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Young people talk about citizenship: empirical perspectives on theoretical and political debates

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Abstract

The citizenship literature includes remarkably few empirical studies. In this article we report on how young people in a British city perceive citizenship and their own transitions as citizens. Of five models which emerged, the most dominant was 'universal status', followed by 'respectable economic independence' and 'constructive social participation' and, less frequently, 'social-contractual' and 'right to a voice'. The extent to which the young people identified themselves as citizens reflected these models and their own life experiences. They drew clear distinctions between what it means to be a 'good' and a 'first class' citizen and had greater difficulty articulating their rights than their responsibilities. Overall, their responses drew on fluid understandings of citizenship but pointed more towards communitarian than liberal or civic-republican citizenship paradigms. They also underlined how everyday understandings of citizenship can have both inclusionary and exclusionary implications.

Introduction

'Vocabularies of citizenship' and their meanings vary according to social, political and cultural context and reflect different historical legacies (Bussemaker and Voet, 1998; Saraceno, 1997; Carens, 2000; Siim, 2000). They are translated into 'lived citizenship': 'the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural backgrounds and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens' (Hall and Williamson, 1999, p2). Yet, 'very little is known about the realities of how different people understand themselves as citizens' (Jones and Gaventa, 2002, p. 28). This conclusion, reached in a recent review of the citizenship literature, echoes the earlier observation in an empirical study by Conover *et al.* that much theoretical debate about the meaning of citizenship is 'conducted in what is virtually an empirical void' (1991, p801). Although there have since been a few studies of how citizens themselves understand citizenship, compared with recent theoretical outpourings the empirical void is far from being filled.

The present article reports findings from a UK study of how young people negotiate the transitions to citizenship, with reference also to the small amount of empirical work that does exist on everyday meanings of citizenship in the UK. The findings serve to inform both theoretical understandings and the 'wide public debate on what citizenship and community belonging should mean in this country' called for by the Home Secretary, David Blunkett (2001).

Youth transitions to citizenship

A three-year qualitative, longitudinal study of young people in the East Midlands city of Leicester interviewed 110 young people aged 16/17, 18/19 and 22/23 in 1999 on a wide range of topics concerning their transitions to citizenship.¹ There was a gender balance and about one in eight was Asian, predominately of Indian-Hindu background (to reflect Leicester's main minority

ethnic community). Given the salience of paid work to contemporary characterisations of citizenship, the group was stratified according to 'insider' and 'outsider' status as a proxy for social class. 'Insiders' conformed with a stereotypical model of the 'successful' young person as on the route through 'A'-levels and university and into graduate-type employment; 'outsiders' fell well outside it, with few or no qualifications and a record of unemployment for most of the time since leaving school. By the third and final interview in 2001, 64 of the original group remained. Apart from the above-average attrition of 'outsiders', anticipated in the construction of the original sample, the final group broadly reflected the balance of the original.

This article reports on those findings most germane to the participants' understandings of citizenship. Most of the analysis refers to the 64 who participated in all three waves. In places, though, where questions were confined to the first and/or second waves, the findings refer to all those who participated in those waves.²

The study needs to be understood in the context of growing public concern about young people's relationship to citizenship in the face of perceived apathy and disengagement (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998; Pearce and Hallgarten, 2000). T.H. Marshall referred to children and young people as 'citizens in the making' (1950, p. 25; see also Arnot and Dillabough, 2000). More than at other points of the life-course, youth is a time when the relationship to citizenship is in a state of flux. This makes it a particularly interesting period during which to study understandings of citizenship and any changes in self-perceptions as citizens.

The meaning(s) of citizenship

A report by an official Commission on Citizenship in 1990 warned that 'an immediate difficulty' in defining citizenship 'is that in our society the term "citizenship" is an unfamiliar notion' (Speaker's Commission, 1990, p.3). More recently, David Miller has observed that

citizenship – except in the formal passport-holding sense – is not a widely understood idea in Britain. People do not have a clear idea of what it means to be a citizen....Citizenship is not a concept that has played a central role in our political tradition (2000, p. 26).

The general consensus is that this remains the case despite the greater prominence of the discourse of citizenship in political debate since the late 1980s. In their study, Dean with Melrose found that almost a third of respondents (particularly those among 'lower' occupational groups) said that 'they didn't know what being a citizen means' or that 'being a citizen did not mean anything very much'. As they wryly observe, 'most citizens are untouched by the animated debate in political and academic circles about the nature of citizenship' (Dean with Melrose, 1999, p105).

