and 11, Hannah also describes using caution when

discussing faith with help-recipients, using aggressive words such as 'grab' and 'drag' to

highlight the fact that she perceives such behaviour to be inappropriate and anti-normative.

She also describes looking for symbols which may indicate their Christian ingroup

membership, such as a help-recipient wearing a crucifix, which would be a sign that she

could perhaps discuss religion more candidly with them:

Extract 12:

Interviewer: "Well, you say that you talk to people when you feel that you have

something to relate to them, do you talk to them about your faith?"

Hannah: "Occasionally, occasionally I do. Because sometimes they come in and they

are wearing a crucifix too. So that sort of opens the channel. (…) And if they want to

ask me about it, they can ask me about it. I, you can't be pushy, but they, I think they

have got to see that it matters to you and that it could maybe help them. (…) Some of

them do express a sort of desire to be involved or to, I said we are always very friendly, I said there is no pressure on you. If you just like to come and pop in any time. So it is the open door thing, you know. You would be welcome if you want but no pressure. Because sometimes the pressure just puts people off and I think you have got to be a bit wary of that."

Hannah talks about how the presence of a crucifix around a help-recipient's neck "opens the channel" for discussing Christianity, and she argues that the best way to get help-recipients interested in the topic of faith is to show them that it is something that she personally values (which could be achieved through the explicit enactment of religious values through volunteering). Like Felicity, it appears Hannah likes to enact her faith by discussing Christianity with help-recipients, and engaging with crucifix-wearing help-recipients (who are thus also likely to be Christian themselves) is a strategic way for Hannah to do so in a 'safe' way that is less likely to communicate evangelism. However, as discussed by various participants, Hannah describes how being "pushy" is, to her, anti-normative ("you can't be pushy"), and she warns against applying "pressure" to help-recipients, as this is likely to be received negatively (and could even stop them from seeking help from the foodbank in the future, thereby undermining the volunteers' goal of helping help-recipients). Instead, her aim is to be "friendly" and have a welcoming "open door" attitude to help-recipients who may express an interest in the Christian faith. This suggests that, compared to Sikh volunteers, Christian volunteers may have somewhat different motivations behind their desire to avoid religious 'pushiness', although both groups' motivations ultimately relate to concerns regarding the desire to express ingroup norms via religious identity enactment. Specifically, while non-evangelism is normative for Sikhs (and thus adhering to this norm while volunteering is a way to enact one's Sikh identity), evangelism is highly normative for

Christians, but engaging in it while volunteering has the potential to be anti-normative, as it may 'put off' help-recipients (thereby preventing the enactment of one's Christian identity via helping).

Concerns about pushiness and evangelism within Christian-based volunteering are voiced particularly strongly by Martin, a non-religious foodbank volunteer. He describes his concern that foodbank helping transactions could sometimes be too religious in their focus, and agrees with Hannah in Extract 12 that this pushiness can negatively affect help-recipients:

Extract 13:

Martin: "But one thing that I am wary of, and one thing that I have sort of intervened when people [volunteers] have been a little bit too full on about the Christian message. People, people in crisis, genuine clients, don't necessarily want a 20-minute lecture on God's infinite wisdom and kindness. (…) And there are people that would take this opportunity to minister to people. To give them the opportunity, and give them a leaflet about the church then that is fine. But sometimes there are, there are volunteers that can be a little bit overbearing given the opportunity to start pontificating about their Christian beliefs. (…)"

Interviewer. "Yes. And why do you think it is important then, to stop that?"

Martin: "Because, because I don't think, I think that would alienate people and make people not want to come. It is the wrong time in their life to start burdening them with appeals for them to change everything. You know, let them deal with the crisis. Ultimately, if, if we are satisfying our remit, we are dealing with clients that are in

crisis. Like I say (…) they don't need 15 minutes of nonsense to add to the turmoil

that they are already in."

Here, Martin is afforded the opportunity, as an outsider or more 'neutral' observer, to

identify inappropriate religiously-motivated behaviours, to be outspoken about them, and to

be in a position to 'intervene' about the potential problems of 'pushy' evangelism due to him

not being a member of the Christian ingroup. Indeed, Martin explains that he has

"intervened" when he felt that a volunteer was overly enthusiastic in their evangelism,

because (supporting Hannah's opinion in Extract 12) he argues that this could scare people

away, preventing them seeking much-needed help. Martin's words thus make it clear that

while the norm of not being religiously 'pushy' towards help-recipients might be adhered to

by many Christian volunteers, it is not adhered to by all, and, moreover, he feels that such

religious pushness is counter-normative to the superordinate volunteer identity to which he

adheres ("satisfying our remit"): something explored in Theme 3.

