

Time Perspective and Volunteerism: The Importance of Focusing on the Future

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Abstract

Because volunteerism is a planned activity that unfolds over time, people who more frequently focus on the future might also be more likely to initiate volunteerism and sustain it over time. Using longitudinal (Study 1) and experimental (Study 2) paradigms, we investigated whether time perspective, and in particular a person's orientation toward the future, is related to volunteers' beliefs and behavior. In Study 1, a person's dispositional level of future time perspective was closely linked to volunteer beliefs and behavior. In Study 2, people who wrote about the future reported higher intentions to volunteer, and this was particularly true for infrequent volunteers and those with lower levels of dispositional future time perspective. Across two studies, we found evidence that future time perspective, whether a chronic disposition or a pattern of thought elicited by someone else, is linked to volunteer beliefs and behavior.

Keywords: identity, personality, prosocial behavior

Time Perspective and Volunteerism: The Importance of Focusing on the Future

Why people help others has long been an important question within social psychology (Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Snyder & Dwyer, 2013). One prevalent form of helping is volunteerism, defined as planned, freely chosen, sustained action aimed at benefiting others, conducted through an organization without expected payment (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Research on who volunteers, and how to sustain volunteerism, has considered psychological predictors such as identification with the “volunteer” role (Grube & Piliavin, 2000) and dispositions comprising a “prosocial” personality (e.g., empathy and perspective taking; Penner, Fritzsche, Craiger, & Freifeld, 1995), as well as volunteer-specific beliefs (e.g., motivations; Clary et al., 1998). However, less work has considered whether general dispositions, not necessarily viewed as specifically “prosocial” traits, also play an important role in fostering volunteerism (for exceptions see, Finkelstein, 2009, 2010).

One trait that might influence a person’s decision to volunteer is time perspective, defined by Lewin (1951) as “the totality of the individual’s views of his [or her] psychological future and psychological past existing at a given time” (p. 75). More recently, Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) proposed that orientations toward time influence a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. We examined the importance of time perspective, and in particular an orientation toward the future, for understanding and influencing volunteerism. Because volunteerism is a planned activity that unfolds over time, an orientation toward the future might facilitate the initiation of volunteerism and sustain volunteers during service. Using longitudinal and experimental paradigms, we examined the influence of time perspective on volunteerism.

Time Perspective

Psychologists conceptualize time perspective as the degree to which an individual focuses on the past, present, and future (Stolarski, Fieulaine, & van Beek, 2015; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). People differ in how much they focus on each of these time segments, and also the extent to which they hold positive or negative feelings about them. For example, a person may think more about the past than the present or future, and they might have predominantly negative or positive beliefs about the past. Research in the tradition of the individual difference measure known as the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (ZTPI; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) has identified two subtypes of past time perspective, including feeling negatively or positively about the past (“past-negative” and “past-positive,” respectively), two subtypes of present time perspective, including preoccupation with enjoying the present (present-hedonistic) and belief in one’s inability to affect the present (present-fatalistic), and a single future time perspective.

Researchers have linked time perspectives to people’s attitudes and behaviors, and have found future time perspective to be a particularly useful correlate of behavior across multiple domains, including educational and health outcomes. For example, Mello and Worrell (2006) found that students higher in future time perspective were more likely to report higher academic achievement, and Zimbardo, Keough, and Boyd (1997) discovered that undergraduates higher in future time perspective were less likely to engage in risky driving. Given that the attainment of educational and health goals often requires planning and sustained effort, people who are more focused on the future tend to have greater success reaching these long-term outcomes. Similarly, since the goal of improving communities also requires planning and long-term action, future time perspective could also be useful in understanding volunteerism.

Volunteerism and Future Time Perspective

Research has linked future time perspective to some prosocial behaviors, including research participation (Harber, Zimbardo, & Boyd, 2003), sharing among children (Thompson, Barresi, & Moore, 1997), and proenvironmental behavior (Milfont, Wilson, & Diniz, 2012). Although volunteerism shares some commonality with these behaviors, it is also distinct in that it is a prolonged behavior enacted through an established organization, aimed at bettering other individuals and local communities. Of most relevance may be work by Arnocky, Milfont, and Nicol (2014), who examined the link between consideration of future consequences (Strathman, Gleicher, Boninger, & Scott, 1994) and proenvironmental behaviors, including volunteering for an environmental organization. However, we wanted to more generally consider volunteer intentions and behavior, removed from the context of a specific type of volunteering (e.g., Maki & Snyder, in press). Additionally, we chose to use the ZPTI to measure time orientations, as it has been well validated across cultures (Sircova et al., 2014) and allows for the simultaneous assessment of multiple time perspectives (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), which would allow greater confidence that future time perspective is the key predictor of volunteerism outcomes. Using the ZPTI to study volunteerism, more generally, allows us to ask broad questions about numerous types of time perspectives and general volunteer behavior.

Though we consider multiple time perspectives, we predict that *future* time perspective, whether a chronic disposition or a pattern of thought elicited by someone else, is particularly important when considering volunteerism. First, volunteerism is often set apart from other types of prosocial behavior, such as emergency helping, as it is a planned behavior freely engaged in by an individual (Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Plans, such as thinking about whether to volunteer, where to volunteer, and whom to help, all necessarily involve thoughts about the future. People

high in future time perspective might be more likely to make plans (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), including plans to volunteer. Second, future time perspective should be important not only for setting goals, but also for striving to reach distal goals (Seijts, 1998; Simons, Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Lacante, 2004). Because volunteerism is sustained activity, volunteers generally remain involved within communities over time, suggesting that future time perspective might be particularly relevant to volunteerism. Third, for volunteers to believe that their actions have value, they must believe that change over time can actually occur, again implicating the future. Finally, volunteers rarely make an immediate impact on the lives and communities they aim to improve. Instead, for volunteers to see the positive effects that they work toward, they must remain involved over time. Just as focusing on the future can help a student find the willpower to study for an upcoming exam, volunteers who focus on the future might be more likely to stick around to see the fruits of their labors.