Given the difficulties that many British adults have in articulating understandings of citizenship, it would be surprising if young people found it easy (although with the advent of compulsory citizenship education from 2002 this might change). Citizenship was not part of the everyday language of the

young people in our study. Nevertheless, the great majority engaged with the interviews with considerable enthusiasm and sometimes passion. The topic of citizenship appeared to provide a framework for discussion of issues of great relevance to their lives and experiences. Even though the language of citizenship was foreign to them, its essence resonated with their own attempts to make sense of their position in society. Five models of citizenship emerged over the three waves from questions concerning understandings of citizenship and self-identification as citizens. Moving from the most to the least articulated, these are:

'Universal status'

Everyone is understood to be a citizen by virtue of membership of the community or nation. At its 'thinnest' this reflected a view that 'citizen' means 'person'. This was the response given by a number of 'outsiders'. One, a 22 year old white male, believed that *'everybody's a citizen. They're all the same. They should all be treated the same'*. For another, a 19 year old white male, citizenship didn't *'mean owl'*, but he added that *'it's just a person at the end of the day – a citizen'*. A 19 year old 'outsider' white female was clear that *'it doesn't matter what they do, everybody's a citizen'*.

Others spoke more of a sense of membership. A 22 year old 'insider' white female saw a citizen as *'just a person living in a certain place in a certain country, having a certain life and fitting in, I suppose'*. A 'thicker' understanding drew on notions of 'belonging' – to either the local or national community. Two participants summed it up: *'Belonging. I think being part of something...a sense of belonging'* (16 year old 'insider' white female); *'Citizenship is about being somewhere, belonging somewhere'* (16 year old 'outsider' Asian female). Overall, 'insiders' were more likely to subscribe to this model and young Asians did so more consistently over the three years. There were no obvious gender differences.

The model (in its thicker sense) bears some resemblance to the first of two definitions of what it means to be a citizen tested out by Pamela Conover (1995) in a study of six varied locales in the US and UK: a 'relational' definition (i.e. a member of a community) and a non-relational (i.e. the bearer of rights and duties). Around two-thirds of UK respondents subscribed to the relational definition in comparison with only a third in the US. Qualitative research with older people (defined as aged 50 and over) in the UK has also elicited such understandings; citizenship 'was thought to define membership of society through being a part of the community' (Hayden *et al.*, 1999, p. 78).

'Respectable economic independence'

This model is embodied by a person who is in waged employment, pays taxes and has a family and their own house: 'the respectable economically-independent citizen', associated with the economic and social *status quo*. As a 16 year old 'outsider' white male put it *'I think as soon as you're living in your own house, out working, paying your bills. That's when you're a citizen'*. A 16 year old 'insider' white male defined a citizen as being *'a working part of the country'*, which would mean *'when I've got a house, wife, kids, job going on'*. The model underpinned understandings of 'first' and 'second class'

citizenship, discussed below. It effectively excludes many of the young people themselves, in the short-term, because of age or dependence on their parents and, in the longer term, some 'outsiders' because of anticipated unemployment and their generally disadvantaged labour market position. The young men were more likely to invoke this model; otherwise there were no clear patterns.

'Constructive social participation'

Here, citizenship denotes a constructive stance towards the community. This ranged from the more passive abiding by the law to the more active citizenship as a responsible practice - helping people and having a positive impact. A 22 year old 'outsider' white female summed it up: *'A citizen is where you're helping in the community....You're helping people and you're trying to do your best. Trying to support where you are'*. On this basis she considered that people *'who can't be assed to get off their beer bellies and help are not a citizen or anything. They don't care what happens around them'*. A 16 year old Asian male was one of number of 'insiders' who talked about being responsible and contributing as part of a reciprocal relationship with the community or society: *'Being responsible; being mature about everything and again, not just taking, giving back. Now you've taken this much you've gotta give a certain amount back, helping people....It's helping out in as many ways as you can'*. A 19 year old 'outsider' white female offered a more political understanding of contributing to the community:

It's doing something for the community really in't it? Getting in with things you know, getting your point across, that's what it needs in this world, more people to be like this. Tell people what they want and what they feel what should happen, what shouldn't happen, you know?

In response to the question whether people who don't do that are not citizens, she agreed:

Yeah cos they're not bothered...They'll let other people plan it for them and they'll just take what comes you know. But there's like people who will go out there and change the world.

This 'constructive social participation' model underpinned notions of 'good' citizenship discussed below. 'Outsiders' were rather more likely to subscribe to it than 'insiders' but there were no clear gender or ethnic differences.

'Social-contractual'

A small number, particularly females, referred spontaneously to rights and/or responsibilities. An 'insider' white female, for instance, stated that citizenship means *'being a part of society and having rights and requirements of living within the law'*. This represents one element of what Dean with Melrose (1999) identified as a 'social-contractual' citizenship discourse. Although in their own study more universalist understandings predominated among responses to direct questions about citizenship, an analysis of the discourses upon which respondents drew during the course of the interviews indicated consistently greater recourse to social-contractual notions of citizenship. An earlier American-British study using focus groups found that, in both countries, the majority subscribed to the social-contractual model (Conover *et al.*, 1991).

'Right to a voice'

The right and genuine opportunity to have a say and be heard is at the heart of this model, which emerged from the responses of a small number of participants. As one 22 year old 'outsider' white male explained *'To feel a citizen, I'd say I should have a right to say what goes on'*. A 16 year old 'insider' Asian female talked about *'being able to help in decision-making...just having your say in what's gonna happen'*. A 16 year old 'insider' white female thought she'd feel like a full citizen *'when people do respect you for your views and they listen to you'*.