Ultimately, while the Christian underpinnings of many foodbanks are perceived as

integral to much of the work taking place within them, many religious and non-religious

volunteers appreciate that there is an important distinction to be made between giving help-

recipients "the opportunity" to become involved in Christianity if they wish and over-

burdening them with religious "pontificating". It is also important to consider the fact that

both religious and non-religious volunteers can enact the norms of less divisive identities

through their volunteering, which will be explored in Themes 3 and 4.

Theme 3: Interfaith Contact Enables Enactment of Superordinate Volunteer Identity

While religious identity enactment was an important volunteering motivation for

many religious participants, it is important to note that various participants described

themselves as following a different faith to that of their voluntary organisation, while others

had no religious faith at all. These differences were often overcome by volunteers focusing

on their mutual membership of a superordinate volunteering identity and the values they

attribute to this identity (e.g., Gaertner et al., 1996), and perceiving volunteering as a way for

them to enact their membership of this more inclusive group, as Amara, a Hindu volunteering

at the Sikh community kitchen, explains:

> Extract 14:
>
> Amara: So, I am not Sikh, me and my husband, we are Hindu. So, it's just not based
> on religion. It's people from all backgrounds, all religions, all ethnic backgrounds,
> they come along to help the needy in the society and just put a smile on somebody's
> face.

Amara describes a superordinate goal of helping the needy: a goal shared by all

volunteers regardless of religion or ethnicity. Similar sentiments are explored in Balan's

discussion of the overarching goal of sharing, which he (a Sikh man) sees as being central to

the community kitchen's ethos, and as uniting the volunteers:

> Extract 15:
>
> Interviewer: So, [the community kitchen allows you to demonstrate] religious and
> non-religious values?
>
> Balan: Yeah, even non-religious, it's all about sharing.

Interviewer: It's all about sharing?

Balan: Yeah, I am a strong believer in sharing; and whatever you can donate, whatever you can do, we should do it together, you know. If you look around us, the volunteers today, you know, we are not all Sikhs; they are all different religions; different backgrounds; you know, we've got a painter, decorator in there; we've got a doctor in there; you've myself in there, you've got so many different people, it's absolutely fabulous.

This reference to superordinate group membership (e.g., "we should do it together") is consistent with Wakefield and Hopkins' (2017) observation that acts of helping have the potential to create more inclusive visions of the community where stereotypes about cultural outgroups are challenged, and diverse people are united in the shared goal of supporting others. Participants often described this adoption and enactment of a superordinate volunteer identity as developing through initial interfaith contact:

Extract 16:

Mary: "Well talking about here [Sikh community kitchen] I do love to meet people of religions, I just feel it creates a bond that we need to have in a country with so many, well, there are, people have issues with people from other countries, they have lots of, lack of understanding really, and I think I feel differently towards people from having just been once before. And I think it's great that we can get to know each other better."

Mary's extract reflects her feelings about prejudice in the UK towards "people from other countries" and she described her experiences of volunteering in an inclusive (mixed) environment as having "created a bond", helping her "feel differently towards people", and allowing her to experience the positive rewards she attributes to "love[ing] meeting people from different religions".

As well as experiencing such interfaith contact themselves, volunteers also may have the opportunity to facilitate contact by encouraging others who share their culture and/or ethnicity to volunteer in contexts where such contact is likely to occur. For instance, as a non-religious White woman volunteering at the Sikh community kitchen, Julie describes how she thought it was her responsibility to dispel non-Sikhs' potential anxieties and misconceptions about the act of volunteering to cook in a Sikh temple:

Extract 17:

Julie: "(…) You've got to, you've got to walk in to potentially what you perceive to be a religious place, to help out in the kitchen. If you don't know that it's friendly, if you don't know that it's this, could be intimidating for some people; and I, I think, you know, getting people past, past that, you know, could, could encourage more people, because people always have conceptions, I think."

Interviewer: "And how can that be done?"

Julie: "(…) volunteers who aren't Sikhs, like myself, just talking about it more and saying you know, honestly it doesn't matter if you wanted to help, just go and help. No one is going to turn you away, no one is going to ask why you are there, just go and get involved. I think that's part of my responsibility, as well, to do that, to make sure people understand that."

