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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The 'problem' with youth: Young people, citizenship and the community

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Abstract

Fears that we are experiencing a crisis in citizenship have been increasingly directed towards youth. Popular political and Government rhetoric have frequently positioned young people as a threat to the healthy functioning of citizenship and democracy. Policies have been implemented to educate them and control their behaviour, particularly in their local communities, in an attempt to foster them as citizens deemed appropriate to join adult society. This article provides evidence to the contrary, of young people who wish to be part of their local communities and incorporated in the development of relationships of mutual trust and respect. In this context it is argued that the New Labour government's approach to renewing citizenship for the modern age is contributing to the alienation of young people from any sense of inclusive citizenship. It is put forward that if we are truly concerned with the engagement and empowerment of young people, what is needed is a broader definition of citizenship that enables them to participate as young citizens and respects their voices as an important part of a fair society. This, it is argued, would entail a departure from currently dominant conceptions of citizenship towards, instead, a cultural citizenship approach.

Keywords: youth; citizenship; cultural citizenship; community; democracy; discrimination; respect; belonging; identity

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The 'problem' with youth: Young people, citizenship and the community

Introduction

The New Labour Government's attempts to renew the concept of citizenship as a potential solution to the perceived fragmentation and breakdown of society in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have been directed overwhelmingly towards young people. The policy of Citizenship Education, statutory in English secondary schools since 2002, was implemented to teach young people the knowledge, values and practices essential for a citizenship that is much more concerned with identity, belonging, participation and mutual responsibility than the traditional liberal rights-based model of citizenship (Citizenship Advisory Group 1998). Traditional liberal citizenship, New Labour argued, has failed to address the impact of increasing individualism on the atomisation of citizens, particularly in its failure to overtly tackle the question of citizenship values. It has also failed to place sufficient emphasis on the responsibilities or duties of citizenship (Blair 1998). The occurrence of cross-cultural clashes, such as the riots in the north of England in 2001 (Cantle 2001), and increasing reports of unacceptable or anti-social behaviour, particularly amongst the youth of society, have been cited by Government as evidence for the need for a citizenship that would serve to connect citizens in terms of common values and at the same time place greater emphasis on the duties of citizenship and appropriate citizen behaviour. Policy implemented within local communities to tackle anti-social behaviour, such as the use of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), curfews and parenting orders (Home Office 2003) are, in this sense, part of a much wider drive by

Government to address the perceived threat of young people and engage them in the values and duties of responsible citizenship.

What this article demonstrates is that this approach is having a negative affect on young people's citizenship mediations. It highlights how it is not only failing to engage young people as citizens, but is actually working against their sense of belonging, mutuality and agency in society, the very citizenship sentiments that New Labour has stated it wishes to foster. Despite the potentially empowering impacts that a more relational conception of citizenship may offer, young people have been constructed within Government and other popular political discourses as a potential threat to citizenship, in need of discipline and training before they may be accepted into the fold. This has led to a situation where young people are positioned as the passive recipients of citizenship policy rather than as active citizens in their own right. Indeed, in defining young people as not-yet-citizens (Lister 2007) they are, in effect, excluded not just from the formal rights of citizenship, but also from being treated with equality in terms of membership in society.

In this context I argue that if we are serious about empowering young people in society and fostering their sense of mutuality and belonging, what is needed is a cultural or difference-centred approach to citizenship. This approach, in deconstructing and challenging the normative assumptions that underpin much citizenship theory and practice, offers the possibility of a more inclusive citizenship in which young people's voices are recognised and heard. Before outlining this approach in greater detail, I will first discuss the New Labour government's

articulations of a reinvigorated citizenship and how this relates, in particular, to the position of young people in society.

New Labour: a new citizenship for a new government?

