Chapter 1

Situating the Self

> *One's sense of self is always mediated by the
> image one has of the other.*
> *—Vincent Crapanzano,*
> *"A Reporter at Large"*

When I was a child there were many times when my mom struggled to provide adequate food and clothing for our family. I especially remember late August because that is when we had to buy clothes for the upcoming school year. My mom did the best she could to come up with some extra money so that we could buy new shirts, pants, or shoes. I remember when I was about to enter the seventh grade and she gave me ten dollars to get something nice to wear as I took that big step from elementary school to junior high. I went to a discount store called Buyers Fair and spent a couple of hours trying to find the best bargains. The clothes were not the greatest and there certainly weren't any name brands but after a lot of searching I was able to buy two pairs of bell bottoms and two shirts for just under ten dollars. That meant four new outfits for school if I mixed and matched them.

The late 1960s and early 1970s were some tough times for my mom, my brother, my three sisters, and me, but we also had some good times. We weren't always poor. Sometimes Mom was able to get a good factory job, like the time she worked at Blazon—the company that used to make those plastic rocking horses on springs and other large toys for kids. She was able to bring home some of the broken ones for free. I'll never forget the day she brought home a toy rickshaw. For hours my older brother and my two younger sisters (my youngest sister, Michelle, was not born yet), and I would take turns pulling each other around the projects. We were the only ones in the entire housing complex with a rickshaw. For once in our lives we felt privileged, and everyone envied us. These were some of the better times, financially speaking. We even

had money for school lunches, unlike my high school years when I had to par-
ticipate in the free lunch program.

Moving was a constant in our lives. By the time I graduated from high
school, I could count twenty-seven different houses or apartments that we had
lived in, about ten different communities, and five different states, including two
moves to California and then back to western Pennsylvania each time. There
were a number of reasons for our moves, but the driving force was a desire on
my mother's part to make a better life for us, even if that meant moving us to
Los Angeles with her third husband, who soon thereafter she discovered was a
drug addict. One divorce later and a cross-country trip back to Pennsylvania
and we were once again as broke as ever.

During the years that followed our return from California, which were my
junior high and high school years, we often were dependent on others for
financial help, like when my Aunt Shirley and Uncle Lou let us live with them
for a while even though they already had eight children of their own. The gov-
ernment helped too with food stamps, medical assistance, and surplus cheese.
I got so sick of the bricklike, dark orange cheese they doled out for free.
Members of the community also helped us, especially during the holiday sea-
sons when my mom tried so hard to give us a Thanksgiving or a Christmas like
our friends could afford. To buy a few presents or even a turkey or ham for a
special dinner drained her monthly budget. I remember men and women from
a local church who came to our house with boxes of food: cranberry sauce,
pumpkin pie mix, canned yams, pickles, relishes. With all the extra food in the
cupboards, Mom was able to spend some of her food budget on a turkey or even
a few presents if it was Christmastime. It was also at Christmastime that people
from the churches or sometimes one of the local steel unions or community
agencies would bring presents that were donated and then gift wrapped. The
presents would have labels that read "14 year-old boy"—"That one's for
Gary!" one of us would yell. Or "5 year-old girl!"—"That one's for Jamie!"

What weighs on me most when I reflect on the people from the churches
or the steel union or the local agencies is not only the gratitude that I cer-
tainly felt, but the feelings of shame and even resentment that I experienced at
the time. I was ashamed that we were so poor that someone from a local church
had to take up a collection for us. I was ashamed that without their help we
could not enjoy the same simple pleasure that all my friends' families seemed to
take for granted. I was ashamed that we were needy.

At the same time, I resented these people for the knowledge they held
about our life, our circumstances. The knowledge that we were poor. Or at
least much poorer than they were. I resented them for the power they seemed to
have over me and the fear that they might be the fathers or the mothers of my
school friends from whom I tried so desperately to hide our poverty. I resented
them for having what I did not have—an excess of food, or clothes, or money. I

truly appreciated their assistance, their generosity, their caring; but, at the
same time, it was a slap in my pride's face.

When they came to the door, I would disappear upstairs and either stay in
my room or hide at the top of the stairs so I would know when they had left. I
felt extremely guilty for accepting their gifts but being unable to look them in
the face and thank them. It was more than my pride could bear.

My oldest sister, Kim, who is three years younger than I am, was the
same way when it came to protecting her sense of pride. She and I talked some-
times about what was worse—going without lunch during the school day or
having to use free lunch tickets that told the entire school (or so it seemed to us)
that we were on welfare. It's no wonder that I never felt a sense of connection to
the guys at my school, some of whom made a habit of mocking those "lazy
niggers on welfare" who lived on the other side of town. I identified with the
Blacks in my hometown and knew something my White middle-class peers did-
n't know: The poor aren't any more lazy than anyone else. They are like my
brother and my sisters. They are just poor.

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I share a bit of my past as a means of introducing the complex story that
lies ahead. We all have a sense of self that we bring to all we do. As we know
from our own lived experience, the self is much more than simply a reflection
of our present-day circumstances and current feelings. We each have deeply
textured social histories, all of which contribute to who we are as a person. For
me, the experiences I had with poverty as a child have left an indelible impact
on the person I am today and the self I bring to community service and profes-
sional tasks such as research and writing.

The college students whose lives and experiences I share throughout this
book also have social histories and a sense of self that they bring to their com-
munity service work. Carolyn Fisher,* a twenty-two-year-old college student,
grew up in a very loving and financially secure family. Her dad is employed as
a professor at a major research university, and her mother is actively involved
in community concerns. Both her parents play an active and caring role in
Carolyn's life. Perhaps it is their influence on Carolyn, their acts of compassion
and care directed toward her and her siblings, which contributes to Carolyn's
desire to serve the poor and her commitment to social change.

Although Carolyn's commitment to others through social activism has
been a source of much passion in her life, it has also produced much confusion.
Carolyn is an artist, and for years she has struggled with what she saw as two

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*The names used for students and community members throughout this text are pseu-
donyms.

contradictory pulls in her life: to be an artist or to be an activist. She has gone through an interesting personal struggle, including a cross-country journey to the West Coast, as part of an effort to resolve her identity crisis and make a choice about her future. Carolyn talks about the conflict: "I want to continue with my art, although for a while I pushed that part of me away because all the women in my family are artists and I didn't want to do the same things that they have done. But also, I didn't see the relevance of art in changing the world. I didn't see how art could help solve social problems." Eventually, Carolyn had an epiphany which led to the resolution of her identity struggle. I discuss Carolyn's explorations of the self and how she resolved her personal conflict in detail in chapter 4. Suffice it to say for now, Carolyn Fisher is a good example of how the social histories students bring to their community service contribute to their experience.