In this extract, it is evident that Julie feels a "responsibility" to communicate the norms of the volunteering organisations and their shared values, e.g., helping others and to encourage other (potential) volunteers to participate. This volunteer-to-volunteer communication is described in more positive terms than the challenges Hannah and Felicity experienced when attempting to resist engaging in evangelism (the latter of which is inevitably bound up with the status relations inherent in helper-recipient interactions and with the need to manage the delicate balance of food aid interactions which are typically stigma-laden and hard for help-recipients to navigate; Bowe et al., 2019).

Julie talks about the potential for volunteering in a Sikh temple to be "intimidating" to non-Sikhs, particularly if the person has not previously experienced contact with Sikh people or has stereotyped them as unwelcoming or insular. However, by highlighting how new non-Sikh volunteers can move beyond the unfamiliarity of the temple by enacting the inclusive and proactive norms of the voluntary group ("just go and help"; "just go and get involved"), Julie shows how intergroup anxiety could be overcome by coming together to engage in volunteering behaviour, potentially fostering a superordinate volunteer identity. This superordinate volunteer identity encompasses all volunteers, regardless of faith, ethnicity, or culture, as Samir describes:

Extract 18:

Samir: "We've got people that are from different faiths. (…) And they've just come in here and just slotted straight in, and it's not about religion, it's not about Guru Nanak, it's not about Jesus Christ. It's a value that's just, we found that it clicked and they're an integral part of our team, you know."

Samir describes this collective volunteer identity as "our team", and that its values transcend the teachings of religions and religious leaders. He describes his fellow volunteers who shared these values as "slotting straight in", like parts in a machine that is designed to achieve a clear goal, regardless of the specific individual nature of each part within it. A similar sentiment is shared by Nicholas:

Extract 19:

Interviewer: "Do you think, also for people that come here and volunteer, do you [think volunteering has] an impact on them, or is it just on the people receiving?"

Nicholas: "Erm yeah I think it [volunteering] does have an impact on people that volunteer because there's a unity built isn't there? (…) And there's bridges built as well (…) and I think if more people would come to volunteer, they'd feel good because it's nice to volunteer and help other people. (…) But also they they'd feel a, a brotherly sisterly connection, more so than in society, it seems to be breaking down all the time, when, you know, we're all the same."

Sharing the views of other participants, Nicholas describes this superordinate volunteer identity as a "bridge" that provides "unity". He also argues that it may lead to a broader realisation regarding volunteers' membership of the most inclusive category: human identity ("brotherly sisterly connection"; "we are all the same"), which he considers to be an important tool for healing divisions within society. It is to this topic of human identity enactment that we turn in Theme 4.

Theme 4: Enactment of Human Identity Connects and Transcends Religious Perspectives

As we saw in Theme 3, volunteers were able to bridge their faith-based differences and yet still collectively enact a valued identity by categorising themselves as being part of a more inclusive volunteer identity. Another way in which volunteers achieved this was by describing how their voluntary work allowed them to enact their membership of the most inclusive social category – humanity – by offering help to all fellow human ingroup members. While this perspective is consistent with the teachings of both Sikhism and Christianity, participants also perceived it to be a fundamental moral stance that transcended religion, and thus united volunteers of all faiths and none. Samir, for instance, described this need to help fellow humans in terms of a general spiritual identity that, for him, was even more fundamental than his Sikh identity:

Extract 20:

Samir: "Before being a Sikh I considered myself to be a spiritual being. (…) So, I, challenge you or anybody else to find a religion that doesn't have similar values to Sikhism; in that we help the community, we help people that are less fortunate than us as and when they need that help. (…) I don't think that's necessarily just a Sikh criteria if you like. (…) I believe that we're all born innately knowing the difference between right and wrong. (…) This is just one of the values that is extremely highlighted in Sikhism and it sits well with me, so it, I don't want to say that it's a religious. I mean from a religious point of view I should be saying 'yeah this is a Sikh value' (…) But I take a step back and say as a spiritual being this is a big value that, it resonates with me so I would actually recognise that as a, as a spiritual value rather than a religious one."

For Samir, there are core values like helping the needy can be conceptualised as innately human moral values, thus spanning and connecting all humans together via a superordinate identity. This allows Samir to communicate his volunteering as simultaneously enacting different levels of social categorisation: at one level he is enacting the norms and values of his Sikh identity, but at a more inclusive level he is enacting the norms and values of his identity as a human being: an identity he shares with Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.