The five models were not mutually exclusive in that some young people subscribed to more than one, sometimes drawing on different models simultaneously. Moreover, references to the vote were classified under either of the last two models depending on whether they were embedded within a 'rights and responsibilities' or a 'voice' discourse. Overall the 'universal' model dominated. However, over the three years it diminished in importance and the 'respectable economic independence' and 'constructive social participation' models, with their invocation of economic and civic responsibility, were articulated with increasing frequency.

To be a citizen?

The importance of identity to citizenship is increasingly being recognised in the citizenship literature (Jones, 1994; Turner, 1997; Isin and Wood, 1999; Stevenson, 2001; Jones and Gaventa, 2002). Hall *et al.* observe that 'in the contemporary political and policy arena, much of the rhetoric of citizenship is about citizenship as an identity – encouraging young people in particular to think of themselves as citizens' (1998, p. 309, emphasis in original). According to Conover *et al.* citizenship constitutes 'a fundamental identity that helps situate the individual in society' (1991, p. 805). Moreover, 'a sense of citizenship', Conover argues, 'is a key motivation for the practice of citizenship: identity provides the emotional energy, and understanding the substantive direction' (1995, p. 135). Like other identities, citizenship identity is constructed and evolves and it is possible to identify processes of differential citizenship identity formation (Hobson and Lindholm, 1997). John Shotter underlines the difficulties involved:

to be a citizen is not a simple matter of first as a child growing up to be a socially competent adult, and then simply walking out into the everyday world to take up one's rights and duties as a citizen. This is impossible. For...it is a status which one must struggle to attain in the face of competing versions of what [it] is proper to struggle for (1993, pp115-5).

National identity

One of the difficulties is the tendency to conflate citizenship and national identities (Fulbrook and Cesarani, 1996). Alongside citizenship, national identity is a current preoccupation of British politicians, concerned to stimulate debate on what it means to be British in a changing world.³ In the study, participants, who had engaged readily with questions about citizenship, struggled when asked about nationality and national identity and showed little

enthusiasm for the topic. This echoed the difficulties Conover *et al.* (1991) reported among their British respondents; in contrast Americans had no difficulty in explaining what it meant to 'be an American'.

White participants frequently used the terms British and English interchangeably but, for the most part, found it difficult to articulate what they meant other than in comparison with other nationalities or in the context of British multi-culturalism. The most common response was to associate nationality with country of birth, parental heritage and long-term residence. Culture (articulated in such terms as language, food, customs, history, humour, monarchy, the pound) tended to be a secondary theme. In terms of their own identification, responses ranged from a sense of significance and pride (sometimes expressed in relation to sport) through indifference to negativity.

In the case of a small number of white 'outsiders', discussion of nationality was tinged with hostility to Asian residents and asylum-seekers who were perceived as receiving more help from the state than white people whose families had paid tax through the generations. Some also talked about cultural, religious and language differences. A 19 year old 'outsider' white female believed that local Asian people did not think of themselves as British. She said that she'd known a few Asian people:

and they do class themselves as Indian. They're not white, they're not the same as us, cos they've got their own thing about them, you know. They've got their own beliefs. They pray at certain times and stuff. They don't do nothing that we do.

A 22 year old 'outsider' white male argued that if Asian residents

wanna be classed as English, then they should speak our language...Yeah, they're different....Really, if you ain't proud of being English then pack your bags and get out of England and live somewhere else you'll be proud, that's my motto. But me I'm proud of being British.

The majority was, however, more accepting. They thought it only understandable that those of Asian background would want to be in touch with and have pride in their roots and culture and one noted the ways in which people's roots are in any case '*all getting very global and mixed up*'. A 22 year old 'insider' white female reflected on the cultural conflicts Asian people are likely to feel in British society but made clear that '*I don't think that should in any way sort of place any different value on them being a citizen or them being part of it; it's just a different mixed bag of elements to mine*'.

The Asian participants themselves found it easier to talk about nationality, for it opened up discussion about the balance between, or compound of, British and Asian identities. Some described themselves simply as British, some as equally British and Indian and others emphasised that they were as British as anyone else, referring to their Indian origin as 'just background'. A 19 year old 'insider' Asian female said how when filling in forms she'd put British for nationality and Indian for ethnic origin. The two were both important to her:

'it's just equal, you're both. A 19 year old 'outsider' Asian male was among those who referred to sport: 'I feel proud when we were in the world cup, yeah – the English – yeah, we done it!'