Time perspective is usually considered a chronic disposition, as some people are naturally more inclined to focus on the future (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). However, it might be possible, by means of systematic intervention, to induce people to think about the future, whether or not they possess that dispositional inclination. Just as people who are disposed to focus on the future might be more likely to initiate and sustain volunteerism, individuals who are induced to focus on the future might also experience increased volunteer intentions. Experimental research relying upon construal level theory (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2000; Trope & Liberman, 2003) has manipulated people's focus on distant-future or near-future events, and found that these manipulations influence attitudes such as occupational preferences (e.g., a focus on distant-future activities leads to less concern about the difficulties of the position). However, we wanted to compare focusing on the future to a control task, so as not to compare two different

segments of the future. This experimental paradigm, when used in the health domain, has shown that writing about the future, compared to a no-writing control condition, produced greater adherence to medication, specifically for people lower in dispositional optimism (Mann, 2001).

Just as writing about the future has been found to be effective for certain individuals in other domains (Mann, 2001), it's possible that people's volunteer intentions may be differentially affected by writing about the future. For example, people who rarely volunteer and are lower in dispositional future time perspective might respond more positively to an intervention involving thinking about the future. Whereas writing about the future might not further induce frequent volunteers or people who are dispositionally future-focused to intend to volunteer more, people who don't volunteer regularly and aren't naturally inclined to focus on the future may be more affected by a future-focused writing task. We set out to test each of these propositions.

Current Research

In this research, we consider the importance of time perspective, whether a chronic disposition or an induced mindset, for understanding volunteerism. Consistent with research that has examined time perspective as an individual difference, in our first study we examined whether dispositional future time perspective is linked to identity, motivation, satisfaction, intentions, and behavior in a longitudinal study of AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps service, although not identical to volunteering, shares much in common with it, including the characteristics of sustained prosocial action aimed at community improvement through established organizations (e.g., see Maki, Dwyer, & Snyder, 2015, regarding the overlap between volunteer and service motivations). In fact, evaluating AmeriCorps service according to common definitions of volunteerism (e.g., Snyder & Omoto, 2008) reveals that it fits most of the criteria, as AmeriCorps service is a freely chosen, deliberate action aimed at helping others over time

through agencies or organizations. Additionally, by studying AmeriCorps service members, we were able to collect data from a sample of individuals over the entire service year, ensuring our ability to study constructs relevant to volunteerism over an extended course of time. Because AmeriCorps members are fundamentally involved in efforts to create community change, we hypothesized that members higher in future time perspective would more strongly identify with their program, be more motivated to serve, find their involvement more satisfying, and report higher rates of volunteer intentions and behavior. Furthermore, we included common correlates of volunteer behavior (i.e., altruistic personality and volunteer expectations) to ensure the robustness of our findings.

We also conducted a second study in which we experimentally induced future time perspective, testing whether assigning individuals to a writing task where they focus on the future, compared to a control writing condition, leads to higher intentions to volunteer. We were particularly interested in moderators of the effect of the future writing task, including the extent to which a person has volunteered and their dispositional inclination to focus on the future. We hypothesized that individuals writing about the future, compared to individuals engaged in a control writing task, would express higher intentions to volunteer, and that this would be particularly true for people who were infrequent volunteers and were not dispositionally future-focused.

Study 1: Method

Participants

Participants were 188 AmeriCorps members (136 women, 46 men, 6 unspecified; mean age = 24.58, $SD = 7.26$, age range from 18 to 74) in the Midwestern United States, during the 2009-2010 AmeriCorps service year, who completed at least one survey across three time points.

Of the 177 participants who reported their race, participants identified as White (76%), African American (7%), Asian (10%), Latino (3%), Native American (2%), and other (3%).¹

Procedure

We used a three-wave panel design measuring AmeriCorps members' beliefs, intentions, and behavior throughout the service year. To recruit participants, we first contacted the program directors of AmeriCorps State programs in Minnesota, explaining the general goals of the project and asking the program directors if they might have interest in working with the researchers to share voluntary surveys with AmeriCorps members. Program directors who expressed interest then made the physical surveys available to members, again making it clear that taking the survey was voluntary. Participation who completed all three surveys were entered into a lottery to win a gift card. Participants completed the initial survey during their first weeks of service, the second survey after six months of service, and the third survey six months later, near the end of the service year. AmeriCorps members were serving in a number of capacities, including helping high school students with the college application process, assisting with afterschool activities in public schools, and helping construct homes for low-income families.

Attrition occurred between time points. Of the 188 participants who completed at least one survey, 145 completed the survey at the first time point, 119 completed it at the second time point, and 61 completed it at the third time point. In total, 44 participants completed all three surveys, 84 participants completed both surveys at time points 1 and 2, 46 participants completed both surveys at time points 1 and 3, and 54 participants completed both surveys at time points 2 and 3. To allow for use of more of the data, we ran panel models that were able to use data from

¹ Gender, age, and race were inconsistently related to time perspectives and volunteer outcomes across the two studies, so we do not consider them in the current analyses.

participants who completed the time perspective scales as well as at least one measure of one of the outcome variables during at least one of the final two waves. These panel models allow for participants missing a measure of the dependent variable at one, but not all, time points to be included in the analysis. All of our panel analyses entailed use of generalized estimating equation models (Liang & Zeger, 1986) to better utilize all available data as compared to traditional regression models or repeated-measures ANOVA (Sainani, n.d.). These models also report a time variable, which represents the extent to which the mean level of the target dependent variable in the model (i.e., satisfaction, intentions, or behavior) changed over the time points.

There were several reasons for attrition. First, the study was voluntary and participation was not required for all surveys. Second, because AmeriCorps service can be demanding, and offers little compensation, it's not unusual for some members to leave during their service year. Finally, members in some programs are allowed to finish their service year early if they've completed extra service hours throughout the year. Therefore, some members had already completed their service year by the time of the third survey. Endorsement of the time perspectives did not vary between people who did or did not complete all three surveys.