Samuel Frias is another student I met through mutual participation in community service. Like Carolyn, he is a college student in his early twenties who is committed to community service and social activism. Samuel strongly identifies with his racial/ethnic heritage and has been deeply touched by the economic suffering of his fellow Puerto Ricans, both in the United States and in his homeland. Samuel's career and personal goal is someday to graduate from seminary (after he gets his bachelor's degree) and return to Puerto Rico to help advance the lives of the poor. In the meantime, Samuel has expanded his com-mitments beyond his concern for Puerto Ricans and has aligned himself with the plight of all poor people throughout the world. He has worked in poor vil-lages in Mexico to improve educational opportunities and has helped provide food for the homeless of Washington, D.C.

Samuel's sense of self is deeply rooted in his religious convictions and what he considers "the liberatory philosophy of Christ's message." As Samuel explains, "People have forgotten the message of love and empowerment inherent in Christ's teachings. I try to live my life by the message of love, and that means giving a piece of myself to others through service." His commitment to the poor reflects a view that extends beyond merely providing Band-Aids and instead seeks fundamental social change. Samuel cannot see any other way to live his life. I return to Samuel's story in chapter 7 as I discuss a Habitat for Humanity project that he participated in with a group of students from his university.

Both Carolyn and Samuel not only recognize the need to care for others, but they also realize the positive feelings involvement in service offers to them. The feelings reflected back to them are not the reason they give of themselves to others, but the warmth is nonetheless something they very much cherish. Their lives continue to change as they create new social histories, and their ser-vice experiences continue to offer them positive sources of the self.

My social history continues to evolve as well. In fact, life has changed dramatically from my childhood days spent on and off of welfare to my current

status as a university professor. I no longer participate in community service as a recipient but instead as a giver. Yet, like the students whose lives I reveal throughout this book, I have learned that in giving I receive so much. I recall the comments of a college senior who was taken aback by the good feelings about himself he experienced as a result of his participation in a spring break community service project: "I couldn't believe how moving the whole experience was for me. I mean, I really only went on the trip because it was a cheap way to go south. But once we started working with the kids and helping with home repairs, I found reasons for being there other than my own personal enjoyment. And that's the oddest thing. Even though I started to think about how I could help others and work to improve their lives, it all came back to me and made me feel great. I'm not sure I should feel so good about myself, given the reasons I went."

A second student echoed some of the same sentiments as she discussed an ongoing community service project she became involved with in the community near her school. "What have I learned? Let me think. . . . I have learned so much from working with the kids. I help tutor them in math, and they just continually amaze me with their resiliency. If I had to deal with some of the family problems they deal with, I'm not sure I could make it. They've given me so much strength and energy to do for others. When I get down and think I can't take any more, all I have to do is think of those little girls and the battles they endure every day. They inspire me to be a better person. It's as simple as that, and I guess that's one reason I keep going back."

This book is about some of the complexities and experiences associated with giving and receiving through participation in community service work and how such activities contribute in fundamental ways to one's sense of self. The focus is on the experiences of college students, although as the author, I share aspects of my life as well.

Over the past six years, I have been engaged in a number of community service projects with other university staff and students. Much of our work has involved leaving university communities and traveling to other areas of the country where we have worked with and served people with far less material comfort and wealth than my fellow student and staff volunteers. We prepared and served food in soup kitchens and helped clean homeless shelters in Washington, D.C.; we built houses in the rural areas of Maryland's eastern shore; we restored and repaired homes on two of South Carolina's sea islands; and we worked with low-income families trying to make ends meet in Lansing, New Orleans, Louisville, and New York City. In all the adventures that I share in this book, my experiences with poverty as a child hovered over me like a ghostly specter of a bare Christmas past. It was hard for me to know what kind of attitude, what kind of conversation, what kind of me to bring to interactions with the low-income families and individuals we tried to serve, and who

oftentimes, as in our Habitat for Humanity work in Maryland, worked alongside us. At no time in my life can I remember having been so self- and other-oriented at the same time. At no time in my life have I been more aware of how someone else contributes to who I am as a person. It seemed as though my sense of self was changing right before my eyes through someone else's eyes. I was supposed to be doing the giving, and yet I was receiving. I was supposed to be learning about others, and yet I was learning about my self.

Originally, it never occurred to me to connect my sense of self as someone involved in community service to the self I have as a researcher and a writer. When I started participating actively in community service, my understanding of research was different from what it is now. Research was about being disconnected, objective, and neutral. It did not involve the passion, feeling, and concern I brought to many of my community service activities. The kinds of things I associated with community service had no place in research. I had fallen into the trap Parker Palmer (1987) addresses when he argues that traditional modes of research and knowledge production tend to disconnect us from community concerns and caring for others: "Objective, analytic, experimental. . . . This seemingly abstract way of knowing, this seemingly bloodless epistemology, becomes an ethic. It is an ethic of competitive individualism, in the midst of a world fragmented and made exploitable by that very mode of knowing. The mode of knowing itself breeds intellectual habits, indeed spiritual instincts, that destroy community. We make objects of each other and the world to be manipulated for our private ends" (p. 22).

This book represents an attempt to escape from traditional views of research that separate the researcher from the researched, work from play, thought from passion, and neutrality from caring. It is about my life and research of students engaged in service for others and how they come to know themselves through their service experiences and literally understand themselves through the eyes of others. These insights reveal a great deal about how we might create a more caring form of higher learning and thus contribute to building truly democratic communities.

Thus, this book is about how community service work helps us understand others and necessarily the self. I focus on the service explorations of different groups of college students who have given up spring and winter breaks, free time during their busy semesters, and even their summers to serve others. At the heart of my discussion is what I term the "self"—which in part reflects the way we think about who we are as persons. As a social science concept, the self is similar to the idea of identity, although there are subtle differences that I will try to distinguish as the book unfolds.

I have two primary goals in this chapter. The first deals with the self: the relevance of the self the author brings to his or her work, and the sociological roots of the concept. In dealing with the issue of the authorial self, it is impor-

tant that the reader of this book have a depth of knowledge about the author, especially as the entire research project is rooted in experiences that are emotionally anchored in my own life. Having provided a glimpse into some of my background, I use portions of this first chapter to explore the theoretical rationale for the role I seek to play in this text. Essentially, while I explore college students and their evolving sense of self, I must also acknowledge the self I bring to this work—the self that contributes to the nature of my observations and of my writing, and which is in turn reshaped by these very efforts. This is why I discuss some of my experiences as a child—in particular, my brushes with poverty. Such experiences not only influence how I think about and engage in work to serve the poor, but they also affect how and what I perceive as I observe others serving the poor. In discussing the role of the author's position, or "positionality," I rely on recent feminist discussions of subjectivity and relational standpointism. An explanation of the sociological roots of the concept of the self follow the discussion of positionality. I depend heavily on the work of George Herbert Mead as well as other symbolic interactionists.

The second goal of this chapter is to situate the study. First, I discuss the methodology. I do this by explaining the theoretical rationale for conducting naturalistic inquiry. I go on to discuss the methods of data collection, describe the sample, and discuss the method of analysis and interpretation. I follow a discussion of the methodology by expanding on the general setting in which the study takes place. In so doing, I elaborate many of the cultural intricacies of what has come to be considered the "collegiate context."

