DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 549 CG 027 834

AUTHOR Rhoads, Robert A.
TITLE Explorations of the Caring Self: Rethinking Student Development and Liberal Learning.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; Feminism; Higher Education; *Public Service; School Community Programs; Self Concept; *Service Learning; *Student Development; Student Educational Objectives; *Student Participation; Student Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS *Caring; Self Fulfillment

ABSTRACT

For traditional-age college students (18 to 24 years old), college is a time of identity exploration. During this time, if individuals have a deep sense of caring for others, it is more likely that they will interact with others in an especially meaningful way. Thus, ways to expand student's identity through community service involvement are explored in this paper. Three objectives addressed are: (1) advance higher education's understanding of the kinds of learning experiences students have through involvement in community service; (2) use theoretical discussions of the "caring self" (a combination of symbolic discussions and feminist explanations of self) as a means to interpret findings on community service involvement; and (3) use interpretations of research to discuss the ideal of community and the role of higher education and community service in advancing community. Data for this paper were derived from a 6-year qualitative investigation of student participation in community service; such research adds to literature that seeks to identify student outcomes with specific kinds of collegiate experiences. Fostering a sense of self, grounded in an ethic of care, is one of the central challenges of education and becomes increasingly important as society grows more diverse. Contains approximately 57 references. (RJM)

EXPLORATIONS OF THE CARING SELF:
Rethinking Student Development and Liberal Learning

Robert A. Rhoads
Assistant Professor

Department of Educational Leadership
Michigan State University
429 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1034
Phone: (517) 353-5979
FAX: (517) 353-6393
Email: RRHOADS@PILOT.MSU.EDU

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

March 1997

Introduction

For traditional-age students (18 to 24 years old), the college years are a time of identity exploration (Chickering, 1969; Erickson, 1968). Although traditional-age students no longer constitute the majority on our college and university campuses, they still account for the largest age group within the overall student population, accounting for roughly 8,000,000 students (The Almanac, 1996). Many of these students face decisions about their future and seek to synthesize new learning experiences with previously held values, beliefs, and attitudes.

College represents a time when so many of life's experiences come together as students face multiple personal crossroads as they seek to successfully navigate what some have described as the "rites of passage" to adulthood (Moffatt, 1989). Distance from parents and high school social networks not only brings about increased freedom, it also results in additional responsibilities and personal decisions that must be weighed. Many students consider relationships in a serious manner for the first time (Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Moffatt, 1989). Career decisions way heavily on the minds of college students as well (Loeb, 1994). Explorations related to the development of a personal philosophy, a religion, a lifestyle, often get played out within the collegiate context (Coles, 1993; Palmer, 1993; Parks, 1986). Students from underrepresented groups are faced with decisions related to cultural identity and their social commitment to others of the same race or ethnicity (Loeb, 1994; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Tierney 1992). And, for a number of students, issues of sexual identity are dealt with during the college years (D'Augelli, 1989, 1991; Rhoads, 1994).

None of the developmental challenges students face exist in isolated psychological states; personal development is rooted in a specific culture that directly influences the kinds of psycho-social issues to be resolved (Erikson, 1968). And today's society is much different from the society of 10, 20, or 30 years ago. Perhaps the most obvious difference is the growing diversity of American society. Such diversity has so dramatically altered the landscape of American life that many in our society, including today's students, face a new developmental challenge: the ability to engage in intimate and meaningful interactions with culturally diverse others.

This brings me to the crux of my argument and what I intend to highlight through a study of student involvement in community service. Unless individuals have a deep sense of caring for others, it is unlikely that they will engage in interactions with diverse others in a meaningful way. Caring may be seen as the solution to the challenge presented by a postmodern society characterized by difference. In essence, I contend that fostering a deep commitment to caring is the postmodern developmental dilemma all of education faces, including higher education. If we are to build communities in these fragmented times, then we must foster in our citizens a commitment to caring. Higher education has a major part to play in this process and involving students in community service is one vehicle for meeting this challenge.

Participation in community service is an educational activity that lends itself to identity clarification and exploration of the self. For example, a student who was part of an intensive week-long community service project in South Carolina talked about identity issues and her participation in the project: "I'm kind of in a search for my own identity and this trip

is part of that search. I just don't know quite who I am yet. I'm struggling to figure it all out. These kinds of experiences help. I'm most genuine in these kinds of settings." Another student added, "Getting involved in community service helps me to get back in touch with who I really am. It reminds me that I have more to live for than merely myself."

At first, it may seem ironic that students learn a great deal about themselves through activities such as community service, which seek to place others first. However, as I will point out when I discuss theories of the self, the other plays a central role in shaping how we envision the self. A third student offered the following comments:

> I've always done service work. During my freshman year at USC [University of South Carolina] I worked on the City Year project and the Serv-a-thon. I believe service is an important part of leadership. It's important to give back to the community. The last four weeks I've been totally into myself, like running for Vice President of the student body. I signed up for this project because I wanted to get outside myself for awhile.

