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We Could Be Heroes: The Case for an Affective Model in Service Learning

They choose their words carefully; they turn away or lose faith instead of confronting or forcefully indicting systems; they employ a well-honed, cool, detached skepticism in their discussions and are well aware that this uncontested skepticism is welcomed in contemporary university culture as a sign of intellect.

—*The Wingspread Statement on Student Civic Engagement*

The discourse of emotion is our primary education.

—Lynn Worsham

In rhetoric and composition, various scholars identify (or are identified) with particular service-learning models, though there's been little effort in the field to trace the relationships among them<sup>1</sup>. More often discussions aim to develop a more perfect model for the citizen. These models inform various pedagogies. In the writing classroom, these pedagogies inspire some instructors to valorize or vilify students based on how each student demonstrates a particular attitude toward "ways of identifying and addressing problems, and long-term visions of individual and community transformation" (Morton 21). Can we imagine alternatives where the instructor works with rather than against students' attitudes toward the world?

In addressing this question, one might begin by describing where service-learning models overlap or diverge, where they come together and where they carry out, what Lynn Worsham calls, pedagogic violence on one another. According to Worsham, pedagogy binds "each individual to the social world [despite] a complex and often contradictory affective life that remains...just beyond the horizon of semantic availability" (217). A pedagogy enforces a limited worldview; things that it can't neatly account for or control through discourse get left out, specifically emotion. Worsham argues for more attention to the emotions that undergird pedagogies because pedagogies lead to disciplinary violence when instructors disregard emotion. An attention to such violence necessitates that service-learning instructors examine how a particular pedagogy creates only one "kind of individual whose affective organization best supports the [existing] social order," i.e., the order reflected in the classroom (225). Pedagogies privilege rationality and cognitive engagement over emotion and affective engagement. In rhetoric and composition, service-learning models characterize the good citizen similarly. Each model demands that the good citizen perform particular types of service and that he/she respond to service in specific ways. While there's some danger in perpetuating pedagogic violence by delimiting these models, this paper does not provide taxonomy. Instead, it traces the ways charity, social change, and outcomes models characterize the good citizen through the rational activity of individuals. I attempt to show

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<sup>1</sup> For a notable exception, see Deans' *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition*. While he deals explicitly with composition, Deans' derives his taxonomy from Morton's three community service paradigms: charity, project, and social change. Because Deans completely ignores charity and conflates the project and social-change paradigms, this paper limits discussion of his work.

what these models leave out. In that sense, the descriptions do not attempt to stabilize difference, but illustrate how existing models have lost their explanatory power in the face of difference.

This goal runs contrary to charity v. social change arguments initiated in some of the earliest articles on service learning by rhetoric and composition scholars, e.g., Bruce Herzberg's "Community Service and Critical Teaching" published in 1994. If these articles have a goal, then it is to demonstrate difference in order to explain how one service-learning model and definition of citizenship outshines the others. For Herzberg, successful service and successful citizens are synonymous, and they include but extend beyond "personal acts of charity" (317). Only efforts that aim to transform the social order "belong in the composition classroom" (317). Herzberg's article establishes a tried and true tactic for service-learning scholars in the field—when in doubt, chastise charity. The charity model offers "direct service...where the control of the service remains with the provider" (Morton 22). Herzberg and others argue that the provider or server feels good about his/her service because of asymmetric power relations inherent in charitable relationships. The charity model rests on a weak or even destructive notion of citizenship regardless of whether the service changes or improves anything, including the relationships among those involved. It breeds superiority in the server and laziness in the individual served. By implication, participants in a charity model are characterized as emotionally or cognitively deficient. They "lack social imagination" and are incapable of analyzing the world (Herzberg 317). Their affective deficiencies represent cognitive ones, and these deficiencies render them impotent in the (social) world. Unable to perform socially, charity functions only for the personal gratification of the server/served, and few scholars are willing to defend it. However, some scholars attempt to bridge the divide between charity and other models. For example, James Dubinsky draws on the work of Classical rhetors in order to address the "moral purpose" underlying service learning (61). Because arguments about its moral or ethical character draw from emotion as much as metaphysics, Dubinsky alludes to service's affective dimensions. Still, scholars are unwilling to cross this blurry line. The rhetoric of participatory democracy offers the discipline a way to evade such discussions. Dubinsky recasts moral purpose as "civic idealism" (62). The path to virtue is paved with good citizenship rather than good feelings or intentions.