We dealt with missing data in two ways: (1) given the length and common use of the volunteer motivation measure, if participants were missing one, and only one, value in one or more of the motivation subscales, we used imputation to replace missing values, and (2) we used pairwise deletion when participants were missing a score for a variable used in a given analysis.

Measures

Covariates administered at time point 1.

Altruistic personality. Participants' general altruistic orientation was measured using a four-item scale based on measures appearing in the literature (i.e., Nickell, 1998; Webb, Green,

& Brashear, 2000). Using a scale ranging from 1 (“not important”) to 7 (“extremely important”), participants responded to items such as “How important is it to you to help other people?” Responses across all items were averaged to form each participant’s altruistic personality score (Cronbach’s alpha = .87). Given that everyone in the study was a current AmeriCorps member, most participants reported high levels of altruistic personality, resulting in reduced variability. Thus, a log transformation was performed in an attempt to more closely approximate a normal curve.

AmeriCorps expectations. Participants reported the extent to which they had positive expectations for their AmeriCorps service using a 46-item measure based on the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI; Clary et al., 1998). Using a scale ranging from 1 (“participating in this program will decrease this a great amount”) to 7 (“participating in this program will increase this a great amount”), participants responded to items such as “How well I get things done in my community.” Responses across all 46 items were averaged to form each participant’s AmeriCorps expectations score (Cronbach’s alpha = .95).

Predictor measures administered at time point 2.

Time perspective. Participants completed the Stanford Time Perspective Inventory Short Form (D’Allesio, Guarino, De Pascalis, & Zimbardo, 2003), consisting of 22 items assessing three different time perspectives: future, present-hedonistic (i.e., a preoccupation with enjoying the present), and present-fatalistic (i.e., feeling unable to affect present events). Participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“very untrue”) to 5 (“very true”). Examples, number of items, and Cronbach’s alphas were as follows: future time perspective (e.g., “I believe that a person’s day should be planned ahead each morning”; nine items; alpha = .73), present-hedonistic (e.g., “I take risks to put excitement into my life”; eight items; alpha = .43), and present-fatalistic (e.g.,

“I think it’s useless to plan too far ahead because things hardly ever come out the way you planned anyway”; five items; $\alpha = .57$). Because of low alphas and because the present-hedonistic and present-fatalistic subscales were correlated ($r = .42$) we combined these two scales to form a global measure of present time perspective, which achieved a Cronbach’s alpha of .63. Items were averaged within each scale for each participant.

Outcome measures administered at time points 2 and 3.

AmeriCorps role identity. The extent to which participants self-identified with the role of AmeriCorps member was captured with an adapted version of Grube and Piliavin’s (2000) role identity scale. A 14-item scale was used, including items such as “Being a part of AmeriCorps brings meaning to my life.” Participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). Responses across all 14 items were averaged to form each participant’s AmeriCorps role identity score (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$ at time point 2 and $.87$ at time point 3).

AmeriCorps motivational strength. Motivational strength to serve in AmeriCorps was measured using a 30-item adapted VFI (Clary et al., 1998). These items measured motivations for serving in AmeriCorps, as opposed to the aforementioned AmeriCorps expectations scale, which measured how much participants expected these motivations would be met during AmeriCorps service. To indicate how important each motivation was to them, participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“not important”) to 7 (“extremely important”). We computed each participant’s average score across all 30 items to represent how strongly they were motivated to serve in AmeriCorps (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$ at time point 2 and $.91$ at time point 3; this approach of collapsing across VFI subscales was used in Okun, Barr, & Herzog, 1998).

Satisfaction with AmeriCorps service. A 46-item scale measured the extent to which participants were satisfied with their AmeriCorps service over the past six months. This scale was similar to satisfaction scales used in the volunteerism literature, which assess the degree to which a variety of common motivations to engage in volunteerism were satisfied (e.g., Finkelstein, 2008; Vecina, Chacón, Sueiro, & Barrón, 2012). A sample item asked participants to report satisfaction with “My ability to do something for a cause that is important to me.” Participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“participating in this program has decreased this a great amount”) to 7 (“participating in this program has increased this a great amount”). Responses to all items were averaged to form an overall satisfaction score for each participant (Cronbach’s alpha = .93 at both time point 2 and time point 3).

Intentions to engage in additional volunteering. To capture intentions to engage in additional volunteering, we asked participants to report their interest in additional volunteer behaviors in the next six months (time point 2), or how likely they were to engage in additional volunteer behaviors in the next twelve months (time point 3). At both time points, participants reported their intentions to engage in 37 different activities, such as “Helping distribute food at a local homeless shelter.” Participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“not at all interested”) to 7 (“very interested”). Responses to all items were averaged to form a score for each participant that indicated their intentions to engage in additional volunteering (Cronbach’s alpha = .93 at time point 2 and .94 at time point 3).

Additional volunteering. Participants were also asked to report the actual amount of additional volunteering and community involvement they had engaged in over the past six months. Additional volunteering was measured with 30 items, such as whether or not participants “Organized or supported a cooperative neighborhood activity.” Participants used a

scale ranging from 0 (“I have not engaged in this activity”) to 7 (“I have frequently engaged in this activity”). Responses across all items were averaged to form an additional volunteering score for each participant (Cronbach’s alpha = .93 at time point 2 and .90 at time point 3).

Study 1: Results

We examined whether individuals higher in future time perspective, compared to those lower, were more likely to identify with AmeriCorps, to report greater motivation to serve in AmeriCorps, to be more satisfied with their service, to have higher volunteer intentions, and to report greater amounts of volunteer behavior. We also tested whether future time perspective has a stronger association with these outcomes than present time perspective.