This student saw the service project as an opportunity to connect with others and in her words "get outside" of herself. For her, the service project offered a chance to become more other-focused and to contribute to building community.

The intent of this article is threefold. First, I want to advance higher education's understanding of the kinds of learning experiences students have through involvement in community service. I do this by introducing findings derived from a six-year qualitative investigation of student participation in community service. The findings presented in this article thus contribute to a long-standing and growing body of literature that seeks to identify

student outcomes with specific kinds of collegiate experiences (Astin, 1979, 1993; Feldman, 1972; Feldman & Newcomb, 1970; Kuh, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Second, I use theoretical discussions of the "caring self" as a means to interpret the findings and to shed light on how involvement in community service might contribute to students' understanding of the self and the other. And finally, I use the findings and interpretations to discuss the ideal of community and the role of higher education and community service in advancing community.

The Caring Self

Many of the developmental challenges and decisions students face during college pertain in one way or another to issues of identity and students' understandings of the self. I use the concept of "self" to refer to the complex interactive processes that shape how we think about ourselves as individuals. The "caring self" is one of many "possible selves" that a person might come to embrace (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Other possible selves may be associated with a vocation (i.e., the professorial self), social position (i.e., the upper-class self), familial position (i.e., the motherly or fatherly self), or with a general disposition (i.e., the angry or contented self). The notion of the "caring self" is a combination of symbolic interactionist discussions of the "social self" and feminist explanations of the "relational self" (Rhoads, in press).

Mead's (1934) notion of the social self derives in part from James (1890) and Cooley (1902), who both suggested that an individual's self conception derives from the responses of others mirrored back to the individual. Mead argued that the self forms out of the

interaction between the "I" and the "me." The "I" is the individual acting out some sort of behavior; the individual doing something such as talking, listening, interacting with others, expressing an idea. The "me" relates to the sense one has about the "I" who is acting out a behavior or set of behaviors. The sense we develop about the "I" derives from the interpretations we suspect that others have of us. We cannot develop an initial sense about ourselves without the help of others, who provide feedback and interact with the behaving "I." Through the imagined thoughts of others, we envision ourselves as a "me," which becomes the object of our thoughts.

The interaction between the "I" and the "me" is fluid and ongoing. Mead argued that the "I" is the response of the individual (as part of an action or a thought) to the attitudes of others. The "me" reflects the thoughts of others towards the individual, which in turn guide the action of the "I," which subsequently creates new reflections of the "me." It is a highly interactive process that is dependent on the use and interpretation of the symbols of language in particular and communication in general.

The idea of the "I" and the "me" interacting to form the self, which is processual in nature, can be confusing yet at the same time is so basic to our nature as users of symbols. Allow me to offer an example. When I make a joke at a dinner party, I can imagine myself through others' eyes. I might even say to myself--"That is 'me,' whom I envision in my mind's eye, making a fool of myself at dinner." Thus, observing the "me" of the "self" involves taking the role of the other and imagining how I might appear, be interpreted, or be understood by someone else. As Mead (1934) explained, "We are continually following up our own address to other persons by an understanding of what we are saying, and using that

understanding in the direction of our continued speech. We are finding out what we are going to say, what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process we are continually controlling the process itself" (p. 140).

Feminist theorists such as Gilligan also have developed a conception of the self strongly rooted in the other. Gilligan (1979, 1982) was one of the first theorists to point out that women often make moral decisions based on a sense of connection with others. Gilligan argued that women's moral decision making reflected a fundamental identity difference between men and women. Whereas men tend to seek autonomy and make moral decisions based on abstract principles such as justice, women, in general, seek connectedness and weigh moral decisions based on maintaining or building relationships.

As a result of early child-parent relationships and ongoing gender socialization (which arguably begins at birth), relationships become central to the social world of women (Chodorow, 1974, 1978). For men, the relational quality of social life is often displaced by a strong sense of individualism. The other is fundamentally a part of women's experience and kept at somewhat of a distance for men. The development of the self for females may be characterized by connectedness. Male development may be characterized by individuation. This difference has significant implications for how males and females relate to others and how they understand themselves in the context of the other.

In the introduction I suggested that caring individuals are needed in order to build intimate and meaningful interactions within an increasingly diverse society. If feminist theorists are correct, then women are more likely to develop the kind of caring attitudes needed for culturally diverse communities to thrive. Although this may be true in general,

socialization processes (such as schooling) suggest that boys and men also can learn to be more caring and develop a relational sense of self (Oliner & Oliner, 1995). My point here is similar to one previously argued by Sampson (1989):

> The feminist perspective should no longer be understood as developing a psychology of women but, I believe, is better seen as developing a psychology of humanity tomorrow. The real issue, therefore, does not involve gender differences per se, as much as it speaks to an emerging theory of the person that is appropriate to the newly emerging shape of a globally linked world system. (p. 920)

The reality is that in a postmodern society characterized by cultural difference and social fragmentation both men and women need to learn to be more caring. Thus, caring, as a developmental objective, ought to be one of the central concerns of any educational vision. I am by no means the first to suggest this argument (Noddings, 1992, 1995); my contribution relates more to explicating the role of community service and fine tuning our understanding of the kinds of interactional contexts where caring is more likely to be embraced as part of one's sense of self.