It could be argued that these observations are consistent with the concept of *identification with all humanity* (IWAH; McFarland et al., 2012), which has been shown to positively predict participants' willingness to donate money to general international humanitarian causes (McFarland et al., 2012), and to volunteer/help during specific crises, such as the Ebola epidemic (Stürmer et al., 2016) and the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Barragan et al., 2021, Zagefka, 2021). It could also be argued that Samir is displaying a moral identity (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002), which involves perceiving one's own morality (e.g., showing kindness to others) as an important personal and/or human trait. However, as McFarland et al. (2012) note, while IWAH correlates with moral identity, IWAH is a broader and more comprehensive concept than moral identity, because (for example), possessing a strong moral identity could mean that Samir deems it important to engage with moral codes he has learned during socialisation, while possessing a strong IWAH means that showing kindness to all human beings is deemed to be 'innate', which is consistent with Samir's extract.

As hinted at by Samir in Extract 20, IWAH not only allows people from different religions to feel a shared sense of identity: it also allows religious and non-religious individuals to connect. For instance, Balan noted how, for him, the act of volunteering

transcended the enactment of Sikh values by allowing him to enact his membership of a more inclusive human identity: one he shares with all people, regardless of their (lack of) religiosity:

Extract 21:

Balan: "Yeah, we don't put a lot, kind of a religious spin on it, even if it's called [name of organisation, which is obviously Sikh], we get that. From a perspective, from a charity perspective, it's open to everybody. So, everybody can come along, help cook; and these values are important; doesn't matter your background or anything; everyone can come, and help and cook; everyone can come, and eat everyone can serve, you know; I think they are just core human values that everyone should have irrespective of your, your religious beliefs."

Although the community kitchen is run by an obviously Sikh organisation, Balan notes that the Sikh volunteers "don't put a lot (…) of a religious spin on it" because they feel it is "open to everybody" and that people's "background" is unimportant. Instead, like Samir in Extract 20, Balan talks about superordinate "core human values" that exist "irrespective of your (…) religious beliefs", and how it is these human values that unite the people who volunteer at the community kitchen, as well as the help-recipients who attend it. As with Theme 3, this is consistent with Wakefield and Hopkins' (2017) depiction of helping being a medium through which new (and more inclusive) visions of community can be developed.

Being able to enact these core superordinate human values was perceived in positive terms, even by participants who also explicitly valued the opportunity to enact their

subordinate religious identities. For instance, when asked by the interviewer to explain why he felt that volunteering gave his life meaning, Lakvir, a Sikh, drew heavily on the joy he receives from helping fellow humans:

Extract 22:

Lakvir: "Like, amazing, amazing feeling. Like, you know, feeling good, feeling like, feeling like you, you, you are doing a service for other people, for your own mankind around the world and be honest, and just be a good person, that's it. That's what it means."

Lakvir's aim is to "just be a good person" by enacting the norms of his human identity through his voluntary work: an aim which even seems to take precedence over his enactment of religious identity norms. His phrase "your own mankind" suggests he experiences a strong sense of identification with his fellow human beings and derives great pleasure and wellbeing from helping them ("amazing, amazing feeling"; "feeling good"). These observations are consistent with research which shows the mental health benefits of IWAH, such as it negatively predicting stress, anxiety, and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic (Frenzel et al., 2022; Vigoles et al., 2021).

As previously discussed, the advantage of religious volunteers drawing upon a highly inclusive categorisation such as human identity means that they can it share with the non-religious individuals with whom they volunteer. Indeed, similar sentiments to those of Balan in Extract 21 and Lakvir in Extract 22 regarding the sense of a shared need to help humanity

were voiced by Bryony, a non-religious woman also volunteering at the Sikh community

kitchen:

Extract 23:

Bryony: "My own values are just completely; just helping people, you know, knowing

that you are helping people, doing something good; it's not anything purely religion

motivated, it's just, probably, morally, you know, doing something for vulnerable

people and helping them."

Here, when asked about her motivations for volunteering, Bryony distances herself

from religious motivation, and instead draws on a moral human identity in a similar way to

Samir in Extract 20. Consistent with previous extracts, Bryony suggests that a core norm of

this identity is to help others, particularly the vulnerable. Indeed, as was the case for several

participants, Bryony's salient human identity led to her highlighting the need for vulnerable

homeless help-recipients to be perceived as fellow humans: a state she recognised society

does not always afford to such individuals:

Extract 24:

Interviewer: "And how is that [volunteering] rewarding for you?"