POSITIONALITY

Positionality refers to the position of the knower. Questions of positionality are epistemological in nature in that they relate to how knowledge is produced and how the knower comes to an understanding of knowledge. Epistemology involves theorizing about knowledge and exploring the nature, scope, and legitimacy of knowledge claims. Traditional views of epistemology are not concerned with the position of the knower, who more often than not is seen as irrelevant to knowledge itself. More recent epistemological explorations, such as those offered by feminists, postmodernists, and critical theorists, have raised fundamental questions about the position of the knower. For example, in *Social Science and the Self* Susan Krieger (1991) speaks directly to the role of subjectivity and the self in social scientific inquiry when she argues that research findings reflect highly interactive processes between the observer and the observed. Furthermore, the observer is "personally involved": "We bring biases and more than biases. We bring idiosyncratic patterns of recognition. We are not, in fact, ever capable of achieving the analytic 'distance' we

have long been schooled to seek. While recognition of the interactional and contextual nature of social research is not new, how we interpret ourselves during this new period of self-examination may, in fact, add something fresh and significant to the development of sophistication in social science" (p. 167).

Krieger's view may be juxtaposed with traditional views of social science, which, as Krieger notes, tend "to view the self of a researcher as a contaminant" and the selves of those under study as irrelevant (p. 43). She argues that, although the self is culturally and socially derived to a large degree, it is essentially "an individual and inner experience" (p. 44). For Krieger, the social scientist studies the social while bringing an individual's subjectivity to the endeavor and thus constructs knowledge that is different from that of anyone else. The knowledge produced is unique because it is relational knowledge tied to the researcher's sense of self, which necessarily is different from all others.

The social construction of knowledge, as advanced by Krieger and others, stands in opposition to traditional social science, which tends to see knowledge as situated within a single reality as if knowledge is "somewhere out there" waiting to be discovered. Knowledge and truth have a quality of permanence to them and are not seen as interactive outcomes resulting from social involvement between the researcher and the researched. From traditional perspectives, knowledge exists independent of the knower; thus, the knower is largely irrelevant. Social science research, if carried out properly, will produce the same results regardless of the identity or sense of self of the researcher. Hence, one concludes that traditional social science operates based on the notion of objectivity and requires that researchers be "impersonal and unbiased because they exclude values, feelings, political intentions, aesthetic preferences, and other 'subjective' states from the conduct of their research" (Messer-Davidow, 1985, p. 12). The objective social scientist speaks authoritatively because *he* has distanced *himself* from any undue personal or political influence.

For feminists such as Sandra Harding (1986, 1987, 1991), traditional views of objectivity are founded in a conception of knowledge disconnected from social experience. Objectivity masks the connections that researchers, scientists, and theoreticians have with their subject matter. In *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, Harding (1991) suggests a view of knowledge grounded in subjectivity and social experience: "A culture's best beliefs—what it calls knowledge—are socially situated" (p. 119). She goes on to discuss "standpoint theorists" who ground research in social values and political agendas but nevertheless produce sound empirical and theoretical work. Feminist standpoint theorists "focus on gender differences, on differences between women's and men's situations which give a scientific advantage to those who can make use of the differences" (p. 120). Harding argues that standpoint theories reject *traditional* science's claim to objectivity because in a hierarchically organized

society, objectivity lends itself to maintenance of the status quo and thus is by
no means value neutral. The status quo is reinforced through objectivity by
the simple fact that to take no position is to support that which already exists.
Desmond Tutu provides a metaphor: "If you are neutral in a situation of injus-
tice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has his foot on the
tail of the mouse, and you say you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate
your neutrality" (Brown, 1984, p. 19). Feminist theorists of the mind of Krieger
and Harding would certainly agree with Archbishop Tutu.

For Harding, the unique vantage point from which women view the
world offers several advantages in the construction of knowledge. For example,
because women's lives traditionally have been devalued, they have had little
opportunity to shape knowledge claims that have been put forth. The com-
plexity and diversity of social life and of knowledge itself are therefore under-
mined, and only when the world is viewed through women's eyes will we
begin to approach its complexity. Harding explains, "Using women's lives as
grounds to criticize the dominant knowledge claims, which have been based
primarily in the lives of men in the dominant races, classes, and cultures, can
decrease the partialities and distortions in the picture of nature and social life
provided by the natural and social sciences" (1991, p. 121).

Another point made by Harding is that the oppressive conditions that
women have faced and continue to face offer them little interest in reproducing
the limited and narrow knowledge conceptions offered over the years by male-
dominated methodologies. With a healthy skepticism grounded in their own
marginality, they may be more likely to pursue new modes of knowledge con-
struction as a means to end oppressive conditions. Again, this suggests that
women might be less likely to support the status quo and reflects their lack of
investment in the social order as it presently exists. In turn, they may raise
important questions that might not otherwise be asked. "They have less to lose
by distancing themselves from the social order; thus, the perspective from their
lives can more easily generate fresh and critical analyses" (Harding, 1991, p.
126).

A related idea argued by Harding is that women come from the opposite
side of the battle of the sexes and that history tends to reveal that "the winner
tells the tale." Nancy Hartsock (1987) points out that all knowers reflect, as Karl
Marx argued, the material conditions from which they operate. Members of the
proletariat experience the world quite differently from the bourgeoisie.
Likewise, women experience the world in a different manner than do men,
and a feminist historical materialism offers valuable insights: "Like the lives of
proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a par-
ticular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which
can ground a powerful critique of the phallocentric institutions and ideology
which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy" (p. 159). Including women's

accounts of social life offers a more complete picture of the struggles any society or group has endured or continues to endure.

In my work with students involved in community service, female students have seemed more likely than their male counterparts to question fundamental aspects about society and social structure. The tendency for women to adopt more liberal or radical views in their criticism of society is a finding supported in Paul Loeb's (1994) analysis of college students. Loeb attributes this difference to the rise in the importance of feminism among college women.

Carolyn Fisher characterizes a group of women volunteers I have encountered over the years who have expressed serious reservations about a number of social and economic policies adopted by our country. Carolyn has grown frustrated with what she sees as a hyperfascination with short-term solutions to some of the lesser problems of our society, all the while big issues that may take years to solve go unaddressed. "There are all these great philosophers and theorists who are hired to advise the government, but all they ever focus on are fixing the immediate problems—the problems that are most visible. They rarely think about the deeper issues that create the problems to begin with. They don't see the lack of love and community that causes people to suffer. They focus on the abortion issue: pro-life or pro-choice. But they never address the fact that no woman wants to have an abortion in the first place. They fail to see the lack of love and caring for one another that leads people to such desperate measures."