The strength of feminist discussions of the relational self is that they highlight an idealized image of human development in which caring becomes a central concern (Gilligan, 1982; Larrabee, 1993; Noddings, 1984). The strength of symbolic interactionsist notions of the social self reside in the processual explanation of how one's sense of self evolves within the context of social interaction. Thus, one can approach student involvement in community service by incorporating aspects of the relational self (feminism) and the social self (symbolic

interactionism). The social context of service can be examined from symbolic interactionist perspectives to better understand how students' interactions with others contribute to their sense of self. Feminist perspectives enable one to analyze students' self-explorations in light of an idealized vision of students as caring and relationally oriented. In my own thinking, the theories of the social and relational self come together to form what I call the caring self and suggest two general questions for examining student involvement in community service: (1) What kinds of interactions and social settings associated with community service foster a more caring sense of self, and (2) How do such interactions unfold? Before I introduce findings framed by the preceding questions, I highlight the methodology.

Methodology

The data for this article were derived from 6 years of research and participation in community service projects conducted in conjunction with three universities: Pennsylvania State University, the University of South Carolina, and Michigan State University. Community service projects ranged from week-long intensive experiences requiring travel to distant out-of-state communities to ongoing student service projects in the local communities or states in which these universities are situated. I participated as a volunteer in many of the service projects described throughout this article. My role ranged from a staff supervisor in a few cases, to that of a graduate student volunteer with limited responsibility in other instances. In every case, my primary role was as a "volunteer" and not as a "researcher"; the data I collected was more of an outgrowth of the community service experience and was not the central objective. The comments here are not meant to short-change the research

strategy employed, but instead are intended to clarify for the reader the context of my interactions and involvement with the student volunteers. In fact, my role as a volunteer may actually add strength to the "naturalistic" strategies used in collecting data as I was able to engage in ongoing and meaningful dialogue with the research participants (Denzin, 1989).

Based on the methodological strategies associated with naturalistic inquiry, data were collected using a variety of techniques, including formal and informal interviews, surveys, participant observation, and document analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The principal documents used as a source of data were journals students were asked to keep as part of their community service experience. The use of multiple data collection techniques provides a degree of triangulation and offers the researcher an opportunity to confirm or reject tentative interpretations (Denzin, 1989).

During the 6-year period (1991-1996) in which data were collected, 108 students participated in interviews, 66 students completed open-ended surveys, and more than 200 students were observed at various project sites in which participant observation was central. Approximately 90 percent of the students involved in the community service projects were undergraduates, and about 10 percent were graduate students. The vast majority (approximately 80 percent) of the undergraduates were traditional-age students in the range of 18 to 24 years old. Females represented approximately 60 percent of the sample, and in terms of race, the majority were Caucasian (roughly 85 percent), with African Americans constituting the largest minority group--about 8 to 10 percent of the overall group.

Interview transcripts (from both formal and informal interviews), field notes from participant observation, student journals, and documents collected in conjunction with various

service projects form the entire data base for the study. Once collected, the data were read repeatedly in an effort to identify important and relevant themes. The process followed the kind of analytical strategy stressed in the work of cultural anthropologists and interpretivists (Geertz, 1973; Rosaldo, 1989). Specifically, themes were identified based on their contextual significance and relevance to the overall goal of the project: to better understand students' involvement in community service. The themes and interpretations were shared with several students as part of a member-check process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Students' feedback was then incorporated into various drafts.

Based on the data analysis, several themes were identified. One of these themes--students' explorations of the self--forms the basis for this article. Other issues such as "student motivation" for getting involved in community service, and "attitudes toward community service" are examples of additional themes that emerged from the data analysis but are peripheral to this article and thus are not discussed in any substantive way.

Students' Exploration of the Self: Making Connections

One of principal outcomes from the community service data collected relates to the general self-understandings students derived from their experiences. In fact, students repeatedly pointed out how they had come to value out-of-class experiences such as community service as sources for developing personal knowledge. One student explained, "I learned that I can grow and learn in incredible ways through experience rather than mere book work." Another student commented, "Intellectual exploration has been rewarding but also suffocating at times and so I find the desire to commit myself to experiential work. I

found one way could be by working in a homeless shelter and understanding social issues from a political standpoint as well as from the perspective of those living and breathing poverty."

The community service work I highlight in this article is about "making connections" for it is through the other that we come to understand the self. Thus, in what follows I introduce findings focused on students' experiences and interactions with others during their community service work. I discuss the findings in terms of *making connections with community members* and *making connections with fellow volunteers.*

Making Connections with Community Members For many students, the most significant learning experience associated with service work was personalizing the lives of those served by the students. Students were able to put faces and names with the alarming statistics and endless policy debates about homelessness as well as rural and urban poverty. For example, the following comments were offered by Penn State and Michigan State students involved in community service projects working with homeless citizens in DC, Louisville, and New York City:

"Every homeless person has a name, a story."