Bryony: "Well, it's obviously rewarding to know that their [homeless people]

tummies are full tonight and they are not starving on the street; they are actually

getting some sort of nutrition tonight, and I think it's very important that we just take

care of them, 'cause they are the most vulnerable people, aren't they; they are kind of

forgotten about, the homeless people. They are not treated as humans. So, it's kind of

nice that these people have come together as a community to help them tonight. They

are waiting for us."

For Bryony, all people (homeless included) are ingroup members, and thus all deserve

to be treated with humanity, compassion, and respect. She laments how homeless people are

often "forgotten" and "not treated as humans", but then talks about the volunteers coming

"together as a community" to support their homeless community-members. Indeed, just as

would be expected within a close-knit community (e.g., Stevenson et al., 2021), she describes

the homeless people as expecting support from fellow ingroup members ("They are waiting

for us"), and how she and her fellow volunteers intend to provide that support. Possessing a

shared human identity thus allows even the most vulnerable (and potentially stigmatised)

people to be perceived as fellow ingroup members, and thus to receive (and expect to receive)

help. Identifying at this highly inclusive superordinate level thus prevents conflict-ridden

intergroup interactions between helpers and recipients which can occur when more

subordinate identities are salient (e.g., socio-economic status; Stevenson et al., 2014).

Conclusions

In the context of increasing reliance on the voluntary sector to deliver vital help

within communities, and specifically the need to respond to growing food insecurity in the

UK through the delivery of food aid, the need to understand and sustain volunteering

behaviour is more critical than ever before. We aimed to extend both the volunteering and

SIA/SIAH literatures by exploring volunteers' perceptions and experiences of their acts of

volunteering through a social identity analytical lens: a theoretical lens which, to date, has

typically only been applied to short-term situational acts of helping (e.g., Levine & Manning, 2013). Given the prevalence of religiously-oriented food aid organisations in the UK, e.g., the Trussell Trust, we were especially interested in investigating religious volunteers' accounts of their experiences in relation to social identity enactment. That is, we questioned how religious volunteers' motivations for volunteering might be shaped by their desire to enact their religious identity. However, given the growth in volunteer driven non-religious food aid provision within communities (e.g., community kitchens and surplus food distribution schemes; see Ipsos, 2022), we were also interested in how religious and non-religious volunteers' motivations for volunteering were shaped by their desire to enact other (non-religious) group identities. Additionally, we explored whether help-recipients' awareness of identity enactment influenced the experiences of volunteers. Our analysis revealed complex and nuanced processes at work, which helps to shed light on the varied identity-based motivations which can inspire acts of volunteering.

Religious participants described volunteering as a tangible behaviour enabling them to enact their faith, and consistent with previous research (e.g., Drury et al., 2005, Wakefield et al., 2022), they described how this enactment benefitted their wellbeing. Although these observations are consistent with the quantitative findings of Wakefield et al. (2022), the present study expands upon this work by showing that where volunteering is motivated by religious identity enactment, religious participants did not feel it was necessary for help-recipients to understand (or even be aware of) this enactment: personal knowledge of the enactment was enough to benefit wellbeing and promote a sense of pride. Moreover, this is a very different dynamic to the highly public CSO behaviour in which Drury et al.'s (2005) protestor participants engaged. The present study thus expands previous social identity enactment research by showing that enactment does not necessarily have to be witnessed or understood by outgroups for it to be motivating or psychologically rewarding. Whether this

dynamic is specific to religiously-oriented volunteering (e.g., perhaps because religious

volunteers are at least partially motivated to enact their religious identity for an omnipotent

god/deity, rather than just for outgroup members) is something future research could

fruitfully explore.

Another potential reason for religious participants' assertion that their religious

identity enactment does not necessarily have to be understood by help-recipients relates to

their desire to not be perceived as overly pushy or evangelical. Participants (religious and

non-religious) were aware that religious identity enactment through volunteering could

become counterproductive if perceived by help-recipients as evangelism, because it could

make help-recipients reticent about seeking much-needed help. Avoiding any reluctance is

essential in the context of austerity-based policy and the present cost of living crisis in the

UK, not to mention the already stigma-laden nature of food aid help-seeking, the barriers that

this can present, and the damaging alternative choices available to those in need (e.g.,

extreme food poverty, unmanageable/risky debt; Bowe et al., 2018; Bowe & Wakefield,