Citizen identity

Over two-fifths of participants defined themselves unambiguously as citizens in all three waves of the research. This group included twice as many 'insiders' as 'outsiders' and more older and female participants. A further fifth who identified themselves as citizens at the third wave had earlier considered themselves either as partial citizens or not as citizens. Both 'outsiders' and females were over-represented in this group and there was a clear age dynamic, with younger participants more likely to develop an identification with the status. Those who felt themselves to be partial citizens were more likely to be 'insiders' and male. The four participants who did not consider themselves to be citizens at the third wave were all older white 'outsiders'. One of these, a 22 year old white female, described herself as *'an insignificant little person'* rather than a citizen and explained: *'I don't stand for anything. I haven't particularly achieved anything, so I don't feel like I'm a proper citizen'*. Likewise, four out of the five who could not say whether they were citizens were white (younger) 'outsiders'. At each wave, 'outsiders' were less likely than 'insiders' to identify themselves as citizens. Ethnicity did not generally appear to be a distinguishing factor.

The extent to which the young people identified themselves as citizens reflected developments in their own lives such as whether or not they had: achieved waged employment and paid tax; been involved in their communities or undertaken voluntary work; or had voted. More subjective factors were also important. These included feelings about belonging, significance, respectful treatment, independence and whether they had had an effective say.

Different combinations of the models of citizenship described earlier underlay the young people's self-perceptions as citizens. Their assessment of changes in their sense of citizenship identity drew most frequently on the respectable economic independence model. In the second wave, a 16 year old 'insider' white male responded *'...I reckon if I'm married with children and a house and stuff I'll probably feel like a citizen more then...when I'm filling in my tax return'*. An 18 year old 'outsider' white male said *'I do see myself as a citizen now really. I go out to work and I pay my taxes...it's work really that makes a citizen'*. This was followed by the constructive social participation model and then by the social-contractual and the right-to-a-voice models. Very few made reference to voting but one 'insider' white female, eligible to vote for the first time, did so strongly:

I do feel a greater sense of being a citizen than I did...I can't stop talking about the whole voting thing, which is quite bad, but it's given me a sense of being a citizen, being a member of the wider society, and being able to count as something.

In some instances, citizenship did not appear an attainable status. One 19 year old 'outsider' white female said that the word made her think of *'old people and people who are like lawyers and people like that. Lawyers and*

social workers and things like that. They're citizens – people who are so high up'.

'First' and 'second class' citizenship

The potentially exclusionary implications of the respectable economic independence model implied by this quotation were reflected also in responses to the notion of 'first' and 'second class' citizenship (see also Dean with Melrose, 1999). First wave participants were asked what they thought of opinion polls, which suggest that unemployed people are often made to feel like 'second class' citizens. There was considerable resistance to classifying people in this way. Nevertheless, the clear consensus was that unemployed people *are* regarded as second class citizens by society; they are seen as dependent, as not exercising responsibility, as not contributing to or participating in society as tax-payers or consumers. A number of the 'outsiders' clearly saw the label as applying to them and placed themselves at the bottom of a hierarchical image of society. '*Lower than everybody else*' was a phrase used more than once:

*It makes you feel like you **are** a second class citizen, cos you haven't got a job. I don't know what it means, but it makes you feel lower than everybody else. (22 year old white male)*

You feel – like everyone else has got more of a say than you. You're just last – at the bottom (19 year old white female).

They're up high and we're down there cos we're taking money from what they're paying in taxes... They think: 'Oh they're taking the money off us; they're no good, they're like second class. (19 year old white female)

Second class citizen, to me, means me really (19 year old white male).

The 'first class' citizen was overwhelmingly personified across groups by the educated, home-owner with a secure job, family and car, in other words the embodiment of the respectable economic independence model and of the socio-economic *status quo*. Independence (from the state) and participation as workers and tax-payers were also the watchwords of 'first class' citizenship. There were no obvious differences according to gender or ethnicity. Some typical examples from 'insiders' were:

Nice house, nice car, nice job!... I think that's classed as a first class citizen – making lots and lots of money. (16 year old Asian female).

I suppose the sort of professionals of the country, sort of seen as pillars of society (19 year old white female).

Again, for 'outsiders' it conjured up an exclusionary image, based on a job, material possessions and money:

Well a job basically ain't it, and decent house. If you've got a council flat and signing on or on Social, then you're a dosser ain't you? (16 year old white female).

Someone who's got a respectable job and a nice house and good children at private school. BUPA [private health insurance] and all that bollocks (22 year old white male).

First class people are the people with the money. It all boils down to money (19 year old white female).

'Good' and 'bad' citizenship

Understandings of 'good' and 'bad' citizenship (explored in the first two waves) stood in vivid contrast to those of 'first' and 'second class', drawing as they did on the constructive social participation model. This was epitomised in the observation of a 19 year old 'insider' white female during the focus group held between the first and second waves:

Money isn't always a good citizen. Sometimes the more money you've got, it seems as though you are a worse citizen.....Whereas the working class person on their estate can't do enough for their neighbour; they're a very good citizen.