"They just want to be recognized and treated as human beings. There are names behind the statistics."

"Working with the people of the streets has transformed 'those people' into real faces, real lives, and real friends. I can no longer confront the issue without seeing the faces

of my new friends. This has an incredible effect on my impetus to help."

"All the statistics about homeless people and the stories of people freezing to death in the winter never really sunk in until I made friends with Harry and Reggie. There are faces now."

"Expressing what it has meant to me to actually have the chance to engage in conversations with people who used to be total strangers is next to impossible. It has been eye opening. My understanding of homeless people was based on what I'd see on the news, in magazines, or on TV shows. They were not real people and I could easily turn my back on them and the problem in general."

In terms of their interactions with homeless citizens, students made several points. Some discussed becoming more empathetic with the plight of homeless citizens. One student elaborated, "I learned that the homeless in general do not earn their predicament. Instead, their problems are brought on by a series of events that are largely beyond their control. Such events could make myself or anyone wind up homeless." A junior majoring in psychology talked about how people often distance themselves from the homeless by making reference to "those people" as if they are somehow better than homeless people. This student also commented on how her work had left her with a different feeling about the homeless: "I feel entirely different about homeless people than I did previously. I understand better some of the circumstances that contribute to people losing their jobs, or their homes. But I also understand that many of the people I've met through this work are not helpless victims. They are more than capable of working and maintaining a normal life if there were

just more opportunities."

Another example is a senior in wildlife management who commented, "My most significant learning experience was that the people I served did not want someone to feel sorry for them, but to just be recognized and treated as a human being with likes, dislikes, and a story. That they are names and not just statistics. This is impetus for me to do more. I can't just walk away from these problems when they are so close to me now." A senior majoring in nutrition added, "Homeless people have a lot to offer. Everyone has a part deep down inside that longs for respect and understanding. If we each try to find that part in ourselves and look for it in each other we can create bonds and break down barriers."

Students who worked in rural areas with low-income families also derived benefit from personal interactions with those they worked to serve. One student commented on the general outcomes associated with having personal interactions in service settings: "The whole experience helps you to see that others are real people and have real problems and yet can come together to help one another. . . . When you work with the people on their houses or in their back yard it adds to the experience. You get a chance to know the people. You have a face or a personality to go with the work." A second student stated, "The fact that we were able to interact a great deal with the people in the community added so much to the overall experience. I've done volunteer work in the past where I never really got the chance to meet with the people who I was actually trying to help." A third student, who participated in a week-long service project in a low-income rural area, added, "This week has taught me so much about other people and the problems they face in life. You can read about growing up poor, but getting to share a conversation with someone who has overcome so much during

their lifetime is quite a different matter. . . . It's made me much less judgmental of others and their place in life."

A group of students who worked on a service project on Johns Island, South Carolina painted the house of a middle-age woman with two little children. One of the students talked about her experience:

> When I was painting the house I asked myself--why are we helping these people? We are painting a house and there's dirt around it everywhere. It will probably be covered with dirt in no time. But it made me feel good to see her smile and express so much gratitude. When I met some of the people like the kids it put a more personal side on community service. Having the two little kids work with us was fun.

The highlight of the Johns Island project for many of the students was the intimate interactions they were able to have with members of the community. As one student explained, "Miss Virginia's house wasn't very big and we were working on a pretty big portion of it, and she was so trusting of us. And she'd never even met us. She was doing just as much for us as we were for her." Another student added, "I will never forget Miss Virginia and how she trusted us enough to welcome us into her home. I learned some things about her life. She has grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Uncle Leroy used to pick cherries for her when they were younger. He lives only about 100 yards away, and they have known each other their entire lives." A third student offered the following thoughts: "I learned about the lives of the people who live here. They opened their hearts and their

homes to us. Miss Virginia gave us everything she had--frying up sausages and giving us sodas. I may never meet the woman again, but she'll always be in the back of my mind."

A common theme delineated by students was the fact that community service work with people of diverse cultural backgrounds forced students to confront generalizations they had of the other. For example, students talked about various stereotypes they held or had witnessed in the media with regard to poor people and how such stereotypes were erased as a result of their service work. Several students noted how surprised they were to find so many intelligent and educated people without jobs or places to live. One student maintained that the only accurate stereotype relates to the amount of bad luck that most homeless people have experienced. A second added, "I learned that all people are innately afraid and that no one deserves to be without a voice and a safe place and that stereotypes can be more damaging than can be fathomed." A third student talked about how his preconceptions about homeless people had been shattered through his interactions with them. As he explained, "This experience gave my beliefs and convictions about the homeless a personal basis that I'll never forget."