Champions of social change represent their service model as the spirit of participatory democracy. Proponents of this model have controlled perceptions of service learning since the field's earliest investments. They view service as social process rather than an individual act and strive to bring real-world problems into the composition classroom. Such perspectives reflect the social turn in composition. Scholars devoted to such a model are "committed to critical literacy or cultural studies" (Deans 9). The social-change model offers two approaches to service, both of which stem from the idea that its impact needs to extend beyond the one-on-one relationships that characterize charity. In its most idealistic form, social change attempts to empower the powerless through community organizing efforts and leveraging institutional power to draw attention to injustice. In more pragmatic efforts, instructors develop projects where composition students write *with*, *for*, and *about* nonacademic communities (17). In either the empowerment or project approach, instructors aim to get students to develop a "critical interpretation of cultural phenomena" (9).

The social-change model depicts service as advocacy, though it is alternately known as community-based work, community literacy, action research, and academic outreach

(Deans 10). "Avoid[ing] the precarious server/served relationship" represents an "abiding ethical question" that binds seemingly disparate notions of advocacy (22). Such arguments demonstrate the talking points of the social-change model because, in the classroom, advocacy means that the instructor runs the show. Often he/she determines the community partner and course readings and materials, leads class discussions, and dictates the type and amount of work students carry out *with*, *for*, and *in* the community. Such a model raises questions about who advocates for whom and to what end.

The instructor adheres the classroom to the community and applies civic and academic pressure to the disparate pieces that he/she holds together. Under such pressure, students often rely on arguments of personal and emotional growth when reflecting on their work (Morton 25). When scholars chastise charity, often they aren't referring to other scholars in the field. They're referring to comments from students in their courses. The social-change model exhibits an extreme propensity for pedagogic violence because it can offer the instructor complete control over students. The instructor can justify taking control over and responsibility for a student's cognitive and affective development in an attempt to imbue the student with a critical consciousness. Under the banner of social change, some instructors advocate a particular definition for citizenship and approach to participatory democracy. The service-learning classroom provides a site where such instructors can more efficiently mold students into good citizens than in the traditional classroom. When students demonstrate continued attachment to discourses associated with rival service-learning models, these sentiments mark failure. The student failed to move beyond charity, and the instructor failed to impart a sense of social responsibility or civic duty in the student. Pointing out the dangers of the social-change model doesn't negate the fact that the charity model poses its own risks. But, as stated previously, it's difficult to trace these risks through service-learning scholarship because scholars don't really deal with charity. They represent it as a sort of pathetic boogeymen whose didactic tales scares naive children. Regardless, the limitations or risks associated with charity and social-change models might be better understood as evidence that service is an experience. As such, it offers lessons that cannot be measured only through cognitive achievements that correspond to a rubric for good citizenship.

Over the past decade, some scholars who support the project-based approach have tried to curb the excesses of the social-change model. They criticize the empowerment approach because it does not offer "strategies for change beyond resisting dominant discourse practices" (Peck, Flower, and Higgins 205). These critics redefine service around an attention to product, and they desire to assess the public effects of rhetoric as something more than a persuasive power among citizens: "rhetoric is more than a tool to exercise power. It is a form of power, itself" (Coogan 670). Under arguments for a materialist rhetoric, David Coogan extends an outcomes model for service learning. Coogan "leaves the revolution to the revolutionaries" (690), a move he claims to have learned from Ellen Cushman. Cushman supports a similar conception: service learning need not be assessed "on the scale of collective action, or sweeping social upheavals," but by taking into account "the ways in which people use language and literacy to challenge and alter the circumstances of daily life" (12).

An outcomes model attempts to understand and reflect on the individual's position in a democratic society through the deroutinization of day-to-day interactions (12-3). Without succumbing to the "missionary-activism" of charity or the revolutionary fervor of social change, Coogan and Cushman acknowledge "a civic duty to empower people with our positions, a type of leftist stealing from the rich to give to the poor" (14). Despite positioning

itself as a rival to social change's project approach, an outcomes model supports similar notions. The rhetor advocates in the name and interests of the powerless. The main differences between the two models reflect the magnitude and measurability of the change desired. Coogan and Cushman focus on one-on-one interactions or small, but measurable change. In this sense, an outcomes model bridges charity with social change while at the same time negating both. Individual changes do not extend to the affective responses offered through charity. In fact, Coogan poses institutional rather than individual change as the measure of success for this model. But, this bifurcation presents certain problems.