The good citizen

Like Dean with Melrose, we found that 'some of the clearest expressions of the meaning which people attach to the idea of citizenship' were elicited through the notion of 'good' and 'bad' citizenship (1999, p. 110). All but 13 of the 110 first wave participants had ideas to offer as to what constitutes good citizenship and there were some similarities with the views reported in Dean with Melrose. Three main images of the good citizen emerged from the latter: 'someone who looks after other people,...someone who contributes to the community, and...someone who obeys the law and/or pays their taxes' (*ibid.*). Underlying these different notions of the good citizen, it is possible to discern a distinction made by Conover *et al.* (1991) between the 'extra good' and the 'ordinarily good' citizen.

This distinction was reflected also in a 1999 Institute for Citizenship/NatWest MORI survey, which asked respondents to identify from a long list of examples the two or three they considered 'most important to being a good citizen'. 'Being a good parent', 'respecting others' and 'obeying the law' were the three most commonly identified, each mentioned by about 40 per cent of respondents. Actions such as 'volunteering to do things' and 'improving your local area/community' were among the least frequently cited, attracting fewer than 10 per cent of responses.

Most of the present study's participants included a number of elements in their definition of good citizenship. The most common interpretation, offered by over two-thirds, involved a combination of the 'ordinarily' and 'extra' good: a considerate and caring attitude towards others and a constructive approach towards and active participation in the community. The latter emerged particularly strongly, most notably in the second wave. Female participants were more likely to refer explicitly to constructive participation in 'community' or neighbourhood and to locate good citizenship in the community generally. Generally, frequent references were made to doing 'one's fair share in the community', sometimes in an organised way, and sometimes more informally

such as in 'looking out for' and 'helping' people in the neighbourhood. A number would have agreed with Derek Heater that 'at its easiest and most effective level good citizenship is neighbourliness' (1990, p. 198). One 19 year old 'outsider' white male explicitly emphasised such an understanding over a more formalised one:

I wouldn't call a good citizen like the kind who goes out to do charity and trying to raise money. That's not my version of a good citizen. Mine's like they'll help you out. They'll lend you something if you need it, and that's the way I see a good citizen....It's like your neighbours.

'Bad citizens' were defined as selfish, uncaring, lazy and lacking in respect. This was summed up by a 16 year old 'insider' white male whose image of the good citizen can be counterpoised to those of the first class citizen held by many of the young people: '*you're giving something back; giving something of your own time and helping people. I would say that would make somebody a good citizen*'. A 'bad citizen', he saw as:

someone that's all take and no give, basically. Not participating in any way – just all for themselves...when somebody cares more about getting a car or whatever, than what's going on with the people who are say homeless on their doorsteps, you know? I would say that would be the model of a bad citizen – someone who only cares for themselves and does not see anything beyond their own life.

Whether or not someone shows 'respect' was a criterion used by a number of 'outsiders'. One, a 22 year old white male, talked of the good citizen as someone with '*a bit of respect for his surroundings and.....respectful, polite. A bad citizen is someone who ain't got no respect for anybody....Smashing this and that up; couldn't give a toss about where he lives*'. Another, a 19 year old white female argued that

people who have respect for each other and themselves are good citizens....So I think good citizens are those that don't break the law, they respect, they have mutual respect for themselves and for people in their community and society. Whereas the bad ones are just, don't have any respect for anyone, not even themselves.

Another 'outsider' suggested, though, that such respect was difficult when living in a poor environment. Here, respect was partly linked to not breaking the law. This reflected the second most common construction of the 'good' and 'bad' citizen overall: that of the law-abiding and non-disruptive versus the trouble-making citizen. A significant minority of first and second wave participants referred to abiding by the law or keeping out of trouble, although in most cases they referred also to other aspect of good citizenship.

Political conceptions of good citizenship were less frequently articulated. Only four, all female 'insiders', mentioned voting. This is consistent with the Institute for Citizenship survey in which only nine per cent chose voting as important to being a good citizen. A very small number, mainly 'insiders', saw good citizenship in more active political or campaigning terms. A 16 year old white male suggested '*you could argue that someone who does something like animal rights or campaigning or whatever, is a good citizen*'. A 16 year old

Asian female described a good citizen as '*trying to have a good say in what's going on*'.

'Dissident citizenship'

Despite the link made with keeping within the law by a significant minority, a couple of 'insider' white males did question this from a political perspective, distinguishing between different kinds of law-breaking. Thus one of them suggested that someone who broke the law in the name of animal rights could be a good citizen while a car vandal would be a bad citizen. In the second wave, participants were asked whether it was ever justifiable or necessary for a citizen to break the law. Only 16 out of the 74 responded that it was never justifiable; 13 of these were 'outsiders' and the young Asians were disproportionately represented among this group. Most participants felt that citizenship status was not affected by certain illegal activities such as minor traffic offences; use of cannabis; stealing food out of necessity and when part of a campaign.

A more specific question on whether it is ever justifiable or necessary for a citizen to break the law as part of a campaign or demonstration elicited a negative response from only nine participants. The most common justifications given were: the need to gain attention for an issue; the deservingness of the cause; the strength of feeling of the protesters and the need to challenge an unfair law. A number talked about where they would draw the line. The general view was that illegal political action became unjustified if: people were killed or injured; the lives of innocent parties were disrupted; or if it involved vandalism or damage to property.