On coming to power in 1997, the New Labour government made the reinvigoration of citizenship a central political concern. The previous eighteen years of Conservative administrations' championing of competitive individualism within a free market neoliberal ideology had led to very real concerns about the atomisation and breakdown of society. A reinvigorated citizenship that would foster relations between citizens offered a potential solution to the 'devastating consequences' that this negation of the social had produced[1] (Blair 2002). Whilst not fundamentally challenging many aspects of neoliberal economics, this approach enabled the government to shift the focus sufficiently to incorporate a concern with 'society' (Hale et al. 2004). The dominant ideas underpinning this new approach to citizenship were threefold. Firstly, that the obligations of citizenship had been overshadowed by its rights in traditional liberal discourse, and thus needed to be re-emphasised. Secondly, that citizenship needed to provide citizens from increasingly diverse backgrounds with a set of values that they may share. And thirdly, emphasis was placed on the need to reinvigorate 'active citizenship', most notably in the form of volunteering. The citizenship that New Labour sought to promote was therefore much more relational, embedded and active than traditional liberal conceptions. Government envisioned this would foster stronger ties and a sense of belonging between citizens, and develop an ethic of mutual citizenship responsibility and respect. In this sense, this new conception of citizenship is closer to civic republican

and communitarian concepts which place importance on an active citizenry and a common citizenship identity. However, in its focus on the idea of 'community' as the locus for the development of citizenship, New Labour has shown itself to be more influenced by the latter (e.g. Etzioni 1993). As Tony Blair stated in the run up to the New Labour government's electoral victory, *"Wider synthesis of the community and individual is the essential underpinning of Labour's new approach"* (1996, p304)

'Community', which is predominantly used to refer to *local* communities in government documents (Levitas 2005), is presented as the site where common citizenship values develop through interaction between citizens. However, on closer inspection of New Labour rhetoric and policy, it becomes clear that this is not the organic and democratic development of citizenship that it may at first appear but is, in reality, highly normative. 'Community' is not simply the arena where citizens may create mutual connections and participate democratically, but is also the site where appropriate citizen behaviour is to be judged and policed (Levitas 2005; Home Office 2003). Furthermore, in its emphasis on the need to fulfil citizenship obligations as a prerequisite to the enjoyment of citizenship rights, New Labour have constructed citizenship as conditional upon behaviour, the content of which is already pre-defined (Rose 2000). Tony Blair elaborated on this when he stated that *"For too long the demand for rights from the state was separated from the duties of citizenship and the imperative for mutual responsibility [...] Strong communities depend on shared values and a recognition of the rights and duties of citizenship – not just the duty to pay taxes and obey the law, but the obligation to bring up children as competent, responsible citizens"* (Blair 1998, quoted in Morrisson 2004, p173).

In this context, engaging in paid work and 'good' parenting are (re)articulated as citizenship obligations, of which the failure to carry out results in sanctions in the form of withdrawal of certain citizenship rights. The New Deal for the unemployed[2], introduced in 1998, removes benefits from claimants who have not taken up the offer of work or training, and parents may be fined if they are viewed as failing to control their children's anti-social behaviour under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Levitas 2005). As a number of authors have pointed out, this has enabled government to bypass the need to address more structural explanations for societal problems, such as unemployment and anti-social behaviour, and shift this responsibility, as a requirement of citizenship, onto the shoulders of individual citizens (Levitas 2005; Morrisson 2004; Dean 2004). This is not to deny the fact that government have taken important measures to address certain structural issues (e.g. the introduction of the minimum wage in 1999; doubling assistance rates for children – see Lister 2003). However, it has meant that the excluded are often characterised as individual failures, in need of ethical reconstruction and re-attachment to the virtuous community before they may be accepted into the citizenship fold (Rose 2000).

This normative conception of citizenship has informed New Labour's measures to foster citizenship belonging, mutual respect and political agency. Reinvigorating active citizenship has been central to New Labour's citizenship formulations (Hall et al. 2000). However, this emphasis on citizen agency has not been matched with an equal commitment to enable increased citizen participation in the political process (Morrisson 2004). The dominant focus of New Labour rhetoric on active citizenship has, in fact, been employed to encourage greater involvement in local communities, most notably in the form of volunteering. In the words of Jack Straw as Home

Secretary, *"In many ways the most important example of our approach is our commitment greatly to extend the idea and practice of volunteering – of people doing something for each other rather than having the State doing it for them and so diminishing them. We have described this voluntary activity as 'the essential act of citizenship'"* (1998, quoted in Rose, p1404-5). This demonstrates how volunteering is synonymous with New Labour conceptions of the 'good citizen'. The trouble with this conception, as Levitas has rightly pointed out, is that volunteering ceases to appear voluntary but, rather, a matter of citizenship responsibility or contribution (2005). This is particularly pertinent for young people considering that policy aimed at encouraging active citizenship has been directed overwhelmingly at them[3]. In highlighting young people as in particular need of *"learning about and becoming helpfully involved in the life and concerns of their communities"* (CAG 1998, p12), they are effectively constructed as failing to display the attributes of 'good citizenship'.