Correlations between measures are displayed in Table 1, as are their means and standard deviations. Future time perspective was more strongly endorsed than the combined present time perspective, and it did not significantly correlate with either of the time 1 covariates of altruistic personality or AmeriCorps expectations. However, future time perspective was negatively correlated with the combined present time perspective.

Is Future Time Perspective Associated with Volunteer Beliefs and Behavior?

We conducted panel analyses with future time perspective and the combined present time perspective explaining each belief and behavior measure over time. To take into account other potential explanations we also controlled for altruistic personality and AmeriCorps expectations, both of which were measured at time 1. Table 2 reports the statistics for each model.

Panel analyses revealed that of the time perspective measures, future time perspective was most consistently associated with AmeriCorps beliefs and behavior. Both future and present time perspectives were unable to predict identity over time. However, future time perspective ($b = .43$ ($CI = .10-.76$), $p = .01$, $d = .63$) and present time perspective ($b = .37$ ($CI = .06-.68$), $p =$

.02, $d = .56$) were both significantly associated with motivation over time. Satisfaction over time was associated with future time perspective ($b = .25$ ($CI = .05-.44$), $p = .013$, $d = .61$), but not with present time perspective. Also, only future time perspective was significantly associated with intentions over time ($b = .53$ ($CI = .02-1.03$), $p = .041$, $d = .49$). Finally, only future time perspective was significantly associated with behavior over time ($b = .74$ ($CI = .28-1.20$), $p = .002$, $d = .79$). In summary, whereas future time perspective was significantly associated with four of the five volunteer outcomes (i.e., motivation, satisfaction, intentions, and behavior), present time perspective was only associated with one (i.e., motivation).²

Study 1: Discussion

The results from Study 1 demonstrate that, compared to present time perspective, future time perspective is more strongly associated with volunteerism. People higher in future time perspective were, over time, more motivated to serve in AmeriCorps, more satisfied with AmeriCorps service, had higher intentions to engage in volunteer activity, and were more involved in volunteerism. These results strongly suggest that future time perspective, but not present time perspective, is linked to positive outcomes associated with volunteerism over time.

However, focusing on people naturally inclined to be concerned about the future is only one approach to understanding and promoting volunteerism. Another potentially fruitful approach would be to intervene by asking people who have not frequently volunteered and are lower in dispositional future time perspective to write about the future, as an attempt to induce a focus on the future that might already be common in individuals predisposed toward a future time perspective and currently involved in volunteer activities. In Study 1, our sample consisted

² We ran follow-up models with the two present time perspectives as separate predictors and no differences emerged in the significance of the associations between time perspectives and AmeriCorps outcomes.

of AmeriCorps volunteers who already showed high levels of prosociality and were already involved in volunteer activities. In addition, the mean age of AmeriCorps members tends to be higher than the mean age of college students, perhaps suggesting they might have already settled into more chronic time perspectives. In Study 2, we instead relied on an undergraduate student sample, expecting there to be more variability among participants in their past volunteerism and their dispositional time perspectives, including future time perspective. It is possible that college students, as opposed to AmeriCorps members who tend to be slightly older and in a different stage in life, might be more receptive to efforts to induce a focus on the future. In addition, by focusing on college students who are not engaged in full-time community involvement, Study 2 could provide insight into how to assist potential volunteers or AmeriCorps members to focus on the future. Given this difference between samples, we set out to examine whether a future writing manipulation is more effective at eliciting volunteer intentions for individuals who are not typically involved in volunteerism and not naturally oriented toward the future.

Study 2: Method

Participants

Participants were 97 individuals (71 women, 26 men; mean age = 19.85, $SD = 2.29$, age range from 18 to 35) at a Midwestern university in the United States. Participants, permitted to select more than one race if applicable, identified as White (65%), African American (2%), Asian or Asian American (30%), Latino (2%), or other (2%).

Procedure

Participants were told that the study examined the relationship between personality and essay writing. Participants were run in groups of up to six at a time. All participants in a session were assigned to the same experimental condition. Participants each had their own private

cubicle in the lab, and each also had a computer in front of them, which they used to complete additional measures after the writing task. Participants within each block were randomly assigned to either a future-oriented writing condition ($N = 49$) or a control condition ($N = 48$). During the first ten minutes of the study they wrote an essay (using pen and paper) either about the future or about a neutral topic.

In the *future-oriented* condition, participants responded to the following prompt, designed to elicit thoughts about the future:

“When you complete the writing task, I want you to think very hard about the future. What will that future be like? In what ways will that time be different than now? Think very hard about that future time, which is probably not so very far off. And then write about that time. You should first think for a little while about that time, so that it is clear in your head and fresh in your mind. And then write. Do not mention your emotions, feelings, or opinions. Your description should be as objective as possible.”

Participants in the future-oriented condition tended to write about the future as it related to their life plans, the type of family life they were hoping for, or where they generally thought the local or global community was heading.

Participants in the *control* condition responded to the following prompt, designed to elicit thoughts about day-to-day activities:

“When you complete the writing task, I want you to think very hard about your daily routine. What does your daily routine look like? Think very hard about it, and then describe your usual daily routine in writing. You should first think for a little while about it, so that it is clear in your head and fresh in your mind. And then write. Do not mention your emotions, feelings, or opinions. Your description should be as objective as

possible.”

Participants in the control condition tended to write about an average school day, including when they typically wake up, the classes they usually attend, any extracurricular or occupational activities they engage in, and when they go to bed. Once the ten minutes were finished, participants logged onto the computer to complete the remaining study measures.

Measures

Volunteer intentions. As the primary dependent variable, participants reported their intentions to volunteer in the near future. Using a scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), participants reported the extent to which they agreed with “I am interested in volunteering in the community,” and “If someone asked me to sign up as a volunteer in the community, I would sign up.” These two items were correlated ($r = .40$) and we looked at them both individually and together as a composite measure of volunteer intentions.