Many of the preconceptions students had about the poor were rooted in ignorance. Although socio-economic factors were the primary source of difference between students and community members, race was another factor. Interactions with a variety of low-income individuals and families often challenged students' conceptions of the diverse other. Because the vast majority of the student volunteers were Caucasians and many of the community members served by the students were African Americans, a number of racial issues emerged from time to time. A Penn State sophomore talked about the difference she felt between

herself and the large number of homeless African Americans she encountered during her volunteer work in DC: "I definitely felt a major barrier between Blacks and Whites in this country. There were times working in the soup kitchens where I felt very uncomfortable." A college junior studying mathematics commented on a similar feeling: "It was an experience for me simply to be placed in the awkward environment of walking around in predominantly African-American, poor neighborhoods. I want to remember that feeling of insecurity. It reminds me of the vast differences between races in our society." Often, issues of race and class blended together and challenged students' prejudices in a multifaceted way. Listen to the following two students discuss their experiences:

> There is something that I'm not proud of and I always considered myself open minded and not prejudiced, but when I worked at Sharon's house [Sharon is an African-American woman who needed repairs done to her home] it reminded me that some of my previous thinking about the poor had been based on stereotypes. I mean I've always kind of thought in the back of my mind that people become poor or destitute because they are not motivated or not as intelligent. But Sharon has a master's degree and is very articulate. I see now that there may be many causes or barriers that people face that can limit them. It was an eye opener and I see now that I was carrying this misconception about them being to blame for their plight.

> Meeting homeless people and talking with them taught me that some of my stereotypes about the poor, about Blacks, have been rooted in my own life of

White, middle-class privilege. I have never had to work that hard to get a college education, for example, yet I've bought into the idea that others who have less than me are somehow lazy because they are poor. Heck, they may have worked twice as hard as I have. I've never really had my views of the poor challenged until this experience working with homeless people.

Some of the generalizations and stereotypes to which students referred were seen as the by-product of the media. As one student, a senior in geography, pointed out, "I learned that my perceptions of poverty, crime, and homelessness are influenced and perhaps shaped by misconstrued images that I see on television." Another student also talked about how television had played a major role in how she had come to envision African Americans. She pointed out that in her rural Pennsylvania community, "There wasn't a single African-American family. I never even met an African American until I attended college."

The students in this study highlight how race and class can often be a barrier to meaningful interactions. In terms of community service contexts, both race and class can pose significant challenges to students and highlight the fact that community service is often an interaction between diverse others. This is the essence of Radest's (1993) argument when he maintained that community service may be seen as an "encounter with strangers" in which the challenge is to enter into the social context of service with the ideal of "mutuality" in mind--we each learn from the other and we each give as well as receive. For Radest, society has become such a "plurality of life worlds" that the sense of connection we have for one another has been weakened (p. 120). Community service represents one effort to restore the

"lost connection," which is at the heart of the demise of community. Viewed in this light, community service is not an effort to create community by eliminating difference through the creation of a common culture. Instead, community service represents a dialogical encounter with the other and thus serves as a bridge to build communal ties. Issues of community were also at the heart of students' discussions of their interactions with other volunteers.

Making Connections with Fellow Volunteers Many students discussed learning experiences derived from their interactions with other volunteers. For example, students talked about the importance of community in terms of working as a member of a group of volunteers with similar commitments. A junior majoring in health education had this to say: "I learned how wonderful it is to work with a group with the same common goal and struggle together to achieve that goal." Another student, a senior majoring in management and journalism, added, "The spirit of the group got me out of bed at 5:00 a.m. I saw how effective a group can be." A third student commented that he was surprised by "how much can be accomplished when a group of motivated, sharing, and open-minded people work together." Another student talked about building a porch, but she could easily have been describing how community is created:

> I think doing this service project gives me a sense of how a group can work together to accomplish things. It wasn't chaotic to me like I thought it might be. It seemed effortless sometimes. The porch group . . . it just turned out so well. There was no fighting. Everyone provided input. Someone would say, "Let's do this." And someone else would say, "Why do you want to do

it this way?" and the first person would explain why. And we'd ask a third person. We worked together and just did it.

An aspect of working together as a group is that each student may bring unique or special talents to bear on community service activities. A senior in nursing thought that a big strength of the student group was that "The people in our group all had their own special talent of relating to and helping those in need and a variety of ways to do it. There was a bond that developed among the students who volunteered."

One aspect of the power of group action is the need and opportunity to inspire one another--to rejuvenate other volunteers. "Volunteers need help too," explained one student. "We helped to refresh and inspire one another while the members of the community we served taught us about love. I learned that I can do a lot to help, and they taught me that I can love more than I do." A junior majoring in psychology also alluded to the interdependence among the volunteers: "I always try to be independent, and it was beneficial for me to have to lean on others during the week. Our world has become too individualistic, and this experience has helped to remind me that community is the answer." One student highlighted the power of a committed group of volunteers: "There is an enormous sense of hope generated by 20 other volunteers working together for the same social cause. This hope is fuel for my own personal fire that drives me to work on behalf of those less privileged." Another student echoed similar thoughts, "The power of a small group of people to work miracles is real. The soup kitchens we worked in were all the result of someone's initiative in response to a need. This is very hopeful."