2020; Garthwaite, 2016a). Accordingly, participants unanimously appeared to prioritise the

need to provide effective (and readily-accepted) help over the need to engage in evangelism;

a decision they drew on to explain the importance of not over-emphasising the link between

their faith and their volunteering. While this was perhaps unsurprising to hear from Sikhs

(since Sikhism does not advocate evangelism), it was interesting that this message was also

voiced by Christians (for whom evangelism is highly normative). Managing the need to avoid

evangelism and being perceived as 'pushing' their religion onto help-recipients, whilst also

enacting their religious identity, thus presented a particular challenge for Christian

volunteers. Indeed, the data evidenced that this was not only needed to facilitate successful

food aid transaction but also to manage the perceptions and potential judgement of co-present

non-religious volunteers. Yet, it was also evident that food aid interactions between

volunteers and help-recipients did often provide opportunities for the communication of religion and shared values for some of the Christian volunteers, despite the avoidance of explicit evangelism.

These findings extend previous social identity literature, such as research exploring CSO (e.g., Drury et al., 2005), by exploring the additional complexities inherent in identity enactment (i.e., where the behaviour in question involves attempting to *help* outgroup members, rather than just displaying one's ingroup membership to them, e.g., through protesting). Indeed, it may be the case that the specific context of religious volunteering encourages people to refrain from adhering to some norms (e.g., evangelism) to prevent accidental sabotage of other norms (e.g., helping): something future research should examine further. More broadly, the findings suggest that members of any group which possesses strong norms that can be enacted though helping others could benefit from ensuring that their prosocial behaviour is not perceived by outgroups as being a purely strategic enactment of ingroup norms. This is because helping transactions are likely to be more mutually beneficial and satisfying if they are perceived to stem from a genuine care for others, rather than as simply an attempt to enact ingroup norms. Nevertheless, it is evident in the extracts presented that displaying normative behaviours viewed as exemplifying the group (e.g., Christian group members getting involved in helping others, rather than simply attending church) allows for group members to draw a favourable distinction between themselves and other group members. Similarly, volunteers were able to draw upon their volunteering behaviour to distinguish themselves from other members of their community who they view as holding more prejudiced views and as not availing themselves of the benefits of volunteering in multi-cultural contexts.

In this way, the present study also supports calls by some social identity researchers (e.g., Wakefield & Hopkins, 2017) for more work exploring the complexities of intergroup

helping. Whereas social identity theorising that we prefer to help ingroup members over outgroup members is well-established, the fact that outgroup helping may be preferred in contexts where it allows ingroup members to communicate positive aspects to outgroups about the ingroup (e.g., Hopkins et al., 2007) is important to consider, and is consistent with the strategic use of helping to enact ingroup norms that we observed in the present study.

The findings also revealed that volunteering can be motivated by the enactment of alternative identities, even in the context of religious organisations. This is encouraging, given the aforementioned political and economic context which has led to increasing demand for and reliance on food aid delivery provided by the voluntary sector which extends beyond religiously-oriented food aid organisations (e.g., Bowe & Wakefield, 2020; Ipsos, 2022). Both religious and non-religious volunteers may use volunteering to enact identities that are more superordinate and fundamental than religious identity, such as volunteer and human identity. Interviewees perceived enactment of these identities as being important (even more important than religious identity enactment in some cases) and described the beneficial group processes that could occur through these identities. These included an opportunity for valuable inter-faith and inter-cultural contact in the context of a shared superordinate volunteer identity, as well as a shared human identity that allowed volunteers to transcend faith-based differences and to perceive all members of their communities (even stigmatised sub-groups, such as homeless people) as ingroup members who are worthy of support. This is another consequential facet of help-giving: it enables the development of new (and more inclusive) visions of community (Wakefield & Hopkins, 2017). Indeed, considering the simultaneous increases in both demand for food aid (in 2023, the Trussell Trust reported a 56% increase in foodbank use in 2022-23 compared to the 2019-20 financial year before COVID-19) and in secularisation in countries such as the UK, it could be argued that human identity is the most morally and practically appropriate identity for religious and non-

religious volunteers to enact, as its inclusivity increases the likelihood of people seeking, delivering, and receiving much-needed help.