Volunteer behavior. Considered as a moderator of the influence of the future-oriented writing manipulation on volunteer intentions, after completing the writing task participants reported whether they had volunteered in the past year, as well as whether they were currently volunteering. Responses to these items were combined to measure volunteer behavior. Participants received a 0 if they had not volunteered in the past year and were not currently volunteering, a 1 if they had either volunteered in the past year or were currently volunteering, and a 2 if they had both volunteered in the past year and were currently volunteering. This centered variable was treated as continuous in subsequent statistical interactions.

Volunteer motivational strength. Motivation to volunteer was measured using the VFI (Clary et al., 1998). Each item referred to volunteering (e.g., “Volunteering lets me learn through direct ‘hands on’ experiences.”). To indicate how important each motivation was to them,

participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“not important”) to 7 (“extremely important”). We computed each participant’s average score and used it as an indicator of how strongly they were motivated to volunteer (Cronbach’s alpha = .91).

Time perspective. Participants completed the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), which measures five unique time perspectives: future, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, past-positive (i.e., feeling positive about the past), and past-negative (i.e., feeling negative about the past). Overall, the inventory included 56 items and participants used a scale ranging from 1 (“very untrue”) to 5 (“very true”). Numbers of items and Cronbach’s alphas follow for each scale: future time perspective (13 items; alpha = .80), present-hedonistic (15 items; alpha = .79), present-fatalistic (9 items; alpha = .77), past-positive (e.g., “It gives me pleasure to think about my past”; 9 items; alpha = .74), and past-negative (e.g., “I often think of what I should have done differently in my life”; 10 items; alpha = .81). To be consistent with analyses in Study 1, we sometimes combined present-hedonistic and present-fatalistic subscales to form a composite measure of present time perspective. This composite measure achieved a stronger level of reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .83; the two subscales were correlated at $r = .39$). Responses across subscale items were averaged to form each participant’s subscale score.

Study 2: Results

We examined whether writing about the future, as compared to a control condition, leads to higher volunteer intentions, particularly for people who aren’t frequent volunteers and people lower in dispositional future time perspective.

Did the Experimental Condition Affect the Content of the Essays?

As a manipulation check, we counted the number of times that the essays contained the word “future.” Compared to participants in the control condition, participants in the future-oriented writing condition used the word “future” more often (on average the word “future” was used 3.29 ($SD = 2.30$) times per participant in the future-oriented writing condition, and it was not used by any participant in the control writing condition; $t(95) = 10.00, p < .001$).

Did Writing about the Future Affect Volunteer Intentions?

We expected that writing about the future (compared to the control condition) would lead to higher intentions to volunteer, and that this would be particularly true for individuals who had not volunteered in the past year and people lower on dispositional future time perspective. Initial t-tests were conducted on both intention items, separately, to determine whether writing about the future affected volunteer intentions. Results revealed that writing about the future did not have an impact on the first intention item (“I am interested in volunteering in the community”); $t(95) = 0.37$ ($CI = -0.23-0.34$), $p = .72, d = .08$), but did have a marginal effect on the second item (“If someone asked me to sign up as a volunteer in the community, I would sign up”); $t(95) = 1.96$ ($CI = -.004-.63$), $p = .053, d = .40$). Writing about the future did not have a significant effect on the combined measure, $t(95) = 1.45$ ($CI = -0.07-0.43$), $p = .18, d = .30$). However, given the strength of the correlation between the two items ($r = .40, p < .001$) and the conceptual overlap, we combined them in our analyses testing the predicted interaction of writing condition and the two moderators we considered (i.e., past volunteer behavior and dispositional future time perspective) on future volunteer intentions (for correlations, means, and standard deviations of the final measures, see Table 3).

We first used multiple regression analyses to test the interaction between writing condition and past volunteer behavior on future volunteer intentions. We hypothesized that writing about the future would have more of an impact on volunteer intentions for people with less volunteer experience. Entered in the second step of a hierarchical regression model, the condition by volunteer behavior interaction was marginally significant ($b = -.32$ ($CI = -.65-.02$), $p = .064$, $d = .39$; R^2 change of .03, F change (1,93) = 3.52, $p = .064$) after entering the condition and centered volunteer behavior main effects in the first step, and the full model had an R^2 of .21, $F(3,93) = 8.43$, $p < .001$. Analysis of the simple slopes revealed that only people with less volunteering who were also in the control writing condition, as compared to people with less volunteering in the future writing condition, had the lowest intentions to volunteer ($t = 4.00$, $p < .001$, $d = .82$), suggesting that writing about the future did influence these individuals.³ There was no difference in intentions between people with more volunteering in the future and control writing conditions ($t = 0.01$, $p = .99$, $d = .003$).

We next hypothesized that writing about the future would have a stronger effect on volunteer intentions for people lower on dispositional future time perspective. Using the same technique, the condition by dispositional future time perspective interaction was not significant ($b = .002$ ($CI = -.43-.44$), $p = .99$). Finally, we also tested the three-way interaction between writing condition and the two moderators (i.e., volunteer behavior and dispositional future time perspective), expecting that those who wrote about the future, were an infrequent volunteer, and were also lower on future time perspective would report higher intentions compared to infrequent volunteers lower in future time perspective in the control condition. The condition by

³ This interaction remained significant or marginal when controlling for dispositional time perspectives.

volunteer behavior by dispositional future perspective three-way interaction was significant ($b = .64$ ($CI = .13-1.16$), $p = .015$, $d = .50$; R^2 change of .05, F change (1,89) = 6.10, $p = .015$); the full model had an R^2 of .27, $F(7,89) = 4.71$, $p < .001$.