Other students talked about the role community plays in contributing to social change and activism in general. They pointed out how other volunteers help one another and build a larger group of people striving for social justice. For example, a first-year graduate student thought it was important to get involved with others doing community service: "I wanted to do some active social justice work and also spend time with children and God and people to get back in touch with my sense of what is important." She added, "I've learned that others have similar feelings as me about activism and that I'm not alone in the struggle to change society. I learned that people really do care and are doing some wonderful things despite many struggles they are facing." A Michigan State student, who participated in a spring break community service project in 1995, highlighted some of her experiences:

> How to function in a group and get along with people in close quarters for an extended period of time was something important that I learned on the spring break project. People I went with were like an extension of myself. We could talk about the people we met and the problems we encountered. I learned from them, and I think they learned from me. We became very connected. In fact, when we came back to school I felt separated from them because we all had different lives to lead as students. I wanted to find a way to associate with them.

Two additional students described a similar need to associate with others committed to service and activism: "I need to be in community with people who are interested in radical social change. Together we can work and witness all kinds of changes, and perhaps come

closer to finding some answers." And, "Building personal relationships with others who are involved in service is my driving force. They are the thing that provides the most significant impetus for me in my hunger for social justice and participation in social action."

Discussion: Community and Caring

The research on student involvement in community service presented in this article highlights how the development and maintenance of community is an interactive process involving both giving as well as receiving. To embrace one without embracing the other does not support the ideal of community. Seen in this light, community service is an act of reshaping a culture grounded in the ideals of individualism. This is part of the story told in Bellah, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton's (1985) Habits of the Heart in which they argue that despite the pervasiveness of a language of individualism many Americans have sought public and community commitments as a source of peace and contentment with life. A similar point is made by Regan (1991) when he wrote, "A shared sense of community replaces the void of individual estrangement. Only by acting for the other does one come to know one's self, not in isolation from the ties that bind each to all but in affirmation of them. Apart from such relationships the self is seen to be an empty shell, the word 'I' the most impersonal of pronouns" (p. 3).

A goal of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of community and how communities might be constructed and maintained within a social milieu that is increasingly diverse. And, of course, this discussion of community takes place within an intellectual context that is deeply divided over what constitutes or ought to constitute community and the

role that higher education is to play in advancing the ideal of community. For example, conservatives such as Bennett (1984), D'Souza (1991), and Hirsch (1987) envisioned a society organized around a "common culture" and viewed educational institutions as the vehicle for socializing youth to this culture. A conservative vision of community and society grounded in a common culture silences cultural diversity and situates schooling as a process designed to assimilate culturally diverse peoples. Serow (1983) made this quite clear when he argued that the cultures of some within our society may need to be sacrificed for the larger social good.

Scholars of the liberal tradition have for the most part rejected the conservative vision of a common culture in favor of other alternatives. Etzioni and fellow communitarians tend to argue that there are "core values" that American society needs to encourage within its citizenry and that schools "ought to teach those values Americans share, for example, that the dignity of all persons ought to be respected, that tolerance is a virtue and discrimination abhorrent, that peaceful resolution of conflicts is superior to violence, that generally truth-telling is morally superior to lying, that democratic government is morally superior to totalitarianism and authoritarianism" (Etzioni, 1995, p. 15).

Other scholars, often associated with postmodernism, feminism, or critical theory, tend to reject any emphasis on commonality for fear that such an emphasize might lead to the silencing of cultural difference (Bensimon, 1994; Giroux, 1992, 1993; hooks, 1992, 1994; West, 1993; Young, 1990). I use "critical multiculturalism" as a category for this group of scholars (McLaren, 1995). Critical multiculturalists, such as Tierney (1993) and Burbules and Rice (1991), suggest that hope for community is lodged in the idea of "dialogue across

difference," in which efforts to understand the other through social interaction form the basis for communal ties and the creation of "communities of difference."

We are left to reconcile the positions of communitarianism and critical multiculturalism if a progressive vision of community is to move beyond the conservative rhetoric that seeks to silence diversity. I believe there is a common connection cutting across communitarianism and critical multiculturalism and it is captured by feminist discussions of "the ethic of care" (Noddings, 1984). For example, an ethic of care lies at the heart of many of the principles Etzioni discussed: respect for all persons and peaceful resolution are superior to violence are two examples. The work of Wuthnow (1991, 1995) reinforces the importance of caring in liberal conceptions of social life. And many critical multiculturalists, whether they recognize it or not, suggest an ethic of care in their notion of dialogue across difference: If we do not care for one another, then why should we enter into a dialogue of any kind?

Community service is in many ways an encounter with strangers in which participants and community members are challenged to build relationships through caring interactions. In true "community" service, giving and receiving are mutual exchanges; that is, service involves giving and receiving on the part of all involved parties. As Radest (1993) explained, "Community service is a particular way of learning my human 'being' precisely because it is an encounter of strangers with whom I am nevertheless connected by the possibility of a reciprocal interchange of positions. I can be doer; I can be done-to" (p. 179). Such a conception of community service challenges relationships that separate the "haves" and "have-nots" of power and position. Once again, Radest is helpful: "To be doer

in the presence of the done-to is to mirror the other in myself; to be the done-to in the presence of the doer is to respond to the other in myself. Both of us are active; neither is passive" (p. 180).