Carolyn has plans to finish her undergraduate degree and then perhaps go to law school where she intends to "master the language of politicians" and, she hopes, be able to have an influence on their thinking as well as their actions. Other students also voiced concerns about significant structural issues that they believed warranted major change. The following comments are all from women:

> The fact that there are thousands of people living on the streets in this city—the capital of our country—says something about the priorities we as a society hold. I think it's great that we are here to help prepare meals and serve soup, but much more than that needs to be done. Every time we vote for someone who supports the status quo we guarantee that someone is going to starve and someone else is going to lose their home and have to live on these streets. We all play a part, and we can choose to contribute in a positive way or we can get in the way of progressive change.

> I don't see why so many people are resistant to rethinking what's going on in this country. It seems to me you'd have to be blind and brain dead not to see that something is tragically wrong with the way things are. Then again, maybe people do see it, but since their life is fine and dandy, what's the big deal?

> My work with low-income families has left me feeling both angry and sad at the same time. I'm sad that I cannot do more and angry at a country that allows children to live such deplorable lives. Sometimes I have the energy to join the battle to convince people and politicians to reconsider their values. At other times, I'm a weakling and I just want to lie down and go to sleep.

Some of the male students I have worked with in volunteer settings also expressed sentiments about the need for larger societal change. For example, a student from Pennsylvania State University explained some of the activities he has been involved with: "I have been working with the AIDS Project and trying to get the quilt to State College. I think the quilt has a powerful influence on people's attitudes. And we need that. I've also been involved with homeless people and trying to change some of our policies toward the economically disadvantaged in this country. I've written letters to politicians and I've joined various marches and vigils. I'm not sure how much of an impact these things have had, but I feel I got to keep trying." It did not occur to me at the time to delve into the male students' backgrounds to the degree necessary to determine whether there were experiences that might in some way have contributed to their willingness to question the status quo. I am left to ponder whether some of these men may have felt the lack of power of a nonprivileged vantage point at some time during their lives, which may have fostered a greater interest in questioning that which is.

Feminist theorists recognize that the structural arrangements of a given society contribute to the experiences of its members and the way they come to know their social worlds (Cain, 1993; Minnich, 1990). One who assumes that knowledge produced by upper- or middle-class White males is generalizable to all human experience lacks a rigorous understanding of how subjectivity frames social life as well as thought processes. One who assumes that all middle-class White males experience social life in the same manner also lacks an understanding of how varied subjectivity and human experience are. The challenge is to examine social life in light of meaningful categories such as race, class, and gender, while considering in-group differences (and intersecting differences such as race and gender), and confronting one's own subjectivity as researcher or author.

Although one's subjectivity is to be considered and used as part of the research process, this does not mean that the ideals of objectivity are to be tossed aside. Feminist inquiry involves a connective endeavor combining the researcher's subjectivity with the realities of those under study. Feminists recognize that neither objectivism nor subjectivism hold the answers, yet both may contribute to our understanding of the other and of social behavior.

From feminist theorists such as those discussed in this section, we can see that we are all subjective beings striving to understand the other—who is often

situated as the object of our inquiry and our work to construct knowledge. Feminism raises our awareness that the subject/object dualism is not so clear in real life—that we are all connected through multiple and complex cultural webs. This is why feminist methods tend to support research strategies that are highly interactive. Strategies such as naturalistic inquiry enable issues involving subjectivity and objectivity to be negotiated through ongoing dialogue between the researcher and the researched.

The point of discussing positionality is that all researchers bring their own social history, economic standing, and cultural background with them to all endeavors—including the writing of a book. For this reason it is important that my own positionality be explained in the context of this first chapter. In the first few pages I provided some insights into the economic problems my family faced when I was a child. We occupied a specific position within the economic hierarchy of our society; most often we were positioned as members of the lower class, although during other periods when my mother found work we might have achieved membership in the working class. In either case, we had little to no control over the means of production, and our material conditions were greatly dictated by others. Obviously, these experiences have shaped to a large degree the way I envision the social world of today.

Perhaps more important is the relation my family and I had to charitable workers. Because of our material conditions, we were positioned on what some might describe as the "receiving end" of charity. There were times as a child when I felt a great degree of humiliation and shame because our family needed help and was assisted by volunteers from a community church or local union. This experience has had a lasting effect on my life and is significant in understanding the sense of self I bring to this work. For example, I am somewhat recalcitrant when I engage in community service work designed to help others who may now be less fortunate than myself, at least economically speaking. It is not a reluctance to serve, but a fear of serving with the wrong attitude or intention. I sometimes ask myself: Is the service I am performing for me more than it is for someone else? Or: Will my service achieve the wrong result? Will I hurt people's feelings by reminding them that others have more material resources?

Throughout this research project I learned that the fears I have about community service are not unique to me. As the following quotations reveal, many students also struggled with mixed feelings and confused attitudes about community service:

> I'm not sure if I'm completely comfortable helping poor families. I mean, who am I that I can help make their lives better? It seems somewhat condescending for me to believe that I can somehow make a difference.

Sometimes I feel like I'm only fooling myself and that I'm really only into service so that I can help myself. I list this stuff on my resume and I feel guilty because I know it will help me get a teaching job. Is that why I do this? I know it makes me feel better about what I do in my spare time, but who am I really serving?

You can say all you want to about why college students get involved in community service and volunteerism, but frankly I think most of them and me included do this for our own benefit. It provides a sense of meaning in our lives. Little else you do in college does. I'm not sure we should feel guilty about it, like I've heard others suggest, but it does make me think twice about who's being served by all of this.

You can't help but wonder what these people [rural families in a South Carolina community] think of us. I mean, they are very grateful that we are here, but maybe they know it would hurt our feelings if they didn't act that way. I'm just not confident, I guess, with my ability to interpret the meaning of it all and whether what we're doing is right.

Involvement in community service sometimes yields more questions than answers about the self and life in general: Is the service I offer desired? How do the people I have volunteered to serve think of me? Am I seen as an intruder in their lives? Am I welcome in their homes? These are all questions that students, as well as I, tended to bring to our community service work. Many of these questions will surface throughout this text as I explore student involvement in various service projects.

In addition to the personal background about my own life that I share in this text is the theoretical and political quality I bring to my research and writing. For me, all writing and theorizing are political. Everything either supports the status quo or suggests some sort of transformation. In this regard, I believe in the classic Marxian imperative: "to understand the world in order to change it." But such a belief implies an overarching philosophical view of what ought to be. An idealized vision of social life is needed. This overarching philosophy will be spelled out more clearly in chapters 2 and 3. For now, I turn to a discussion of the concept of the self as delineated by symbolic interactionists.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM
AND MEAD'S SOCIAL SELF

The notion of the self discussed in this book is deeply indebted to George Herbert Mead's (1934) social theory of the self, largely expressed in his famous

Social Psychology course taught at the University of Chicago from the early 1900s to 1930. Mead wrote very little but thought very much. If it were not for the foresight of some of his students, who recorded his lectures during the latter half of the 1920s, much of his work might have been lost, except for what was stored in the minds of those students fortunate enough to have had personal contact with Mead and who were enriched by his teachings.