When considering those lower in future time perspective, simple slopes analyses indicated that writing about the future had a significant positive effect on future volunteer intentions for those who were infrequent volunteers ($t = 3.33$, $p = .001$, $d = .68$; see Figure 1), but also led to marginally lower intentions for those who were frequent volunteers ($t = 1.91$, $p = .06$, $d = .39$). When considering those higher in future time perspective, simple slope analyses indicated that writing about the future did not lead to higher intentions for those who were infrequent volunteers ($t = 1.41$, $p = .16$, $d = .29$; see Figure 2), but did lead to higher intentions for frequent volunteers ($t = 2.78$, $p = .007$, $d = .57$). Overall, these results suggest that writing about the future positively influenced volunteer intentions for individuals who were infrequent volunteers and lower in dispositional future time perspective, as well as those who were frequent volunteers and higher in dispositional future time perspective.⁴

Did Future Time Perspective Relate to Volunteer Motivation and Intentions?

We also considered how differences in all five of the dispositional time perspectives (i.e., future, present-hedonistic, present-fatalistic, past-positive, and past-negative) were related to volunteer motivation and volunteer intentions. Toward this end, we entered the time perspective subscales together to predict motivation and intentions. Additionally, because experimental condition did not influence scores on any of the five time perspective scales (e.g., writing about the future did not change participants' future time perspective, $t(95) = 0.11$ ($CI = -.22-.25$), $p =$

⁴ This interaction remained significant when controlling for the other various time perspectives.

.92, $d = .02$), we collapsed across condition in these models. The models we report consider all five dispositional time perspective measures together.

Future time perspective was found to be the strongest predictor of motivation ($b = .48$ ($CI = .14-.82$), $p = .006$, $d = .57$), though present-hedonistic time perspective was also a significant predictor ($b = .45$ ($CI = .08-.82$), $p = .017$, $d = .50$), and past-positive time perspective was a marginally significant predictor ($b = .27$ ($CI = -.03-.58$), $p = .08$, $d = .36$). When considering the ability of each of these five constructs to predict volunteer intentions, future time perspective was a marginally significant predictor ($b = .22$ ($CI = -.03-.47$), $p = .09$, $d = .35$), and present-hedonistic time perspective emerged as a significant predictor ($b = .34$ ($CI = .07-.61$), $p = .014$, $d = .51$).⁵

Study 2: Discussion

In Study 2, writing about the future led to higher intentions to volunteer; this was particularly true for people who had been infrequent volunteers and were also lower in dispositional future time perspective, as well as those who were frequent volunteers and higher in dispositional future time perspective. Although not hypothesized, we also found that individuals who wrote about the future and were frequent volunteers but lower in future time perspective reported lower volunteer intentions, a finding worthy of future examination. We also found further support for the notion that chronic future time perspective is linked to volunteer

⁵ These patterns of findings largely held when considering the combined present time perspectives, with the only differences being that the combined present time perspective measure was a significant predictor of motivation but did not predict intentions, and that the future time perspective measure was also no longer a marginal predictor of intentions.

motivation and intentions, as well as some unexpected support for the idea that present-hedonistic time perspective is related to volunteer motivation and intentions, a finding mostly inconsistent with results from Study 1. However, the future time perspective results were consistent with findings from Study 1, which suggested that service organizations should target individuals with a predisposition to focusing on the future. Results from Study 2 offer the additional implication that asking people to focus on the future might also help induce a mindset that is supportive of volunteerism.

General Discussion

We set out to determine the relevance of time perspective, and in particular future time perspective, for understanding volunteerism. We hypothesized that not only would dispositional future time perspective be positively associated with volunteerism outcomes, but that asking people to write about the future would lead them to have higher intentions to volunteer. In summary, we demonstrated that a dispositional focus on the future contributes to motivation to serve, service satisfaction, volunteer intentions, and volunteer behavior (Study 1). We also found that having people focus on the future can induce greater intentions to volunteer, especially for people with less volunteer experience who were also not naturally inclined to focus on the future, and also those who are frequent volunteers and are higher in future time perspective (Study 2). Using both longitudinal and experimental research paradigms, we have provided convincing evidence for the role of future time perspective in the domain of volunteerism.

The volunteerism literature has primarily considered predictors of volunteering intentions and behavior that are intimately tied to the domain, such as empathy, altruistic personality, volunteer role identity, and volunteer motivation. By demonstrating that one's orientation toward time is linked to volunteerism outcomes (i.e., motivation, satisfaction, intentions, and behavior),

we have shown that more general approaches to personality (i.e., dispositional future time perspective) and intervention work (i.e., writing about the future) can also have implications for people's intentions to volunteer, as well as their actual volunteer behavior. Although occasional work has considered the relation between volunteerism and more general personality approaches (e.g., agreeableness; Graziano, Habashi, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007), less work has considered longitudinal or corresponding experimental contexts. Our results suggest that general personality traits can be tied to volunteerism outcomes over time, and also that interventions relating to those traits can contribute to volunteerism outcomes.

Just as the present research contributes to our basic understanding of volunteerism, it also has important applied implications for recruiting volunteers, as well as helping elicit interest in volunteer positions from individuals not typically predisposed to volunteering. It appears that people with a predisposition toward focusing on the future are more motivated, more satisfied, and more involved in their volunteer positions. Volunteer organizations would be wise to target these types of people when recruiting for volunteer positions. However, we set out to explore both how *predispositions* toward the future relate to volunteerism outcomes, as well as how *eliciting* a focus on the future relates to volunteerism outcomes. Thus, it is important to note that we also found that inducing a future-focused mindset can influence people to have higher intentions to volunteer. Volunteer organizations might be wise to target those who might have more of a focus on the future, but simply focusing on these types of individuals is not sufficient. Instead, it is important that a wide variety of individuals become involved in their communities, and that they maintain their involvement over time. Thus, organizations might benefit by also eliciting a focus on the future in those not already inclined toward such a focus. This approach would vastly increase the number of individuals who might be drawn toward volunteering and

who might be satisfied with volunteering over time. It is important to note, however, that these efforts could possibly backfire for some individuals (i.e., those who are frequent volunteers but are lower in future time perspective). It is also possible that asking people to focus on the future at the beginning of their volunteer position might have important downstream implications for volunteer satisfaction and retention.