This discourse of citizenship responsibilisation is also apparent in New Labour's articulation of the concept of 'respect'. Tony Blair outlined that *"Respect is a simple notion. We know instinctively what it means. Respect for others – their opinions, values and way of life. Respect for neighbours; respect for the community that means caring about others. Respect for property which means not tolerating mindless vandalism, theft, and graffiti. And self-respect, which means giving as well as taking... It makes real a new contract between citizen and state, a contract that says that with rights and opportunities come responsibilities and obligations"* (2002). Articulating respect as a duty of citizenship, however, suggests that what government is primarily concerned with is management of behaviour. This is made more explicit

in the concept's predominant usage by government in relation to community crime. Indeed, what was previously known as the Anti-social Behaviour Unit[4] was reformulated, under the same leadership (of Louise Casey), to become the Respect Task Force in 2005 (Home Office 2005). Here, anti-social behaviour is formulated as the result of a lack of respect: *"Family problems, poor educational attainment, unemployment, and drug and alcohol misuse can all contribute to anti-social behaviour. But none of these problems can be used as an excuse for ruining other people's lives. Fundamentally, anti-social behaviour is caused by a lack of respect for other people"* (Home Office 2003, p7). It is notable that New Labour's drive to inculcate respect has not included wealthy tax avoiders or employers who exploit their workers but, rather, poor communities and 'unruly' young people (McDowell 2007). The concept of respect as a mutually negotiated two-way process is conspicuously absent from much of the policy discourse. Instead, it is certain groups of people who are constructed by government as failing to live up to their citizenship obligations, who have become the targets of policy addressing their behaviour.

Young people, in particular, have been targeted by government in its drive to responsibilise citizenship and inculcate respect. 'Could-not-care-less' attitudes amongst the young towards society were cited as a justification for the introduction of citizenship education (CAG 1998). Community policies in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, including anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) and parenting orders[5] have been primarily targeted at the need to address youthful behaviour (Muncie 2006). Although it may be argued that these policies were introduced to address the behaviour of *certain* young people, they sit within a more general discourse where young people are presented as potentially dangerous and/or in need of control. As

Tony Blair pointed out in his foreword to the Respect Action Plan, *"This Respect Action Plan is about taking a broader approach. It recognises that, as well as enforcement we have to focus on the causes of anti-social behaviour, which lie in families, in the classroom and in communities"* (Respect Task Force 2006). In implementing policy to inculcate certain standards of behaviour, the 'respect' that Government has attempted to foster amongst young people may be viewed as closer to deference than mutuality, in that what is being imposed is a one-way relationship where young people must demonstrate respect (to adults), but where the obligations of adults to respect young people are barely mentioned (France & Meredith, forthcoming; McDowell 2007). The Respect Task Force was disbanded under Gordon Brown's premiership, and it is important to note that some of the more recent government documents have been more careful about attributing societal problems entirely to young people's behaviour, focussing instead on the need to empower them (DfES 2004; O'Donnell et al. 2007; Ministry of Justice 2007). Despite this, the appointment of the former head of the Respect Task Force, Louise Casey, to head up a review of the criminal justice system in 2008 suggests that the focus on behaviour and responsibilisation policies is unlikely to be fundamentally reversed (Casey 2008).

What has so far been demonstrated is that underpinning New Labour's conception of citizenship are normative beliefs about what constitutes appropriate citizen activities and behaviour. This has enabled the government to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' citizens, the latter being subject to increasing measures designed to regulate their behaviour. Inclusion into citizenship and/or a sense of citizenship belonging is thus dependent on conformity to New Labour's notion of the 'ideal citizen' (e.g. partaking in paid employment, engaging in voluntary activity and bringing up

children to be respectful of others, particularly adults). In presenting citizenship

values as 'common sense' and based on consensus, government has effectively

bypassed the need for debate and/or the inclusion of alternative viewpoints. As

Morrisson points out, *"It is a discourse [of citizenship] which attempts to suture the*

social by articulating the particular as universal" (2004, p180).