Mead's view reflects the foundations of social psychology in that he explains "the conduct of the individual in terms of the organized conduct of the social group, rather than to account for the organized conduct of the social group in terms of the conduct of the separate individuals belonging to it" (1934, p. 7). Mead does not imply that the internal workings of the mind, of the individual, are not also important to understanding human behavior: "[Social psychology] is not behavioristic in the sense of ignoring the inner experience of the individual—the inner phase of that process or activity. On the contrary, it is particularly concerned with the rise of such experience within the process as a whole. It simply works from the outside to the inside instead of from the inside to the outside . . . in its endeavor to determine how such experience does arise within the process" (pp. 7–8).

Mead's lectures in social psychology inspired the work of sociologists such as Herbert Blumer, Everett Hughes, and William I. Thomas, who went on to become some of the most renowned members of the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism (House, 1977). Later, Norman Denzin played a key role in delineating symbolic interactionism when he outlined three basic assumptions of an interactionist perspective. First, Denzin argued that understanding reality involves a social process because interactions with others are the means by which one makes sense of social life. "Interacting individuals produce and define their own definitions of situations" (1989, p. 5). Second, people engage in self-reflexive behavior and are capable of guiding their own behavior and the behavior of others. Third, to create their own definitions of the situation and to align self-definitions with those of others requires people to interact with one another in an ongoing basis. Denzin described ongoing social interaction as "emergent, negotiated, often unpredictable . . . [and] symbolic because it involves the manipulation of symbols, words, meanings, and languages" (p. 5).

How individuals interpret events and interactions with others as part of the process of creating meaning and constructing the self is central to the work of symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1962, 1969). As Denzin noted, "Any theory of society must ultimately answer the question, 'How do selves develop out of the interaction process?'" (1977, p. 114). The *process* of interaction is key. For Denzin, the self is "not a thing, but a process, the self is consciousness conscious of itself" (1987, p. 289). An action taken by another, or something indicated in the context of a discussion, in many respects is not as important as is *how another individual gives meaning to that action or indication.* The impor-

tance the individual plays in the process of sense making within a social context calls attention to the classic proposition framing much of symbolic interactionism and known as the Thomas Theorem: "Situations defined as real are real in their consequences," or as William I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas originally noted in their classic sociological work *The Child in America*, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (1928, p. 572).

Let us return to Mead and his notion of the self. 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. Language is essential to the development of the self as it serves as the central vehicle for communication within the interactional context. 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. As Mead noted in his lectures of 1914: "The self that answers to the 'me' arises out of the attitude of others toward the individual. Our view of the self, so far as the form is concerned, is the individual as we conceive him to exist in the minds of other members of the group. This is the 'me.' The 'I' is the speaker over against the one spoken to, but the attention is given to the other. If we cannot turn the attention back to the self without taking the attitude of the other, we cannot immediately view ourselves" (1982, p. 92).

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 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" (1934, p. 140).

Oftentimes, the other is imagined in our minds as the "generalized other," projecting general cultural understandings of a society or social group with sets of expectations for behavior. Once the generalized other becomes part of one's repertoire, we can envision someone in solitary confinement further developing a sense of self as the individual is now able to imagine himself or herself in interaction with others, and able to continually take the role of the other by carrying on a personal conversation in one's mind.

At other times, however, the other is a specific individual (a particular other) with whom we may be interacting or with whom we imagine ourselves to be interacting. Obviously, social interaction is crucial to Mead's view of the development of the self: "It is impossible for the self to develop outside of social experience" (1934, p. 140). As Michael Schwalbe elaborated, "The thinking individual is thus thoroughly social; in fact, there could be no individual thought at all if not for the existence of communal life based on the creation and use of symbols" (1991, p. 283). Unless we can take the role of the other and view the "I" who is behaving as the "me" once it becomes the object of our examination, we cannot develop a sense of self. Otherwise, we are only organisms acting without reflection.

Mead's view of the self is indebted to the early psychological writings of William James (1890) and the "looking glass self" delineated by Charles Horton Cooley (1902), who suggested that an individual's self-conception derives from the responses of others mirrored back to the individual. Cooley stated, "As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it" (p. 184). This is the same general perspective brought to bear on the work of Erving Goffman (1959) when he described social life as a series of theatrical performances involving impression management through a reflective "presentation of the self." One cannot help but think of William Shakespeare's oft-quoted passage from *As You Like It* (Act V): "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women are merely players."

A symbolic interactionist conceptualization of the self has much utility for making sense of students' self-explorations through community service. First, service involves a great deal of interaction between the self and the other. Service demands that students meet community members as part of identifying various needs and actions to be taken. Second, because of the caring context of

community service, students often get positive feelings reflected back to them that intuition tells us ought to have an effect on students' sense of self. For example, two students discussed their involvement in service and the positive feelings derived from their interactions with community members: "I didn't feel that what I did was that big a deal, but the woman whose house we painted sure did. She was so gracious and thankful to us. I couldn't help but feel very good about the whole experience." And a second student commented, "Volunteer work is great. You get so much back from the people you help. To see kids smile at me and look up to me because I've helped them in some small way is an incredible feeling."

A rather philosophical student named George Watkins, who was interviewed as part of my research, offered some insights that tend to support interactionist conceptions of the self and the other. George talked about the week he spent on Johns Island, South Carolina, doing community service work and what he learned about and from others: "I realized how much people learn by interpreting signals from others. It's so obvious in a situation like this—where you're working with people you hardly know. People learn so much without decisively learning it. Most of what I learned about people is obscure and circuitous. . . . People hide things from people, but they see through the masks. They see things you don't want them to see. And I learned about initiation and taking a first step. There's this understood fakeness. You're supposed to be nice. When you're getting to know someone. You're not supposed to barge right up to someone. But, by making the first step obtrusively, you by-pass a lot of the crap. It seems unnatural, but it's efficient. It's not good or bad, just efficient. I never thought I'd learn about thirty people this way in my normal life. Living with people has something to do with it. There's the 'fronts thing' that is difficult to maintain when you live with people. They get dirty and grungy. You get a much broader perspective of a person."

The comments from George appear to be those of a symbolic interactionist in the making. He alludes to the importance symbols play and the need to interpret or "read" others. He also mentions the games individuals enact as part of meeting new people when he discusses the "fronts thing." Although he suggests that a more obtrusive style involving less managed behaviors may be more efficient, he nonetheless highlights the reality that many of us find ourselves existing within as we give thought to how we might appear or desire to appear to others. This is the sort of behavior and thinking that Goffman (1959) devoted much of his analyses to and which he discussed in terms of a theory of dramaturgy. In the conclusion to his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman summarized his perspective:

> In this [book], the individual was divided by implication into two basic parts: he was viewed as a performer, a harried fabricator of impressions

> involved in the all-too-human task of staging a performance; he was
> viewed as a character, a figure, typically a fine one, whose spirit, strength,
> and other sterling qualities the performance was designed to evoke. The
> attributes of a performer and the attributes of a character are of a different
> order, quite basically so, yet both sets have their meaning in terms of
> the show that must go on. (p. 252)

Goffman went on to add, "The self, then, as performed character, is not an
organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born,
to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that
is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will
be credited or discredited" (pp. 252–53).