Holloway Sparks has suggested the notion of 'dissident citizenship' to describe 'oppositional democratic practices' through which 'dissident citizens constitute alternative public spaces' to pursue non-violent protest outside the formal democratic channels (1997, p. 75). Such notions might help render citizenship a less oppressive notion for those who perceive it in terms of a *status quo* that excludes themselves. There was a sense, often not verbalised but expressed through tone, facial expression or atmosphere, that for some of the 'outsiders' questions about 'good citizenship' and their own involvement in citizenship-related activities carried such a potentially oppressive air (see also France, 1998). They referred to activities that they recognised that they were 'supposed' to do but did not in fact do. One concluded that he must be a 'bad citizen' as he had a criminal record and did neither paid nor voluntary work. Another, 22 year old white female, referred to herself when describing a bad citizen as someone who thinks of themselves all the time and does not help out in the community. '*I'm a terrible citizen aren't I?*' she observed.

Voluntary work and good citizenship

In the first wave, the question of good citizenship was approached initially with reference to the UK Government's promotion of volunteering as key to the development of 'responsible' or 'active' citizenship, particularly among young people. In the second wave they were asked more generally about any connection they saw between voluntary work and good citizenship.

Of the 74 participants in the second wave, 50 believed in such a connection; a number though qualified this by emphasising that it was neither an exclusive nor a necessary connection (an argument put also by those who opposed the idea). The two most frequently cited bases of such a connection were that both are about 'helping people' and about contributing to the community or society. In both instances, the young women and Asian participants were particularly likely to use such arguments. The small number of Asian participants in the second wave were also more willing to make the connection in the first place, but there were no obvious gender differences. 'Outsiders' were, again, much less likely than 'insiders' to accept any connection.

There was less support in the first wave for the Government's association of voluntary work with good citizenship. Some 'outsiders', such as this 16 year old white female, also expressed a dislike of the idea of working without pay: *'No one's gonna get no medals to be a good citizen.....I think you'd be silly actually doing something for nothing'*. As in the Conover *et al.* study, which reported a reluctance to equate voluntary work with good citizenship, 'insiders' who opposed the idea tended to raise questions of motivation or to argue that not doing voluntary work does not mean that one is a bad citizen. One, a 16 year old white female, demonstrated a shrewd understanding of the politically dominant citizenship philosophy when she observed that previously citizenship *'was an automatic thing but it seems now that you gonna have to work for your status in a way'*.

Rights and responsibilities

New Labour's promotion of voluntary work as active citizenship is one example of its repeated emphasis on the need for a 'fresh understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the citizen' (Brown, 2000), with the accent on responsibilities and obligations over rights. The general presumption appears to be that set out in the Cattle Report: *'the rights – and in particular – the responsibilities of citizenship need to be more clearly established'* (Cattle, 2001, p.20, emphasis added).⁴ Yet, the young people we interviewed found it markedly more difficult to identify their rights than they did their responsibilities.

Responsibilities

In line with their views about good citizenship, the most frequently mentioned citizenship responsibility referred to 'being constructive'. This included notions of 'giving back to the community', being responsible and courteous, respecting others, behaving in a socially acceptable manner. A 16 year old 'outsider' white female summed it up as *'whether it's through taxes or helping in the community, just giving back something to society'*. An 18 year old 'outsider' white male responded: *'keep the country clean and that; help old people across the road, things like that. Being polite and courteous'*.

Other responses referred to obeying the law; looking after oneself and one's family; being in work/paying tax; and voting. In the final wave, 'insiders' were about three times more likely than 'outsiders' to refer to employment/paying

tax and were twice as likely to refer to being constructive; 'outsiders' were about three times more likely than 'insiders' to refer to looking after self or family. Female participants had a greater tendency to refer to obeying the law and to employment/paying tax and older participants to being constructive. The small number of Asian participants were more likely to refer to obeying the law.

The contrast between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' has a degree of resonance with the starker finding of Harris *et al.* (2001) that African-Caribbean and Pakistani young people were only prepared to acknowledge obligations in relation to their own community, family and friends. However, the responses did not accord with those in Alan France's study in a deprived working class community, which found that some young people's acceptance of citizen responsibilities in both the community and the labour market 'had been undermined by experiences of exclusion and exploitation' (1998, p. 108).