This has potential implications for young people in particular. Young people are

unlikely to be in full-time paid employment, and they are yet to reach the age of full

de jure citizenship entitlement. They have also been constructed as a potential threat

to citizenship. Moreover, in focussing on the need to educate and guide young people

to prepare them for *adult* citizenship (CAG 1998, p8), it may also be said that young

people's *current* status as citizens is ignored (Lister 2003). Young people are

excluded from government conceptions of citizenship, while at the same time being

demonised for their behaviour and 'failure' to act as responsible citizens. This, I will

demonstrate, is having a negative effect on young people's citizenship mediations.

First, I will outline an alternative approach to citizenship that offers the possibility of

empowering young people as citizens in their own right.

A cultural citizenship approach

A cultural approach to citizenship, or a difference-centred approach (see Moosa-

Mitha 2005), has at its heart a concern with the need to develop an inclusive

citizenship that respects 'difference'. In a similar vein to government's approach,

belonging, mutuality and agency are also posited by cultural citizenship theorists as

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being fundamental to citizenship where recognition of one's membership is just as important as access to formal rights (Lister 2007). The focus of this approach, however, is on the lived experiences of citizenship and the practices of exclusion and discrimination that mediate citizens' membership and political voice, particularly amongst citizens of 'difference' (Moosa-Mitha 2005; Stevenson 2003). A cultural citizenship approach seeks to uncover and challenge the cultural and institutional practices that support fixed notions or normative assumptions of 'ideal' citizenship, which serve to exclude citizens who may differ from these norms, for example in terms of identity, culture or beliefs. For cultural citizenship theorists, equality of citizenship is only realisable in a context where the experiences and views of citizens themselves, whatever their background, culture or social location, are both recognised and respected.

Cultural understandings of citizenship draw attention to the fact that in global informational societies, power is no longer confined simply to material dimensions but is also fundamental in mediating understanding and knowledge. As Stevenson claims, *"The control of the powerful over dominant discourses and frameworks of understanding is one of the key structural divisions within the world today"* (2003, p17). Thus feminists have challenged dominant discourses of citizenship based on 'male' attributes such as rationality and impartiality that have served to exclude women, viewed as lacking in these 'virtues' (Lister 2007). Anti-racists have also drawn attention to the negative effects of hegemonic discourse that has represented black people as 'Other' and potentially dangerous and troublesome (Hall 1996). A cultural citizenship approach stresses that if citizenship is to achieve its inclusionary potential, the 'cultural' sphere, or the sphere of meaning-making, cannot be ignored as

non-political or 'private', but must become a public concern (Pawley 2008; Stevenson 2003).

In this way, citizens' everyday lived experiences, of discrimination and disrespect, and of having a voice and being listened to, are pivotal to citizenship. The centrality of citizens' own voices and experiences also places greater emphasis on citizen empowerment and inclusion than other approaches that seek to mould citizens into a pre-defined 'norm'. Citizenship belonging, mutuality and political agency are not dependent on adhering to normative conceptions of appropriate citizen behaviour or activities posited as 'responsible citizenship'. What counts as citizenship is articulated in a much broader and more inclusive fashion where the views and experiences of individual citizens are taken into account (Moosa-Mitha 2005). This does not, however, mean that citizenship is purely subjective or that it is value-less. Indeed, the aim of a cultural citizenship approach is to enable commonality to be negotiated and achieved on the basis of difference, or amongst 'differently equal' citizens (Lister 2007; Moosa-Mitha 2005). This echoes some of the work by prominent multiculturalists on the development of commonality *through* difference (Touraine 2000; Parekh 2000). Nor does it mean that institutional structures or hegemonic discourses are ignored; as stated previously, they are central to cultural citizenship's challenge. What it does mean is that citizenship 'norms' may only be considered valid if they have been open to negotiation and freely accepted by all to whom they may apply (Stevenson 2003).

This does presuppose the creation of active and democratic public spaces where negotiation may take place. It also suggests that in order to function effectively,

citizens may need to develop an outlook of empathy for and connection with others, the absence of which risks collapse into individualism (Pawley 2008). It is here that theories of cultural citizenship may be said to be at their weakest. For although the focus is on the development of mutuality and commonality through discursive process amongst citizens, the very facilitation of this may be said to be dependent upon *some* measure of value agreement. Some have posited that this may be informed by human rights principles, which don't necessarily have to be biased towards Western cultures or ways of life (Stevenson 2003). Others have taken a slightly different route and stressed the idea of citizenship as a learning process within a more discursive framework, where *"citizenship can become an important means of cognitive transformation of self and other"* (Delanty 2003, p7). In this respect, cultural citizenship may be more accurately described as an ongoing project. However it is a project, as I will show, that is particularly pertinent to the inclusion and engagement of young people as citizens.