The need for longitudinal research that further addresses how asking a potential volunteer to focus on the future might affect volunteer satisfaction and retention is evident, as it is unclear how long these interventions influence people. It seems possible that getting a volunteer without a chronic focus on the future to initially focus on the future could elicit interest, but that interest might wane over time if expectations are not met, failing to improve long-term volunteer retention. However, it is also possible that getting a new volunteer to write about the future could be a pivotal moment that contributes to other positive changes surrounding the volunteer position, such as shifts in volunteer expectations or goals, similar to work demonstrating that students who write self-affirming essays at the beginning of high school or college can experience positive feedback cycles and improved academic achievement over time (e.g., Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). Additionally, from an applied perspective it might be useful to ask volunteers to write about the future on a semi-regular basis, such as once a month, to ensure that their focus on the future might also be maintained over time.

Though we were able to demonstrate links between future time perspective and constructs of importance to volunteerism, the processes by which focusing on the future leads to higher intentions to volunteer remain unclear. In the health domain, some past research has found that writing about the future can lead to more optimism, contributing to better medication adherence (Mann, 2001), and that having more of a focus on the future bolsters a person's

pursuit of health goals (Joireman, Shaffer, Balliet, & Strathman, 2012). Though these mediators make sense in the health domain, it is less clear how these constructs might mediate the link between focusing on the future and volunteerism outcomes. Writing about the future⁶ might make people more optimistic in general, and more optimistic people might be likely to get involved in their communities. In addition, writing about the future might induce goal setting and pursuit, which may include goals that they have for their community. Additional research should explore possible mediating mechanisms of how writing about the future can influence volunteer beliefs and behavior. Once these mediators are discovered, applied interventions that focus on these processes, perhaps by refining the ways in which volunteer managers ask volunteers to write about the future, might become more potent options for volunteer recruitment and maintenance.

Using both longitudinal and experimental designs, we demonstrated the importance of future time perspective for understanding volunteerism, including volunteer motivation, satisfaction, intentions, and behavior. We were able to link future time perspective to these outcomes longitudinally among participants in AmeriCorps, as well as experimentally-induce higher levels of volunteer intentions by having people write about the future, particularly among people who were infrequent volunteers in the past and had lower levels of dispositional future time perspective. These findings inform our conceptual understanding of volunteerism, and also contribute to our ability to motivate and sustain the important work that volunteers carry out in their communities.

⁶ Research from the literature on construal level has explored the differential effects of manipulating thoughts about either the near or distant future. Our measures and manipulation were designed to simply measure and affect general thoughts concerning the future, but future research should explore teasing apart thoughts concerning these two segments of future time.

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	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Altruistic Personality (T1)	1.85	0.12	--													
2. Expectations (T1)	5.20	0.72	.37**	--												
3. Future TP (T2)	3.47	0.51	.04	.10	--											
4. Combined Present TP (T2)	2.65	0.45	.04	.04	-.22**	--										
5. Identity (T2)	5.20	0.93	.15	.20	.24*	-.04	--									
6. Motivation (T2)	4.65	0.72	.12	.17	.24*	.08	.55**	--								
7. Satisfaction (T2)	5.08	0.48	.16	.25*	.38**	-.13	.62**	.50**	--							
8. Intentions (T2)	4.21	0.96	.31**	.09	.25**	-.04	.43**	.45**	.52**	--						
9. Behavior (T2)	2.16	1.05	.23*	-.04	.28**	.08	.22*	.47**	.32**	.36**	--					
10. Identity (T3)	5.22	0.79	-.08	.17	.27	-.21	.72**	.32*	.62**	.47**	.15	--				
11. Motivation (T3)	4.80	0.74	-.01	.09	.17	.02	.38**	.58**	.41**	.57**	.06	.53**	--			
12. Satisfaction (T3)	5.20	0.47	-.24	.10	.32*	-.04	.19	.38**	.44*	.30*	.05	.50**	.62**	--		
13. Intentions (T3)	4.04	1.00	.22	.00	.44**	-.03	.12	.27	.26	.58**	.35*	.25	.42**	.34*	--	
14. Behavior (T3)	2.21	0.87	.27	.05	.37**	-.09	.10	.29*	.15	.30*	.59**	.14	.08	.07	.50**	--

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of national service beliefs and behaviors across the three time points in Study 1, as well as correlations between the measures. T1 = time point 1, T2 = time point 2, and T3 = time point 3. TP = time perspective.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Variable	Identity		Motivation		Satisfaction		Intentions		Behavior	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Time	-.09	.10	.11	.10	.14	.07	-.15	.13	.14	.12
Future TP	.33	.25	.43**	.17	.25*	.10	.53*	.26	.74**	.23
Present TP	.19	.20	.37*	.16	.08	.09	.17	.21	.34	.24
Altruistic Personality	-.37	.98	.41	.72	-.16	.39	2.81**	.86	1.84*	.90
Expectations	.81**	.25	.27	.18	.30**	.10	.17	.19	.02	.29

Table 2. Panel analyses with future and present time perspectives predicting beliefs and behavior over time. The “Time” variable refers to whether the outcome significantly changed over time. TP = time perspective.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Volunteer Behavior	1.31	0.68	--							
2. Future TP	3.77	0.58	.14	--						
3. Present-Hedonistic TP	3.44	0.54	-.06	-.48**	--					
4. Present-Fatalistic TP	2.31	0.66	-.07	-.44**	.39**	--				
5. Past-Positive TP	3.89	0.59	-.10	.04	.15	-.13	--			
6. Past-Negative TP	2.92	0.76	.16	-.18	.09	.45**	-.37**	--		
7. Volunteer Motivation	5.05	0.87	.27**	.17	.18	-.01	.28	-.21	--	
8. Volunteer Intentions	4.16	0.62	.39**	.09	.20*	-.06	.25*	-.19	.47**	--

Table 3. Correlations between volunteer behavior, time perspectives, volunteer motivation, and volunteer intentions in Study 2. TP = time perspective.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