In sum, the present study both supports and extends previous work on social identity enactment (Wakefield et al., 2022) by examining volunteers' rich accounts of their lived experiences of using volunteering to enact valued social identities (religious, volunteer, human). The present study is also an important addition to the wider body of literature exploring volunteering processes through the theoretical lens of SIAH (e.g., Jetten et al., 2018). Supporting this literature (e.g., Bowe et al., 2020, 2021; Gray & Stevenson, 2018), our interviewees highlighted how social identity processes (specifically group membership enactment) motivated them to start (and continue) volunteering, as well as to experience wellbeing through volunteering. These results thus reinforce the need for researchers to acknowledge the importance of social identity processes when attempting to understand volunteering and its health-related outcomes.

Limitations, Strengths, and Future Directions

Our study is not without limitations. We interviewed volunteers with a relatively narrow range of religious backgrounds (Christianity, Sikhism, Mormonism, Hinduism), so future research should recruit participants from a wider range of religions, as well as from a wider range of voluntary organisations. Nonetheless, food insecurity is highly topical in Western nations (especially in the UK, where the cost-of-living crisis affects many; UK Parliament, 2022), so we feel that exploring the dynamics of this specific (and often highly stigmatised, e.g., Bowe et al., 2019) context is an important strength of our research.

Additionally, it is important to note that our data were gathered pre-COVID-19, and it was well-documented that many people began volunteering during the pandemic (United Nations, 2021). Future research could thus extend the current study by exploring whether

pandemic-specific volunteering opportunities (such as COVID-19 mutual aid groups, e.g., Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2021) have enabled people to enact their religious identities (or, indeed, their more superordinate social identities), and whether this was associated with greater longevity and persistence within these vital prosocial roles. This is particularly important, because being motivated by long-term facets of one's identity (e.g., deep religious, moral, and spiritual values) is likely to lead to more committed and persistent volunteering than being motivated by facets that can pass more fleetingly, such as a sense of common fate after a crisis (Ntontis et al., 2020).

COVID-19 also increased instances of 'remote' volunteering, such as befriending over the telephone/internet (NCVO, 2022), which might affect social identity dynamics and identity enactment opportunities, so future studies should consider exploring the impact of remote interactions on identity enactment which might be contrasted with identity expression.

Finally, it is important to note that this paper focused exclusively on the experiences of volunteers. Although we have explored help-recipients' experiences elsewhere (citation redacted), it must be noted that qualitative researchers should avoid accepting participants' accounts of reality as the only 'truth', particularly in cases where only the experiences of one (higher-status) party in an interaction has been studied.

Practical Implications

Our findings highlight the importance of volunteers feeling that they can enact valued social identities through their acts of volunteering. Experiencing this sense of enactment is likely to encourage volunteers to continue volunteering, as well as increasing the likelihood of them experiencing wellbeing-related benefits. The way/s in which voluntary organisations attempt to enable this enactment is likely to depend on the specific social identity/identities that volunteers wish to enact. Our data indicated that religiously-motivated voluntary

organisations could perhaps facilitate religious identity enactment through providing opportunities for religious volunteers to engage in explicitly religious acts, such as collective prayer and scripture reading before beginning their shift. However, care would need to be taken to not alienate non-religious volunteers, nor undermine the development of more superordinate social identities, such as a shared volunteer identity. Care would also need to be taken to avoid religious volunteers becoming overly evangelical when talking with help-recipients: although our data suggested that such instances are relatively rare, perhaps developing guidelines to facilitate effective help-giving whilst also allowing volunteers to enact their religious identity (if they wish) would be beneficial.

Our data highlighted the value of volunteers possessing and enacting shared superordinate identities that transcend religious boundaries, including their volunteer identity and their human identity. Voluntary organisations should thus attempt to develop and strengthen these shared identities. In terms of developing a volunteer identity, this may include devising an explicit list of norms and values for the volunteers who work at the organisation (and which they can enact through their volunteering), as well as developing a stronger sense of shared identity through uniforms and/or badges for volunteers, group events (e.g., meals out), and regularly thanking volunteers for their service. In terms of developing a human identity, our data suggest that encouraging volunteers to perceive help-recipients as fellow ingroup members is likely to be useful. For example, Bowe et al. (2019) showed how the UK's climate of financial austerity encouraged foodbank volunteers to acknowledge that they themselves were only a few missed payments away from needing foodbank help, and how this unfortunate realisation allowed volunteers to develop a 'we're all in this together' mentality, thereby allowing them to feel psychologically closer to foodbank help-recipients. Encouraging volunteers to share their own experiences of needing help could also facilitate

the development of a superordinate human identity within which people are obligated to look after each other.