The goal of community service then is not simply to provide help to individuals in need. Instead, community service should be seen as part of the struggle to build community with others. The goal of interactions in service contexts with culturally diverse others is not to erase or ignore those differences, but to see difference as a positive source of learning about one another. But to build communities through difference, we must have a society of caring individuals who are concerned enough about the other to want to learn from them. This is why the concept of the caring self is so important and why activities such as community service need to become more central to the mission of higher education institutions. Not only does the caring exemplified through community service contribute to community building, it also provides a learning context in which participants are more likely to embrace a caring sense of self.

I suggest in this article that one of the principal goals of higher education is to foster an ethic of care among students in a way that contributes to community building. If we are to have anything in common, that commonality ought to be the ability and desire to care for one another. An ethic of care cuts across the differences between communitarian and critical multicultural notions of community and suggests that a common connection does exist among diverse visions of social life.

Conclusion

Community service provides a social context in which caring is at the center of the activity and influences to a large degree the kinds of interactions students have. Because caring is so vital to service, students are challenged to give serious thought to what it means to care and to related issues such as their commitment to social change to improve the lives of others. Service encourages students to see themselves as intimately connected to the other. In this way, service provides a learning context in which the caring self is more likely to emerge.

Fostering a sense of self grounded in an ethic of care is one of the central challenges of education and becomes increasingly important as our society grows more diverse. By fostering an ethic of care, higher education can encourage the sense of otherness needed for community to survive and indeed thrive in a complex and fragmented social world. Thus, my argument is rather straightforward: Caring is an ethic that can be fostered, and community service is a vehicle for advancing such an ethic. In short, understanding the social processes associated with community service can shed light on how higher education might be restructured as we struggle to build communities within the tensions and strains of a postmodern world.

References

Almanac, The. (1996). The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Astin, Alexander W. (1979). Four critical years: Effects of college on beliefs, attitudes and knowledge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Astin, Alexander W. (1993). What matters in college?: Four critical years revisited. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bellah, Robert N., Sullivan, William M., Swidler, Ann, & Tipton, Steven M. (1985). Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life. New York: Harper & Row.

Bennett, William J. (1984). To reclaim a legacy: A report on the humanities in higher education. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities.

Bensimon, Estela M. (Ed.). (1994). Multicultural teaching and learning: Strategies for change in higher education. University Park, PA: National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, & Assessment.

Burbules, Nicholas C., & Rice, Suzanne. (1991). Dialogue across differences: Continuing the conversation. Harvard Educational Review, 61(4), 393-416.

Chickering, Arthur W. (1969). Identity and education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chodorow, Nancy. (1978). The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Coles, Robert. (1993). The call of service: A witness to idealism. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cooley, Charles Horton. (1902). Human nature and the social order. New York:

Charles Scribner's Sons.

D'Augelli, Anthony R. (1989). Lesbians and gay men on campus: Visibility, empowerment, and educational leadership. Peabody Journal of Education, 66(3), 124-142.

D'Augelli, Anthony R. (1991). Gay men in college: Identity processes and adaptations. Journal of College Student Development, 32, 140-146.

Denzin, Norman. (1989). The research act (3rd ed.). New York: Prentice-Hall.

D'Souza, Dinesh. (1991). Illiberal education: The politics of race and sex on campus. New York: The Free Press.

Erikson, Erik. (1968). Identity: Youth and crisis. New York: W. W. Norton.

Etzioni, Amitai. (Ed.). (1995). Rights and the common good: The communitarian perspective. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Feldman, Kenneth A. (Ed.). (1972). College and student: Selected readings in the social psychology of higher education. New York: Pergamon Press.

Feldman, Kenneth A., & Newcomb, Theodore, M. (1970). The impact of college on students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). The interpretation of cultures. New York: Basic Books.

Gilligan, Carol. (1979). Woman's place in man's life cycle. Harvard Educational Review, 9(4), 431-446.

Gilligan, Carol. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Giroux, Henry A. (1992). Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education. New York: Routledge.

Giroux, Henry A. (1993). Living dangerously: Multiculturalism and the politics of difference. New York: Peter Lang.

Hirsch, E. D., Jr. (1987). Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know. New York: Vintage Books.

Holland, Dorothy C., & Eisenhart, Margaret A. (1990). Educated in romance: Women, achievement, and college. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

hooks, bell. (1992). Black looks: Race and representation. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, bell. (1994). Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom. New York: Routledge.

James, William. (1890). Principles of psychology (Vol. 1). New York: Holt.

Kuh, George D. (1995). The other curriculum: Out-of-class experiences associated with student learning and personal development. Journal of Higher Education, 66(2), 123-155.

Larrabee, Mary Jeanne. (Ed.). (1993). An ethic of care: Feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives. New York: Routledge.