Although Goffman's theory of dramaturgy tends to portray people as
somewhat contrived—through his depiction of individuals engaged in interac-
tion as preoccupied with impression management—his perspective taken as a
whole offers some basic insights about how the self is formed and reformed
within the social context that to Goffman parallels the stage.

The work of Goffman, as well as the comments from George Watkins,
reinforces Mead's contention that the self is best explained not as a structure
(which tends to be the Freudian position), but as a process. Mead rejected the
views of scholars who identify the self with the ego, or with an organized body
of needs or motives. For Mead, the self is not an extension or part of one's per-
sonality. Nor is it the internalized norms and values one holds. To think of the
self in a structural manner is to miss the ongoing and reflexive process involved
in constituting the self. Blumer (1969) offered clarification when he argued
that for a psychological structure to be a self it must be able to act upon and
respond to itself. "Otherwise, it is merely an organization awaiting activation
and release without exercising any effect on itself or on its operation. This
marks the crucial weakness or inadequacy of the many schemes . . . which
misguidingly associate the self with some kind of psychological or personality
structure. For example, the ego, as such, is not a self; it would be a self only by
becoming reflexive, that is to say, acting toward or on itself" (p. 63).

As I have already noted, Mead's conception of the self is tied to the
acquisition and management of language and meaning. Gregory Stone elabo-
rated on Mead's position: "The emergence of the self in society is inextricably
linked to the expansion and consolidation of personal communication as the
child participates in and successively generalizes an ever widening universe of
discourse—that set of social relations that is mobilized by the symbols the
child acquires" (1962, p. 104). The process for Mead involves two stages
beginning in early childhood: the play stage and the game stage. Stone later
suggested a third stage called "pre-play"—the phase involving rudimentary
language acquisition.

There are some significant similarities in how symbolic interactionists and feminists treat the self. Both tend to see the self as a "social self" strongly bound to others and forming through social relations. However, there are some major differences as well. For example, in his analysis of games and how the self develops from such activities, Mead pointed out that the child begins to develop a sense of rules and learns how such rules shape social relations. He cited the example of a baseball game in which the developing child must learn to take the role of various "others" (both teammates and opponents) involved in the complex drama that is baseball. Here perhaps Mead fails to take into account that boys and girls often play different types of games and that boys' games may be more competitive and last significantly longer than games adopted by girls. This and other related ideas have been pointed out by Janet Lever, who also noted the different manner in which girls and boys handle disputes during games: "In the gravest debates, the final word was always to 'repeat the play,' generally followed by a chorus of 'cheaters proof'. . . . Boys seemed to enjoy the legal debates every bit as much as the game itself. Even players who were marginal because of lesser skills or size took equal part in these recurring squabbles" (1976, p. 482). By contrast, conflict among girls usually means that "the game breaks up, and little effort is made to resolve the problem" (p. 483). It seems that girls would rather maintain positive feelings for one another than enter into heated debate to resolve disputes. This finding is compatible with the research of Nancy Chodorow (1974, 1978) and Carol Gilligan (1979, 1982) who argued that interactions among girls (and women) tend to focus more on maintaining relationships than settling disputes by appealing to issues of justice or fairness (as boys and men tend to do). The work of feminists suggests that symbolic interactionists may have overgeneralized the development of the self across both genders, when in fact men and women develop a sense of self through slightly different routes. I return to this issue in chapter 2.

Although there are many appealing aspects to Mead's explanation of the social self, there are some shortcomings as well. First, whereas Mead and symbolic interactionists in general highlight the self as a process, it also seems logical at times to speak of the self as a structure—as something that exists and has a remote degree of permanence attached to a complex social history. Otherwise, how can I speak of having a sense of self if it is entirely a process? I like to think of the self as something I can discuss as an object of a conversation (albeit a moving object), while at the same time recognizing that the self is formed through a dynamic, highly interactive process.

A second shortcoming of Mead's theory is the apparent lack of agency or individuation of the self. The social context seems so powerful from Mead's perspective that one is left to wonder what makes us each unique. Denzin spoke to this issue: "Many sociological descriptions of the self are inherently

debunking. They foster a view of self as being totally socially constructed. The self is viewed as a precarious entity fashioned through social discourse. There is no face behind its various masks. So too, morals are seen relativistically and ritualistically. They are reduced to roles and performances and the institutions wherein they take place" (1985, p. 233). Denzin's point is well taken. How can the self be socially constructed and at the same have some psychologically oriented qualities that make individuality possible? The solution lies in how the "I" of Mead's theory is to be understood. We not only must envision the "I" as a response to reflections derived from situating oneself as the object (the "me"), but we should also understand the "I" as representing some of those complex, difficult-to-explain aspects of personality that make one's actions different from another's despite similar social histories. In this way, we can envision the self as having agency and thus being capable of breaking away from social norms and customs. In other words, we are capable of removing the masks at times and stepping away from a socially staged drama in an effort to write our own script. This is important in understanding the lives of community activists such as Carolyn Fisher and Samuel Frias, as well as other student volunteers we will meet throughout this text.

Up to this point, I have spent a good deal of time situating the self and discussing the role this concept plays as I seek to make sense of students' lives. What might be helpful at this point is to explain my study in greater detail and outline some of the primary methods used for collecting data about students.

THE METHODOLOGY

This book represents my effort to break away from the traditional strategies of research and data presentation. As an academic who is fully socialized to the boredom that sometimes is academe, I often fall back on numerous strategies for putting readers to sleep. I, like others before me, tend to rely on traditional antiquated structures that organize our narratives into neat compartments labeled with such terms as "the review of literature," or "research design," or "findings." As much as possible, I want to avoid compartmentalizing this text as I attempt to create a more integrated narrative. By the same token, I understand that some readers have a desire to review a clearly articulated discussion of how the data were collected and analyzed.

The data for this book were derived from six 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 range 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 book. 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 objective was as a "volunteer" and not as a "researcher"; the data I collected was more or less an outgrowth of the community service experience and was not the central objective. My comments here are not meant to shortchange the research strategy employed, but are intended simply to clarify for the reader the context of my interactions and involvement with the student volunteers.

The research methodology used in this study borrows to a large degree from what is generally described as "naturalistic inquiry." Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba used several axioms to describe the naturalistic paradigm: (1) reality is multiplicitous and socially constructed and therefore must be examined holistically; (2) the researcher and the research subject interact to influence one another; hence, the knower and known are inseparable; (3) the aim of inquiry is to develop an interpretive understanding of social experience; (4) because social phenomena are highly interactive, cause and effect are difficult to ascertain; and (5) the various choices made by researchers reflect the values they hold (1985, pp. 37–38).