If institutions are rhetorical constructions that shape relationships among individuals<sup>2</sup>, then Coogan's measures for assessing change exhibit a profound skepticism toward the individual. He questions whether a change in consciousness or character can radiate throughout institutions and affect structural change. Such skepticism could lead to top-down models of rhetorical work and good citizenship, and move the rhetor from advocate for democracy to *the* harbinger of democracy. In this schema, the rhetor represents the only individual with any power in a participatory democracy. Institutional change occurs when the rhetor exercises power over the institution of which he/she is a part. Still, such assessments of change necessarily begin with the individual. However, he depicts individual change as the rational exercise of rhetorical power. Coogan's model of rhetorical power becomes clear when he describes service learning: it "offers rhetoricians a unique opportunity to *discover* the arguments that already exist in communities we wish to serve; *analyze* the effectiveness of those arguments; collaboratively *produce* viable alternatives with community partners; and *assess* the impact of our interventions" (emphasis in original, 668).

This schema demonstrates that the difference between charity's "missionary activism" and the outcomes model's "deroutinization" is one of attachment. This attachment relates to how each model defines civic responsibility. For the charity model, civic responsibility is a personal duty that is often associated with religious or moral beliefs. It binds individuals together. For the outcomes model, civic responsibility is a social duty endemic to particular people in a democratic society. It is the duty of those with institutional power to exercise that power in ways that he/she deems democratic. Unfortunately, proponents of an outcomes model ignore the operative word that crops up in both definitions: duty. Duty has moral and idealistic connotations as well as demanding practical, reasoned action. By ignoring various dimensions to duty, the outcomes model pits metaphysical morality against rational democracy based on affective and cognitive attachments to the notion of rhetorical power. This model sheds all pretenses toward an external and generalizable rubric for assessing student work and reframes assessment as ping ponging between the extreme rationality and extreme emotions of Robin Hood. The service-learning course becomes a process of initiation where a student, who aspires toward good citizenship, hopes to be adopted into the fold as one of the merry men.

Each service-learning model constructs citizenship in a particular way. These constructions characterize service-learning pedagogy as a rational method for developing a moral purpose, a social imagination, or a civic responsibility. Such characterizations point toward each models' affective attachments as well. For the charity model, good citizenship arises when internal beliefs are tested by external conditions and when the individual acts on

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<sup>2</sup> This formulation is offered in "Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology" by Porter et al. The authors argue that institutions are rhetorical constructions and that humans make up the malleable material of institutions. Institutional change needs to be approached through such an understanding.

those beliefs in the service of another individual. Charity offers the most direct form of democracy if we approach democracy as a way to build emotional connections between individuals without necessarily involving institutions. However, it is questionable whether charity strengthens connections between people or simply the beliefs of the server. For the social change model, good citizenship defines the individual who is able to move past or transform his/her personal beliefs and act for the "greater good." Through such a model, the citizen demonstrates his/her goodness by subsuming personal desire to larger, abstract values or values identified by another individual or group. The social change model begins as a process that subsumes rather than gratifies desire until such point that submission itself becomes gratifying. Often, the impact of such actions proves to be immeasurable beyond some sense of personal satisfaction. Finally for the outcomes model, good citizenship defines when an individual utilizes his/her personal capital to change the day-to-day conditions for another individual in relation to a particular institution. The outcomes model tries to make goodness and micro-level change synonymous, just as it makes individual and social changes synonymous.

Through each model, service represents rhetorical power. An individual offers his/her rhetoricity to a less powerful or rhetorically savvy individual. Yet, previous scholars describing service-learning have gone to great lengths to denigrate or suppress the role that making "personal connections" plays in any model and in the exercise of rhetorical power. Instead, these scholars emphasize how service learning presents academia with a rational, democratic process. Emotion serves as an auxiliary rather than a foundation to this process. The rhetoric of democracy forms the deeply troubling core of each model because it gets positioned as the antithesis of emotion and the emotional foundation demanded by service. Can we imagine other models for service learning that coalesce around something else? Examining this question might begin by addressing how citizenship gets rhetorically constructed and how emotion plays a role in this construction.