In challenging current conceptions of citizenship as normative and exclusive, a cultural citizenship approach offers the potential for the inclusion of young people and children into citizenship, even though they may not enjoy some of its more formal rights. In an important article on this issue, Moosa-Mitha (2005) argues that *"Difference-centred theorists… [provide] a space where childhood is acknowledged as being an important stage in life without reference to adulthood as a norm or standard by which children get constructed as 'not-yet-adults', where children's difference/s, both real and constructed, is not understood in terms of 'less-than'"* (p375). If citizenship is viewed in relational terms, as it is within civic republican, communitarian, New Labour, and cultural conceptions, then it is fair to say that young

people already experience citizenship through their everyday life experiences and relations with others. In liberating them from the pressure to conform to an adult notion of ideal citizenship, young people may be given the mutual recognition and respect that they are entitled to as 'differently-equal' citizens. This, as I will show, is likely to be far more conducive to the development of their sense of belonging, mutuality and political agency in society than an approach which makes the achievement of these elements of citizenship conditional on conformity to a norm that young people have had no input in creating.

An empirical study of youth citizenship

In seeking to explore these issues, empirical research on the experience and negotiation of citizenship was conducted with young people in Nottingham between 2005 and 2006. The aim of the research was to identify how young people articulated citizenship, its relative importance to them, the extent to which they felt included and empowered as citizens, and the factors in their everyday lives informing their positions. Particular emphasis was placed on an exploration of young people's experiences in their local communities. Communities, as stated previously, are central to New Labour's reinvigoration of citizenship in terms of both the rhetoric of responsibility and active citizenship, and policy implemented within communities to control 'undesirable' behaviour, particularly amongst the young. Local communities are also, moreover, the site where, to a great extent, young people 'live' their citizenship. An analysis of young people's experiences there is central to a difference-centred or cultural citizenship approach which seeks to understand the

obstacles in the way of young people's enjoyment of an inclusive citizenship through their own voices.

The research is based on interviews and focus groups with 83 young people aged 14-16 attending schools within Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Authorities[6]. Participants were selected to represent a cross-section of school populations in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, academic ability and performance, although all the participating schools had received recent favourable Ofsted reports, meaning that respondents not in receipt of a good standard of education were not captured. The selected age band of respondents was informed by the fact that it is this age group that is both the target of statutory Citizenship Education, as well as community based policies of control aimed at tackling young people 'hanging around on street corners' and causing a nuisance (Appleton 2006; Rohrer 2006).

Interviews and focus groups were structured to enable young people to explore issues that concerned them, what they felt they could do (and, indeed, had done) to address these issues, and what they felt about their position and/or role within their communities and the wider society. Research findings are split into four themes or areas: crime and anti-social behaviour; community (dis)respect; belonging and stake in the community; and having a voice. This has been informed by what young people taking part in the research felt was important, and most affected their experiences and positions within their communities. The ethos of a cultural or difference-centred approach to citizenship, in terms of emphasis placed on the voices of young people themselves, has informed the methodological approach taken.

Young people's experiences in their communities

Although the young people did not tend to use the term 'citizenship', it was clear from their descriptions of their lives in their communities and what was important to them in these contexts that citizenship, in the relational sense described, was both highly relevant to them and something they were concerned about. Issues of 'respect', belonging and having a voice were fundamental to their sense of inclusion and stake within their communities. How young people conceived of these issues and their own citizenship was, however, often at odds with the conception of citizenship promoted by the New Labour government. One pertinent example of this concerns the issue of 'respect' which, for young people, was something that flourished in relationships of mutuality, where respect was given and where it was received, rather than relationships of deference where young people were expected to show respect without questions of reciprocation.