Lincoln and Guba went on to argue that the naturalistic paradigm strongly leans toward qualitative methods because they are more flexible in addressing multiple realities, offer greater insight into the transaction between the inquirer and the object(s) of study, and make assessing the mitigating role of the inquirer easier. From their perspective, the researcher is far from a mere bystander and instead actively engages research participants in the creation of meaning.

The naturalistic setting also has been discussed by Norman Denzin who described "naturalistic interactionism" and suggested that such a method "involves the studied commitment to actively enter the worlds of interacting individuals" (1989, p. 7). Additionally, Denzin emphasized that "because symbols, meaning, and definitions are forged into self-definitions and attitudes, the reflective nature of selfhood must be captured" (p. 8). Denzin's points are central concerns of my study as I seek to understand students' explorations of the self in the social context of community service.

Based on the methodological strategies of qualitative inquiry, data were collected using a variety of techniques, including formal and informal interviews, surveys, participant observation, and document analysis. The principal documents used as a source of data were journals students kept as part of their community service experience. In the six-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 major-
ity (approximately 80 percent) of the undergraduates were traditional-aged
students in the range of 18 to 23 years old. Females represented approximately
60 percent of the sample, and in terms of race, the vast majority were Caucasian
students (roughly 85 percent), with African Americans constituting the largest
minority group—about 8 to 10 percent of the overall group.

The small percentage of African American student volunteers reflects
the fact that all three universities from which the students came have rather
small percentages of African American students. A second factor is the tendency
for many African American students to get involved in volunteer work through
service-oriented Black fraternities and sororities. This may limit African
American student participation in campus-wide service projects (Bulger, 1995).
In any case, the fact that the students participating in the service activities
examined in this study were predominantly White, combined with the fact that
the majority of community members whom they served were African
Americans, raises an important concern about how racial differences might
influence the nature of community service interactions. This concern will be
addressed at various points throughout this text.

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 analyzed using the kind of cultural analy-
sis suggested in the work of Renato Rosaldo (1989) and Clifford Geertz (1973),
involving a systematic interrogation of textual data that seeks to understand
how research participants create meaning. Geertz maintained that cultural
analysis is not a scientific strategy designed to discover some ultimate schema
of facts, but instead is more of an interpretive adventure in search of meaning.
Such a process involves "guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and
drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses" (p. 20). And Rosaldo
argued that cultural study (ethnography) is more about "making the familiar
strange and the strange familiar" than it is about uncovering the "brute timeless
facts of nature" (p. 39). Viewed in this light, cultural analysis may be seen as a
process of making sense of how others make sense, a process that necessarily
involves the researcher as an active participant in the construction of meaning.
This is compatible with my earlier discussion of positionality and feminist
contentions arguing that the researcher or author is an integral part of knowl-
edge construction.

Cultural or interpretive analysis involves identifying themes around
which data may be organized and rejects the type of quantification of textual
data often associated with content analysis. To count the number of times an
action was taken or the number of times a comment was made is antithetical to
an *interpretive process.* For an interpretivist, understanding the context of

behavior is just as important as understanding what specifically was said or done. In other words, meaning is created through both the content and the context. For example, a lover may say to his or her partner a thousand times "I love you" as they embrace. However, that same lover may say "I'm leaving you" only one time as he or she walks out the door, forever. Clearly, both phrases have meaning, but if we depend on a strict quantified analysis, the "I love you's" count one thousand and the "I'm leaving you's" are counted only once. Obviously, there is more to making sense of social interaction than counting the "I love you's."

Based on an interpretive analysis of the data, several key themes were identified. These themes form the basis for chapters 4 through 7 and relate to the following general topics: the implications of working with and in service to others ("Otherness"—chapter 4), a need to understand community service as a mutual activity between the "doer" and the "done to" ("Mutuality"—chapter 5), the central role that community plays in students' experiences of community service ("Community Building"—chapter 6), and the significance of combining action and reflection as part of community service efforts ("Action/Reflection"— chapter 7).

This work suggests a moral dimension in that it supports a perspective that community service is something that *ought* to be considered as a fundamental aspect of higher learning. Such a view rejects the traditional positivists' claim that true social science is a neutral activity and is apolitical. Mary Savage elaborated, "The positivist tradition of research is often supported by conventions that border on 'scientism' and that obscure the fact that research, like all social life, is a kind of praxis, action with a political moral dimension" (1988, p. 6). By "scientism," Savage referred to the notion that formalized method exemplified by the classic experimental design "yields truth or verifiable fact, that reality may be described objectively" (p. 6). As I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this book involves positioning the author within the research and the writing. From such a perspective, knowledge is seen to be relationally situated within the experiences of the observer and the individuals under study. Hence, any discussion of reality must involve some type of interactional process between the researcher and the researched. Lincoln and Guba discussed such an attempt as "member checks," which they defined as, "the process of continuous, informal testing of information by soliciting reactions of respondents to the investigator's reconstruction of what he or she has been told or otherwise found out" (1986, p. 77). In the case of this study, a concern for adequate member checks involved two processes. First, the data collection itself was a participatory and highly interactive endeavor involving students' reflection and discussion about their experiences working in community settings. Second, several students acted as readers of significant portions of this text

and in turn provided feedback about its content. This feedback formed the basis for a dialogue between the researcher and research participants and served to reshape both the findings and the narrative.

THE COLLEGIATE CONTEXT

The college years are key times for the development of a sense of self because so many decisions about one's future and past come together and so much thought and learning typically are given to identity matters. For example, a student I met on a service project in South Carolina talked about why she chose to participate: "I've always done service work. During my freshman year at the 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. This project was a chance for me 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" herself. For her, community service provides an opportunity to become more other-focused and examine her life from a reflective, external position, through the eyes of another. In many ways, she highlights the kinds of developmental struggles students often face during the college years—developmental outcomes that have attracted a great deal of attention over the past twenty-five years (Astin, 1979, 1993; Feldman, 1972; Feldman & Newcomb, 1970; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

A set of outcomes that has long concerned higher education faculty and practitioners is the idea of developing students as whole persons. A more holistic view of students is rooted in the long history of liberal education and the role of schools and universities in preparing citizens. John Dewey (1916) spoke to this concern when he argued that a democratic society is dependent upon an educated citizenry capable of making informed choices and actively participating in community, regional, and national governance. Schools have a key role to play in the development of students as citizens who are able to make such informed choices. And, of course, many of the choices that an educated citizenry must make involve matters of moral significance and hence necessitate moral education of some sort. Dewey's point is taken up by Pearl Oliner and Samuel Oliner in *Toward a Caring Society* when they highlight the innovative quality of Dewey's thinking:

> That virtue was complex and required thoughtful consideration was not a new idea, of course; philosophers had so argued for centuries. What *was* new was the idea that the 'common man' could think in this way; if that

were not the case, then democracy itself seemed doomed to failure. As
many prominent thinkers interpreted it, authorities had the responsibility
to provide a social climate where reasoning and reflecting about democ-
ratic community life could occur, and the place to begin was in the
schools. (1995, p. 55)

Whereas liberal views of higher learning and the curriculum have long
stressed the development of students as whole persons, the specific field of
student affairs has been primarily charged with this massive undertaking, and a
whole body of literature has sprung up around the developmental challenges
college students face (Chickering, 1969; Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1975; Perry,
1970; Sanford, 1956, 1967; Strange, 1994; Upcraft & Moore, 1990).
Oftentimes, however, issues of vocational, intellectual, and emotional devel-
opment have taken precedence over concerns associated with developing a
sense of community- or civic-mindedness. Somewhere in the chasm between
faculty work and student affairs practice, encouraging students to develop the
sense of community-mindedness necessary for democracy to thrive has been
lost. A goal of this book is to speak to this issue and to how higher learning
might reconsider the development of students as caring and community-ori-
ented citizens. Part of the solution clearly involves not only closing the chasm
between faculty and student affairs professionals, but also the division between
"in-class" and "out-of-class" student experiences, as well as the separation of
practical and academic knowledge. One presumption behind this book is that
involving students in community service work ought to be a concern of both
faculty and student affairs professionals, and that such activities should be sit-
uated not simply as out-of-class learning but as an extension of the classroom
into the "real world." In this light, academic and practical knowledge may be
integrated as students struggle to solve important social problems through
action and reflection.

Understanding the unique qualities and social dynamics of the college
student experience (often described as the "collegiate experience") is helpful in
making sense of this text and the role community service plays in the broader
goals of higher learning. Consequently, various aspects of the college student
experience need to be addressed.

The vast majority of students in this study are of traditional college-
going age (18 to 23). For many traditional-age students, the college years are a
rite of passage to adulthood. They are a time of great decision making and
personal change. Freedom from parents and high school social networks not
only brings about increased autonomy, it also results in many responsibilities
and personal decisions that must be weighed (Chickering, 1969). In some
cases, students consider relationships for the first time in a serious manner
(Moffatt, 1989). Career decisions also weigh heavily on the minds of most tra-

ditional-age college students (Erikson, 1968). Notions of a personal philosophy, religion, and lifestyle all come to the forefront (Parks, 1986; Perry, 1970). Many students deal squarely with issues of sexual identity during their college attendance (D'Augelli, 1991; Rhoads, 1994). Arguably, nearly every decision faced during the college years pertains in one way or another to issues of identity. Although identity is constantly changing, there is perhaps no other period of time when it is challenged to a greater degree.

In Michael Moffatt's anthropological account of undergraduate life at Rutgers University, "College as the students saw it was . . . about coming of age. It was where you went to break away from home, to learn responsibility and maturity, and to do some growing up. College was about being on your own, about autonomy, about freedom from the authority of adults, however benign their intentions" (1989, p. 28). But, as Moffatt noted, college was about having fun, too—"unique forms of peer-group fun—before, in student conceptions, the grayer actualities of adult life in the real world begin to close in on you" (pp. 28–29). Moffatt's portrait of students "coming of age" is insightful but at the same time raises the issue of how college students should be classified in terms of their maturity level. I do not care to enter the debate about whether traditional-age college students are adults or are "coming of age" as adults; like nearly all linear conceptions of development, the category of "adult" obscures the reality that change often varies dramatically across individuals. What is important here is that both traditional and nontraditional students face many crossroads during the college years. And, as individuals at significant decision-making points in their lives, they make for interesting observation and analysis.

But college life is much more than the fun and silliness often depicted in Moffatt's portrait of college students and American culture. For example, Sharon Parks discussed the serious challenge students often face in developing their own faith understandings and a spiritual sense of self: "Young adults in higher education quickly don the trappings of adulthood—an aura of independence, a measure of responsibility for self, and cultural permission for participation in all adult behaviors. But the young adult is still in formation, still engaged in the activity of composing a self, world, and 'God'. . . . The young adult is searching for a worthy faith" (1986, p. 133). As the musicians Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young once wrote, it seems "everyone must have a code they live by." Developing a clearer sense of one's spirituality or a philosophy about life—a code to live by—is another of those challenges that seem to be more psychologically salient during the college years. My contention throughout this work is that community service is an activity that brings students into a direct and significant relationship with others, and thus challenges students to consider a variety of significant issues about the self, such as a code to live by. And, although a number of researchers and authors,

such as Moffatt and Parks, situate the emerging sense of self college students reveal at the transition between immaturity and maturity, or adolescence and adulthood, it is hard for me to envision many of the serious-minded students who commit to serving others as anything but mature adults. After all, if change is a lifelong process, it seems to me that complete maturity occurs only when we are six feet under.

In *Generation at the Crossroads*, Paul Loeb (1994) discussed the much maligned students of the late 1970s through the early 1990s, often described as the "me" generation or more recently a generation of "slackers." As Loeb pointed out, these students have been attacked on many fronts. From Allan Bloom's (1987) suggestion that students are self-indulgent, isolated, ignorant, and in need of, as Loeb stated in summarizing Bloom's point, "a stiff dose of the classics" (p. 2), to E. D. Hirsch's (1987) criticism of their cultural knowledge and ability to communicate effectively in today's world, to Dinesh D'Souza's (1991) warnings about zealous campus radicals whose commitments to equal opportunity threaten academic excellence, today's students clearly have attracted the wrath of many a writer. However, Loeb was quick to point out that these students have "come of age under the sway of political, cultural, and economic currents that convinced citizens in general to seek personal well-being over a common social good" (p. 3). Additionally, Loeb maintained that today's students work more hours, graduate with greater debts, and are less likely to find employment related to their major than students of twenty years ago. It is hardly surprising that many of today's students are oriented toward their own career concerns and getting ahead in the world or, to the contrary, have become disenchanted and tuned out.

Nonetheless, many students, often marginalized on their own campuses, have heeded the call to broader social concerns and have become involved in campus activism and community service. Loeb described a number of student groups who have become actively engaged in national, regional, and local concerns. For example, he discussed the Greeks for Peace movement at the University of Michigan, in which students organized protests over United States interference in foreign countries. He also called attention to the student strikes at City University of New York over tuition hikes that threatened educational accessibility for low-income students. And the work of students involved in volunteerism in conjunction with the Campus Opportunity Outreach League has grown significantly over the past ten years. The questioning, protests, and community service commitments of students described by Loeb challenge those who envision students as immature, apathetic, uninvolved, and disengaged slackers. As Loeb argued, the activists pose a direct challenge to traditional sources of power within American society. It is not surprising that they have faced so much resistance.