Troy Murphy deals with just this question. He addresses the good citizen as "one who represents the ideals of a democratic system and the preferred character of membership in a democratic community" (194). Character becomes the lynchpin for determining membership. Is the good citizen charitable? Does she exercise a social imagination? Is she like Robin Hood? The character of the good citizen preferred by service-learning models carries out a war against the character that the student has spent years developing and being molded into. In the service-learning classroom, the good citizen supersedes the student. In an attempt to remedy this situation, instructors might interrogate the criteria for membership in both categories. They might discuss with students the overlapping and rival demands each character places on the individual and the complications that arise as individuals come together under the banner of service. However, instructors must also understand the limitations of critique. Murphy addresses exposure and identification to an ideal as keys to understanding how the good citizen is constructed. These criteria present generative rather than potentially destructive ways for service-learning instructors to approach service—as a process of exposing various social and individual ideals and teasing out which ones the class, community partner, and individual students identify with. The learning in service courses needs to move beyond notions that community sites and partners provide living models for the critical analysis that goes on in the classroom. These sites offer further criteria for membership, and these criteria complicate the character that students seek to create or exhibit in the classroom and in various situations.

Many community partners aren't particularly concerned with the discussions that go on in classrooms. Often times, they have more practical purposes in mind when it comes to the partnership. Maybe they need a specific task completed or to fill a volunteer schedule. Maybe they're interested in establishing connections between their organization and the instructor's institution. For their part, students don't enter service-learning courses free from concerns or attachments. The students' and community partner's practical and emotional concerns affect the character of the good citizen. In other words, the good citizen is a completely plastic entity. It is not stable and rationally determined, and the learning in service courses should not be geared to one ideal. Murphy reframes this plasticity as rhetoricity, and he devotes particular attention to the social ideals espoused in contemporary American politics. He provides a rhetorical analysis of the good citizen as an "ordinary hero," and he addresses the impact of this ideal.

The ordinary hero symbolizes "both universal ideals and specific expressions of those ideals in situated contexts" (195). Murphy's work describes various contexts and how heroes emerge from those contexts. He traces this hero through figures such as Rosa Parks, who despite her dedicated involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, gets depicted as a tired seamstress who didn't have the energy to move to the back of the bus. She never intended to be political. She simply took a stand in her day-to-day life and in doing so demonstrated heroic qualities. Murphy provides other examples as well, such as the depiction of firefighters and emergency personnel who responded to September 11, 2001 the attacks on the World Trade Center. These heroic figures represent a "Horatio Alger narrative, recasting a type of rags-to-riches narrative into an apathy-to-action formula for democratic citizenship" (199).

Ordinary heroes would rather "'roll up their sleeves' and 'make a difference' in their communities" than devote attention to elected officials (193). The ordinary hero limits his/her politics to private action rather than public display. He/she becomes famous through the stories told and the intimate details chronicling these actions and personal transformations. These stories arouse a deeply embedded affective response that is intimately connected to what it means to be American. At the same time these narratives afford a space for, or even support, a cynical attitude toward conventional politics. Today, the average American expresses a profound distrust of politicians and skepticism toward traditional politics. This distrust extends into traditional forms of engagement associated with service-learning and advocacy. The ordinary hero contrasts the good citizen in service-learning scholarship in a number of ways. For example, the hero dismisses not only electoral politics, but the discourses associated with any such politics, including the rhetoric of social change that gained a footing with mainstream (or middle-of-the-road) Americans after the 1960s. Cynicism extends beyond the voting booth and into the ways an individual relates to the world. It extends beyond discourse as well. Murphy describes ordinary hero narratives as presenting intimate details from the hero's life. The good citizen looks beyond such details to the greater good.

*The Wingspread Statement on Student Civic Engagement* provides a dynamic example of the ordinary hero and the good citizen occupying the same context. It illustrates the gulf that exists between college student's attitudes toward service and the attitudes exhibited by service-learning scholars. This statement emerged from the Wingspread Summit on Civic Engagement of 2001, which brought together 33 student-leaders from 27 campuses across the United States to discuss student models for engagement and service. It lists undergraduate

student Sarah E. Long as author, with analysis provided by Professors John Saltmarsh and Kerrisa Hefferman of the University of Massachusetts and Brown University, respectively.