Lincoln, Yvonna S., & Guba, Egon G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Loeb, Paul Rogat. (1994). Generation at the crossroads: Apathy and action on the American campus. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Markus, Hazel, & Nurius, Paula. (1986). Possible selves. American Psychologist, 41(9), 954-969.

McLaren, Peter. (1995). Critical pedagogy and predatory culture. New York: Routledge.

Mead, George Herbert. (1934). Mind, self, & society (Charles W. Morris, Ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moffatt, Michael. (1989). Coming of age in New Jersey: College and American culture. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Noddings, Nel. (1984). Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Noddings, Nel. (1992). The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noddings, Nel. (1995). Teaching themes of care. Phi Delta Kappan, 76(9), 675-679.

Oliner, Pearl M., & Oliner, Samuel P. (1995). Toward a caring society: Ideas into action. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Palmer, Parker J. (1993). To know as we are known: Education as a spiritual journey. San Francisco: Harper.

Parks, Sharon. (1986). The critical years: The young adult search for a faith to live by. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Pascarella, Ernest T., & Terenzini, Patrick T. (1991). How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Radest, Howard. (1993). Community service: Encounter with strangers. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Regan, Tom. (1991). The thee generation: Reflections on the coming revolution. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Rhoads, Robert A. (1994). Coming out in college: The struggle for a queer identity. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Rhoads, Robert A. (in press). Explorations of the caring self: Community service and higher learning in the shadows of poverty. Albany: SUNY Press.

Rhoads, Robert A., & Valadez, James R. (1996). Democracy, multiculturalism, and the community college: A critical perspective. New York: Garland.

Rosaldo, Renato. (1989). Culture & truth: The remaking of social analysis. Boston: Beacon.

Sampson, Edward E. (1989). The challenge of social change for psychology: Globalization and psychology's theory of the person. American Psychologist, 44(6), 914-921.

Serow, Robert C. (1983). Schooling for diversity: An analysis of policy and practice. New York: Teachers College Press.

Tierney, William G. (1993). Building communities of difference: Higher education in the 21st century. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

West, Cornel. (1993). Race matters. New York: Vintage Books.

Wuthnow, Robert. (1991). Acts of compassion: Caring for others and helping ourselves. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. (1995). Learning to care: Elementary kindness in an age of indifference. New York: Oxford University Press.

Young, Iris Marion. (1990). The ideal of community and the politics of difference. In Linda J. Nicholson (Ed.), Feminism/postmodernism (pp. 300-323). New York: Routledge.

AREA 1997

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Explorations of the Caring Self	
Author(s): Robert A. Rhoads	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: March 1997

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following options and sign the release below.

Check here
Permitting microfiche (4"x 6" film), paper copy, electronic, and optical media reproduction

Sample sticker to be affixed to document

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Level 1

Sample sticker to be affixed to document

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Level 2

or here
Permitting reproduction in other than paper copy.

Sign Here, Please

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature: Robert A. Rhoads	Position: Assistant Professor
Printed Name: Robert A. Rhoads	Organization: Michigan State University
Address: Dept. of Ed. Admin, MSU 429 Erickson Hall E. Lansing, MI 48824	Telephone Number: (517) 353-5979
	Date: March 19/1997

OVER

CUA

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Department of Education, O'Boyle Hall
Washington, DC 20064
202 319-5120

February 21, 1997

Dear AERA Presenter,

Congratulations on being a presenter at AERA[1]. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation invites you to contribute to the ERIC database by providing us with a printed copy of your presentation.

Abstracts of papers accepted by ERIC appear in *Resources in Education (RIE)* and are announced to over 5,000 organizations. The inclusion of your work makes it readily available to other researchers, provides a permanent archive, and enhances the quality of *RIE*. Abstracts of your contribution will be accessible through the printed and electronic versions of *RIE*. The paper will be available through the microfiche collections that are housed at libraries around the world and through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service.

We are gathering all the papers from the AERA Conference. We will route your paper to the appropriate clearinghouse. You will be notified if your paper meets ERIC's criteria for inclusion in *RIE*: contribution to education, timeliness, relevance, methodology, effectiveness of presentation, and reproduction quality. You can track our processing of your paper at http://ericae2.educ.cua.edu.

Please sign the Reproduction Release Form on the back of this letter and include it with **two** copies of your paper. The Release Form gives ERIC permission to make and distribute copies of your paper. It does not preclude you from publishing your work. You can drop off the copies of your paper and Reproduction Release Form at the **ERIC booth (523)** or mail to our attention at the address below. Please feel free to copy the form for future or additional submissions.

Mail to:

AERA 1997/ERIC Acquisitions
The Catholic University of America
O'Boyle Hall, Room 210
Washington, DC 20064

This year ERIC/AE is making a **Searchable Conference Program** available on the AERA web page (http://aera.net). Check it out!

Sincerely,

Lawrence M. Rudner, Ph.D.
Director, ERIC/AE

---

[1]If you are an AERA chair or discussant, please save this form for future use.