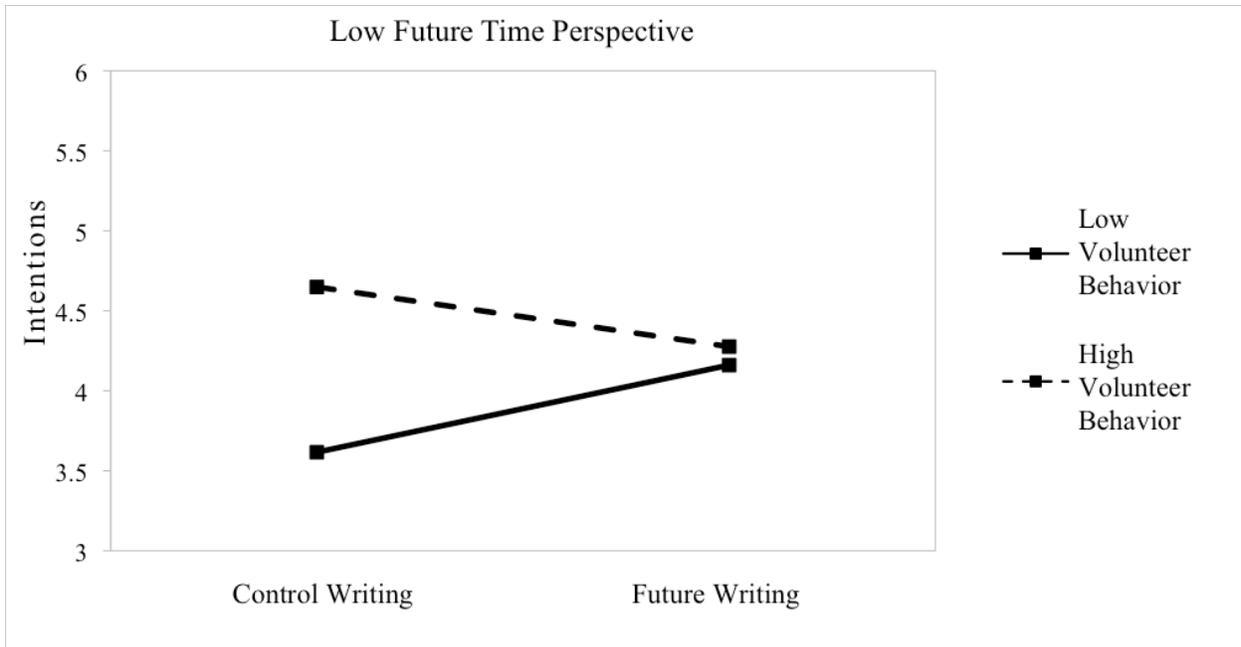


Figure 1. Interaction of writing condition and past volunteer behavior for individuals lower in dispositional future time perspective, predicting volunteer intentions in Study 2.

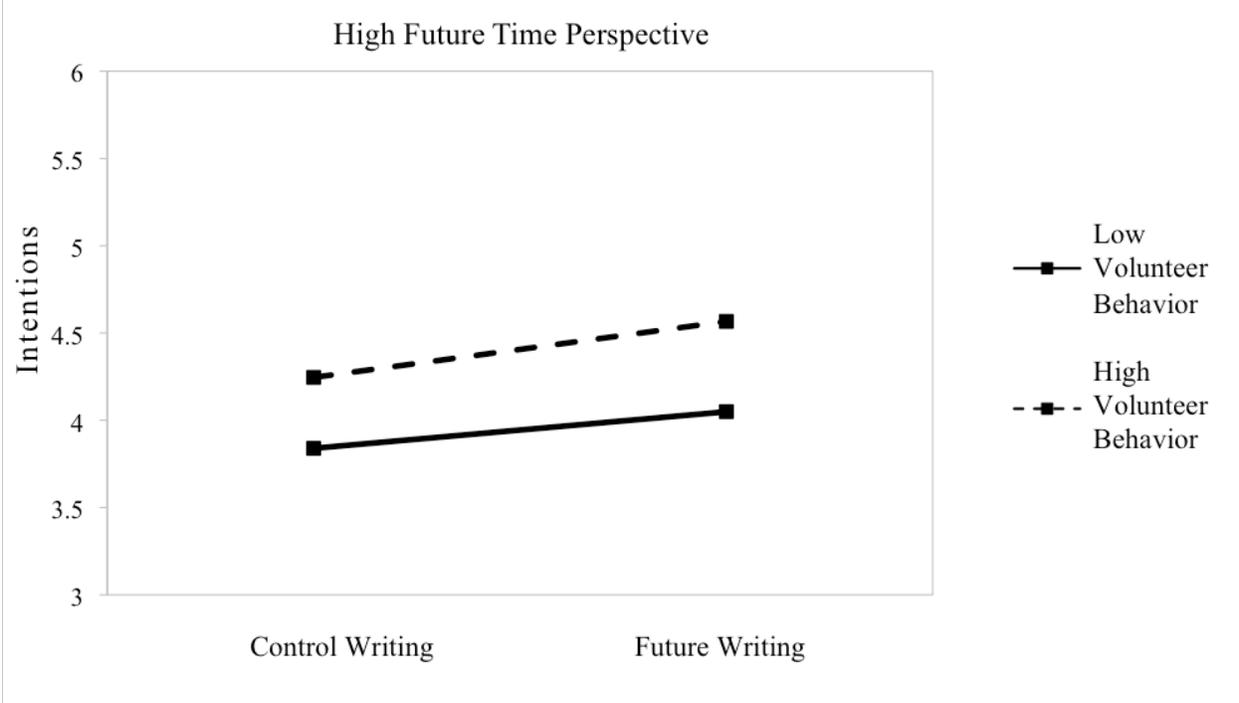


Figure 2. Interaction of writing condition and past volunteer behavior for individuals higher in dispositional future time perspective, predicting volunteer intentions in Study 2.