Final Thoughts

Through analysing interviewees' own accounts of their volunteering, this study has provided a nuanced and multi-faceted exploration of the processes and outcomes of religious identity enactment through volunteering, as well as the processes and outcomes of the enactment of more superordinate social identities (volunteer, human). Our study is the first qualitative exploration of such processes and outcomes, and thus shed important light on the key role played by social identity processes in encouraging people to start and to continue volunteering. Such observations have the potential to promote and sustain future acts of volunteering, and in turn benefit countless lives.

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Table 1

Participant demographic information

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Organisational Location
Felicity	57	Female	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Thomas	20	Male	White Caribbean	Non-religious	Foodbank on church premises
Sarah	68	Female	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Ruth	77	Female	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Hannah	79	Female	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Daniel	69	Male	White British	Non-religious	Foodbank on church premises
George	63	Male	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Lily	60	Female	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Ben	65	Male	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
John	67	Male	White British	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Robert	76	Male	White English	Christian	Foodbank on church premises
Martin	41	Male	White British	Non-religious	Foodbank on church premises
Krishna	45	Female	Indian	Sikh	Sikh Community Kitchen
John	69	Male	White British	Mormon	Sikh Community Kitchen
Shami	19	Female	Indian	Sikh	Sikh Community Kitchen
Mary	54	Female	White British	Mormon	Sikh Community Kitchen
Nicholas	52	Male	White British	Mormon	Sikh Community Kitchen
Sanjeev	46	Male	Indian	Sikh	Sikh Community Kitchen
Samir	31	Male	Indian	Sikh	Sikh Community Kitchen
Amara	44	Female	Asian	Hindu	Sikh Community Kitchen
Bryony	20	Female	White	Non-religious	Sikh Community Kitchen
Balan	41	Male	Asian	Sikh	Sikh Community Kitchen
Julie	39	Female	White	Non-religious	Sikh Community Kitchen
Lakvir	25	Male	Asian	Sikh	Sikh Community Kitchen
Simon	68	Male	White	Christian	Christian Community Kitchen
Terry	67	Male	White	Non-religious	Christian Community Kitchen

Table 2

Thematic Structure

Theme 1	Personal Religious Enactment as Volunteering Motivation and Reward
Theme 2	Religious Enactment Must Not Be Perceived as Pushiness
Theme 3	Interfaith Contact Enables Superordinate Volunteer Identity Enactment
Theme 4	Enactment of Human Identity Connects and Transcends Religious Perspectives

Supplemental Materials: Interview Schedule

Introduction by Research Assistant

The purpose of this study is to use one-to-one interviews to explore people's thoughts and feelings around foodbank/soup kitchen volunteering. Before we begin, I will give you time to read the Participant Information Sheet, or for me to read it to you if you prefer. If you are happy with everything, please sign the Informed Consent Sheet. Just let me know if you have any questions.

At this point, the Research Assistant will gather some basic demographic data from the participant (gender, age, relationship status, number of dependents, nationality).

Topic Areas To Be Covered During Interview

- Can you tell me a bit about your role in the foodbank/soup kitchen?
- How long have you been involved in providing this service?
- What services does your foodbank/soup kitchen offer to clients?
- Do you think that local people are aware of these services?
    - How are people made aware?
    - Could more be done to make people aware?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about people who use foodbanks/soup kitchens?
- What do you think stops people from using foodbanks/soup kitchens?
- Do you think there are differences within the community regarding who does and who does not use the foodbank/soup kitchen? What are these differences?
    - Why might people not wish to seek help from the foodbank/soup kitchen?
    - What might help people to seek help from the foodbank/soup kitchen if they need it?
- Do you think there are any differences within the community regarding who people who use soup kitchens, compared to people who use foodbanks? What are these differences?
- Why do you think local foodbank/soup kitchen use is at the level that it is?
    - Has this always been the case?
    - Have you noticed any changes in this over the last few years?
- Does the foodbank/soup kitchen work with other organisations in providing services to local people?
    - If so, how do they work together?
    - Are there any that compete or have some sort of conflict? Which ones and why?
- The foodbank/soup kitchen is run by [name of organisation], which is a [name of religion] charity. Do you identify as [name of religion]?
    - Do you feel that working for the foodbank/soup kitchen allows [name of religion] volunteers to demonstrate their religious values? If so, how?
    - Do you think that the foodbank/soup kitchen communicates something to the community about [name of religion] values? If so, what?
    - Do you think that the [name of religion] aspect of the foodbank impacts upon foodbank users in any way? If so, how?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your work here?