In contrast to the two studies just cited, when asked specifically about work obligations in earlier waves, the majority of 'outsiders' as well 'insiders' signed up to the Government's philosophy of paid work as a citizenship obligation, although sometimes with qualifications such as the state of the local labour market. Another qualification raised by some, most notably older 'outsider' white young women who had or were expecting children, was the presence of young children or pregnancy. When asked specifically in the second wave whether waged employment or parenting is more important to society, about half of both the young men and women answered the latter and most of the others felt they were of equal importance. Some articulated views that reflected the position of a number of feminist citizenship theorists that care should be acknowledged as an expression of citizenship responsibility alongside paid work (Knijn and Kremer, 1997;; Sevenhuijsen, 1998; Lister, 2003). For example, a 16 year old 'insider' white female responded:

I do see the value of working, I really do. But I think I'm going to have to side with a really positive important role – to stay at home, and raise the children. You're at home with them, and teaching them things: how to grow up to be good citizens.

Some participants, in particular both Asian and white 'insider' younger women, referred explicitly or implicitly to an underlying responsibility to be self-reliant and independent. One 16 year old white female, for instance, spoke of '*being an independent person. Not being dependent on other people and the state to do it for you*'. In line with their general views about citizenship responsibilities, 'outsiders' were more likely to define paid work responsibility in relation to themselves and their families, whereas 'insiders' tended to talk more of a responsibility to the wider society, sometimes in addition to themselves and their families. A small group, mainly of 16 year old 'outsiders', did not see employment as a responsibility and rejected the idea as coercive. One 16 year old white male, for instance, rejected the idea as '*a load of rubbish...just pushing you to get a job, you know what I mean. Just trying to get you down so you say "sod this! I'm getting a job; don't want none of this stick"*'. Most believed that the responsibility to secure employment lies either with both individuals and government or with individuals alone.

The other area of particular concern to British politicians at present is voting, in the wake of the unprecedentedly low turn-out in the 2001 General Election, especially among young people. The 16th British Social Attitudes Survey found 'dramatic' age-group differences on the question of whether voting is a civic obligation: only a third of those aged under 25 saw voting as a duty compared with around two-thirds of those aged between 25 and 55 and nearly four-fifths of those aged over 55 (Park, 1999).

Very few participants referred spontaneously to voting as a citizenship obligation. In the first wave, of 52 participants specifically asked, 12 were in favour and 34 opposed to the idea of voting as a social obligation, with the rest unsure. All but one of those in favour were 'insiders'; nine were female and none was Asian. The most forcefully put argument against voting as an obligation was, in fact, premised on a notion of responsibility that serves to problematise a simple equation of voting and sense of civic responsibility. A number of the young people believed strongly that it was more irresponsible to vote in ignorance – without knowledge of the candidates or issues at hand – than not to vote at all. A 16 year old Asian female 'insider', still at school, who held the view that voting is important because *'one vote can make a full difference'*, believed strongly that the responsible citizen should *'not just vote for the hell of voting'*. She suggested that *'if I was a bad citizen, I'd go to a voting poll and just tick any names. Not knowing what I was ticking – that would make me a bad citizen'*. Such beliefs need to be read in the context of the acknowledgement by a number of participants, 'insiders' as well as 'outsiders', of their lack of political knowledge both in terms of what the parties stand for and the mechanics of voting.

When it came to the 2001 General Election, of the 31 participants (19 out of 34 females to 12 out of 30 males) in the third wave who had voted, 18 gave reasons reflecting a sense of civic duty. Broken down, this represented 16 out of 21 'insiders' but only two out of ten 'outsiders'. The young women were twice as likely to give such reasons as the young men. Some participants referred to voting as a 'responsibility', a 'moral obligation', a 'duty' or a 'privilege'. Six (five of whom were female) said they were motivated to vote by the knowledge that the vote had been fought for. The main substantive reasons given for not voting among the other 33 referred to a perception of politics as boring; critical attitudes towards formal politics and politicians or the efficacy of voting; and lack of political literacy.

Rights

As noted, the young people were less fluent in the language of rights than of responsibilities.⁵ When asked specifically about this in the third wave around half struggled to identify their rights. Sixteen of these (of whom 15 were white 'outsiders') were unable to do so at all; in contrast only one participant was unable to identify any responsibilities. Roughly a quarter of the remaining participants referred to political and social rights respectively, the former in relation to the vote and the latter in relation to social benefits, housing, healthcare and education. A 22 year old 'outsider' white male referred to *'the*

right to vote. That's about it really ain't it? For someone like me I'd say it's my only right'.

Two thirds referred to civil rights such as freedom of speech, movement and worship and from discrimination. This included nine of the ten remaining Asian participants. One of them, a 16 year old 'outsider' male, stated '*every person in this world has the right to worship who they wanna worship*'; another, an 18 year old 'outsider' male, spoke of '*freedom of speech; to be counted as equal; just to be treated equally really, like any other British citizen should be treated*'. None of the 'outsiders' referred to social rights. Several participants (mainly 'insiders') also referred to employment as a right. The findings contrast with those of Conover *et al.* who remarked on the primacy given by British respondents to social rights of citizenship and their relative disregard of civil rights (1991; see also Dean with Melrose, 1999; Dwyer, 2000).