Cultural approaches to citizenship have emphasised the importance of lived experience and interpersonal relationships of mutual respect to the development of an inclusive and equal citizenship. This was very much the case for the young people taking part in the research, who highlighted their experiences of discrimination and disrespect in their everyday lives as preventing them from developing a sense of themselves as included and valued members of their communities. This calls into question contemporary views that citizenship is simply about knowledge, morals and values that are taught in formal settings, i.e. school. Government policy and rhetoric on the need to control young people's behaviour and educate them in the values and practice of citizenship has meant that young people's relational experiences within

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their communities are often ignored, and also ones where they feel discriminated against and disempowered. This is having a detrimental effect on their sense of their own citizenship[7].

Crime and anti-social behaviour

When asked to describe their communities and their experiences within them, the issue of community safety was raised by many. Crime and anti-social behaviour was a major concern for young people, particularly regarding the issue of intimidation from groups of other young people on the street. Their concerns in this sense do not conflict with dominant Government and media rhetoric about lawless communities and the 'problem of youth':

> *"Where I'm living at the moment there is a problem with too many youths walking around and getting drunk and stuff"*
>
> -   Hannah, aged 15

These fears suggest that the communities in which many of these young people live are not viewed as pleasant places to be and instil, in a number of cases, a certain amount of fear. This was not the case for all, but a majority mentioned negative attributes associated with their communities, and this was the case for both young men and young women, as well as across the spectrums of class and ethnicity. It was also clear that the most widespread view was that it was young people (albeit other young people) who were causing many of the problems within communities, whether that be vandalism, violence, or simply intimidation. It may be that young people have themselves internalised some of the currently dominant rhetoric positioning youth as a

problem. As Finn and Checkoway (1998) highlight, *"the dominant view of youths in any society will affect the beliefs and behaviours of adults and youths themselves"* (p.335). It is interesting to note that only one young person in the sample actually admitted to being rowdy and perhaps a little disrespectful on the streets. This may be due to unintended effects of the research process, in that participants may have been reluctant to admit their part in anti-social behaviour to an adult researcher asking them about citizenship. However, the sheer volume of complaints about this type of behaviour appears to suggest otherwise.

Young people's views on this issue were not immune to the influence of its coverage in the media, and parental fears about crime and anti-social behaviour also had an influence, particularly in the context of parents as protectors:

> *"I'm not allowed into Nottingham unless it's like on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon and I'm with my friends, my mum won't let me go in in the evening which is fair enough"*
>
> - Lydia, aged 16

Although media hype and parental worries undoubtedly had some effect on young people's perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour in their communities, it is also important to note the first hand experiences that they had of these problems. Young people are much more likely than adults to be the targets of verbal and physical abuse from other young people (Pain 2003), and a number of (predominantly male) participants recounted how they had been beaten up and had objects and abuse thrown at them by other young people on the streets.

What may be even more particular about young people's experiences, however, is the fact that they did not feel that they were taken seriously as victims of crime, or that anything was really being done to address these situations, because of their age:

"I mean some of the muggings have been quite serious, I have been quite badly beaten up and the police didn't really take much care or anything... They told me that they'd come and pick me up and they were like four hours late and things like that so I think that they need to take a bit more care about what's going on in your life kind of thing, in the city centre they should have more wardens walking round and patrolling to make sure that nothing is going to happen"

- Tony, aged 15

It is possible that this reaction to young people by the police is informed by stereotypes with regard to youth and 'bad' behaviour and the positioning of young people as in need of control. Research has shown that the dominant rhetoric connecting community crime and anti-social behaviour with young people has meant that young people's fears and experience of crime have not always been taken seriously by Government and the relevant authorities (Pain 2003). If young people feel threatened within their communities (and research suggests that young people are more likely to be threatened than any other age group – Home Office 2005; MORI 2004), and if they also feel that those employed to protect them in these arenas are not prepared to listen to them, it is unsurprising that they express fear and anxiety when talking about their experiences. Young people could be said to be the subjects of a double dose of discrimination where they are stereotyped as the perpetrators of violence and ignored as its victims.