Comments from the Wingspread students tend toward ordinary hero narratives, but they also eclipse Murphy's analysis of such narratives. Murphy describes how ordinary heroes focus on the emotional transformation of those involved in service. The Wingspread students offer a similar focus. Long documents the conflicted emotions of student participants toward conventional politics. She peppers descriptive accounts of the summit with statements about student "anger," "discomfort," and feeling divided by concerns for home communities and the demands of college (2-3). However, the Wingspread students also contradict ordinary hero narratives. For Murphy, such narratives, and the heroes themselves, shrink from arguments around social change, and ordinary heroes limit their involvement to the private sphere. On the contrary, the Wingspread students broaden their political engagement to the point where almost everything gets defined as political. In the statement, Long refers to the "multiple manifestations" that student civic engagement takes, and she recognizes that "not every activity should be measured as political activity, [although] many do have political dimensions" (1). Additionally, student discussions of engagement included "cultural and spiritual forms of expression" alongside "other forms of expression through the arts such as guerilla theater, music, coffee houses, poetry, and alternative newspapers" (2). The Wingspread students didn't shrink from conventional politics. Instead, they embraced the possibilities afforded by "unconventional activities," which include service, as a "viable and preferable (if not superior) alternative" (1). Such forms of engagement are excluded from the mainstay of service-learning scholarship in rhetoric and composition.

In their turn, Saltmarsh and Hefferman echo the sentiments expressed definition of good citizenship encompassed in models of service learning laid out previously. They address how students enter the university with a "limited understanding of what one needs to know and how one must act to become a citizen" (6). Saltmarsh and Hefferman even believe it's what students want despite Long's description of how the Wingspread students felt alienated by college. Also, the professors lament students' "grasp of citizenship [that] is often very isolated, rooted in a belief in the primacy of individual rights, and they argue that college offers students knowledge on how to "subordinate individual desires to a larger public purpose" (6). Such sentiments contradict Long's discussion of how Wingspread students grapple with issues of personal identity and engage in service to "build bridges between people and communities" rather than building bridges between institutions and communities (2).

Finally, Murphy's analysis of ordinary heroes argues that they avoid activities that might be construed as confrontational (205). In addressing the role that academic institutions should play in student and community engagement, the Wingspread statement argues that universities should provide "space, resources, recognition, information, transportation, and other forms of support" (9). In other words, the university should play an auxiliary role and deal only with pragmatic concerns. These students want control over their political work as well as their service. In contrast, Saltmarsh and Hefferman depict universities and university professors as providing the analytic framework that students need to "develop a reflective, social imagination" (6). These professors offer an informing and affective role, despite the fact that the Wingspread students expressed a desire for practical support. Somewhat oddly, the Wingspread statement offers a form of the ordinary hero narrative alongside service-learning's attachment to the good citizen narrative. If nothing else this statement demonstrates

that the two can coexist and carry out engagement work despite or possibly even because of the different perspectives that each model offers the individuals involved.

The Wingspread statement offers instructors a model for how they might approach service-learning courses, and this model eclipses existing paradigms. It raises questions about how instructors depict the cognitive proficiencies and deficiencies of students as well as understanding how these relate to affective attachments. It means dealing with students with the same level of respect and openness that service-learning scholarship demands in dealing with community partners. In service-learning scholarship, what might courses look like if instructors approached students as partners? Why do we approach students as potentially good citizens—as citizens who could be good if we curtail their wild, individualistic desires—while at the same time depicting our community partners as good citizens? Can we imagine a pedagogy that moves beyond disciplinary violence, beyond emotionally chaste notions of service derived from the good-citizen construct?

Rhetoric and composition scholars have begun to deal with affect and develop understandings of how affect relates to our cognitive, behavioral, and somatic (or embodied) experiences of the world (see for example DeGenaro; Edbauer; Yoon). However, few scholars have addressed affect in for service and engagement and fewer still have attempted to illustrate an affective model. This paper utilized the space opened up by Lynn Worsham in her discussion of emotions as a foundation for pedagogy in order to make a case for such a model, but future work might devote more attention to developing an affective service-learning pedagogy. In scholarly research and in the service-learning classroom, an affective model might begin by more deeply evaluating the lessons offered in the Wingspread statement and addressing the ways students and faculty negotiated their relationships at the summit.

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