With regard more specifically to the right to social security, only a minority believed that they had an unconditional right to benefit, when questioned in the first wave.⁶ This small group referred to their right as a British citizen and/or the taxes paid by their parents or themselves. The majority, though, linked social rights with responsibilities, talking of benefit receipt as a conditional right, the most common condition specified being active job-seeking. A number questioned the fairness of taking money from people who are working and paying tax, without putting something back:

I don't think that people have a right to request money off the state without giving anything in return. (19 year old 'insider' white male)

People like me that are trying to get their lives back together and it's visible that we are, then yeah, give them help. But people that just sit around all day, then no, I don't think they should get a penny. If they don't help themselves, then nobody should help them. (19 year old 'outsider' white female)

Others expressed some ambivalence about their own position. A 16 year old 'outsider' white male, for example, spoke of a right to benefit in the face of the Government's failure to supply jobs. Yet he also felt that in a way he didn't have a right because:

it's the taxpayer's money that we're having ain't it? When they pay tax it's coming towards us and we're just sitting on our arses all day and doing nothing, and in that way I don't think we deserve it, but like I say, I don't think we'd be able to survive without.

While on the whole opinions did not differ significantly between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', the most noticeable group to hold a distinct view was some older 'outsider' young white women who had or were expecting children. They believed that lone mothers with young children or expectant mothers should have an unconditional right to benefit.

Conclusion

Young people take seriously the question of their relationship to the wider society. The over-riding impression received from in-depth discussions on the meanings of citizenship is of a highly responsible group. The common assumptions of politicians that rights have been over-emphasised at the expense of responsibilities and that young people, in particular, need to be made aware of their citizenship responsibilities are not borne out by the study. Indeed, the young people found it much easier to talk about responsibilities than rights and when they did identify rights they were more likely to be civil than political or social rights. This contrasts with earlier research in the late 1980s, which found social rather than civil rights were central to how British people thought about citizenship (Conover *et al.*, 1991). Few saw social security rights as unconditional. The young people also tended to place a high premium on constructive social participation in the local community. Such participation represented for many of them the essence of good citizenship and was one of two more responsibility-based models that emerged as prominent from general discussions of the meanings of citizenship. The most dominant model was, however, a less active one rooted in membership of the community or nation. Unlike in earlier research, few thought about citizenship in social-contractual terms.

Together, these elements indicate that, of the three main citizenship models developed in the literature, it is the communitarian model to which the young people were most likely to subscribe (Bussemaker and Voet, 1998; Delanty, 2000). They also displayed a belief in at least some 'civic virtues' (Dagger, 1997) and the importance to citizenship of civility and respect (McKinnon, 2000) and giving to the community (Heater, 1990). Liberal rights-based and civic republican political participation-based models did not figure prominently in their discussions. This suggests that they have taken on board political messages about active citizenship and about responsibilities over rights (though not the related social-contractual model propounded by New Labour) that have become increasingly dominant over the past couple of decades in the UK.

Similarly, the young people's image of the first class citizen is redolent of the successful citizen promoted by Thatcherism and to a degree under New Labour: economically independent, with money, own home and a family. For some of those classified as 'outsiders', this meant that they themselves identified with the label of 'second-class citizen', below everyone else. The respectable economic independence model of citizenship, which underpinned such understandings, became more dominant during the course of the research. Its potentially divisive and exclusionary nature stands in tension with the more inclusive universal, membership model, which was most dominant overall. It also stands in contradiction to T. H. Marshall's classic definition of citizenship as bestowing equal status on all full members of a national community (1950). Instead of challenging class divisions, the respectable economic independence model of citizenship reinforces them.

This points to how everyday understandings of citizenship can have both inclusionary and exclusionary implications. Also, the ways in which

individuals frequently drew on a number of models simultaneously to make sense of citizenship and their own identities as citizens suggests that the 'lived citizenship' of young people needs to be understood in fluid terms, cutting across fixed theoretical categories. Such findings pose a challenge for both the theorisation and politics of citizenship.

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² 74 participated in the second wave in 2000. In longitudinal qualitative research it is necessary to narrow down the questions at each successive wave in order to focus on areas of likely change and to make the analysis manageable. In addition to the three qualitative interviews, a short factual questionnaire was administered at recruitment stage and a focus group of some of the participants was held after the first wave to help inform questioning in subsequent waves.

³ Examples include a speech on 'Britishness' by Tony Blair (28 March 2000); a Millennium lecture on 'Britishness in the 21st century' given by the historian Linda Colley at 10 Downing St. (8 December 1999) and an article by Trade and Industry Secretary, Patricia Hewitt on 'The quest for a British identity' (*New Statesman*, 17 December 2001 – 7 January 2002). See also Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000) on the need to rethink Britishness.

⁴ The Cattle Report was commissioned by the Government following disturbances in a number of Northern towns.

⁵ A MORI poll found that two-thirds of 15 to 24 year olds felt they knew little about their rights as citizens compared with half who felt the same about their responsibilities (Wolchover, 2002).

⁶ Dwyer's focus group study in the North of England found a larger minority opposed the idea of social security as a conditional right (2000, 2002).