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(Dis)respect and the community

Despite their fears about other young people within their communities, there was a growing realisation that perceptions about young people causing trouble on the streets could and are in many cases used unfairly about any groups of young people in the community. This led the majority of the young people taking part in the research to complain vociferously about being discriminated against and disrespected by adults due to their age:

> *"Everyone stereotypes teenagers into being, you know, hoodies and gangsters and chavs that steal things, stand in the square smoking and stuff, it's just not everybody's like that"*
>
> - Amy, aged 15

The young people were very aware of how they were represented in popular political discourse in the press and on TV:

> *Adults don't seem to know what we're like because the media is a very powerful tool, all you see on the news is the youths who broke the windows and got drunk in the park, things like that, that's all you see, that's the only portrayal that you see.*
>
> - Eva, aged 15

What is particularly concerning is the impact that this view, or stereotyping, of young people as troublemakers, untrustworthy and disrespectful had on young people's experiences in their everyday lives in their communities. The majority of research participants across axes of gender, class and ethnicity reported some instance, and in many cases a number of instances, where they felt they were discriminated against

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due to their age. A large number complained about being unfairly targeted by the police. In one particular area the local police had implemented a policy of taking down the names of any young people on the streets or in the local parks who were in groups of more than three[8]. The young people tended to feel harassed by this practice as well as intimidated, particularly when the police gave the impression that they had done something wrong and/or threatened to call their parents. Young people's sense of fear in their communities was heightened rather than alleviated by this practice.

It was not solely by the agencies of law enforcement that young people felt disrespected and unfairly treated. Participants recounted many instances in their everyday lives where they felt discriminated against due to their age, including in shops, using public transport, as well as on the streets. It was generally felt that people expected them to misbehave, and treated them accordingly:

> *"On the bus you get bus drivers and it's not like a good job and like you respect them 'cause they're providing a service to you and, like, say if you give them the wrong money by accident and they say, they start to get angry because they think that you're being cheeky… They like start thinking that you're cheeky 'cause you're an annoying little kid basically"*
>
> - Callum, aged 15

> *"You're automatically like watched when you're going into shops and stuff, like, to be careful that you're not shoplifting or doing something that you shouldn't do and stuff like that"*
>
> - Michelle, aged 15

Being respected was the issue that many participants cited as having an impact on their sense of value and belonging within their communities:

"[I feel respected] by my friends but not by adults or others… Because of my age people just think 'oh it's another teenager, they're going to start squealing and giggling at every opportunity' but um it's not like that. There's quite a lot of people who aren't the archetypal teenager, but they don't really get a voice… It just makes me feel, it just makes me distrust the person because it feels like they're judging me before they know me".

- Ava, aged 15

As this quote and those above demonstrate, what makes young people feel disrespected is being negatively judged and interacted with based on assumptions about their age, and not on the basis of who they are as human beings. It is not necessarily the case that young people wish to be treated as though they were the same as adults. In fact, a number of them stated a desire for greater support and supervision from adults within their communities:

"I don't think there's enough people outside [school] who can help you, help you through your problems, or encourage you and stuff like that, even though parents do a good job of it I don't think there's enough people out there, like in community centres, who could help people"

- Alfie, aged 15

Rather, the point of contention is directed at the assumptions and stereotypes about what being a young person means and who they are. Respect, for young people, meant being recognised and listened to without prejudice. Here it is clear that a cultural citizenship approach may speak directly to young people's experiences and

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concerns. Young people were aware that they were not treated with equal respect to adults. Emotions expressed by young people as a result of these experiences ranged from anger and annoyance through to feeling embarrassed or demoralised, although a couple said that they'd got used to ignoring these incidents. What is clear is that these experiences are not leading to the sense of community inclusion stressed by New Labour as vital to the healthy development of citizenship:

> *"It makes you feel like you're lower down in society and like a bigger community because, well especially Nottingham and Manchester, because there's a lot of gun crime and stuff, and drugs, they all stereotype you that obviously if you're under eighteen you're carrying a gun and doing drugs. And that just makes you feel like you're just not worth it"*
>
> - Amy, aged 15

The everyday experience of young people is not one of inclusion and equality and in this sense they could be described as second class citizens, or even non-citizens, within their communities. The development of mutual respect with adults that young people taking part in this research desired, and which is also necessary for an inclusive citizenship, is far from being realised.

Wanting a stake in their communities

Despite feeling treated in an unequal way by adults within their communities this did not, as might have been expected, lead to a rejection of those communities or rebelliousness against adults amongst the majority of the young people taking part in the research. On the contrary, young people lamented instead what they saw as a

more general decline of a sense of community spirit and care for others amongst all sections of their communities. Notwithstanding the particular discrimination that young people experienced, it was clear that they also perceived a wider problem with the way that community members interacted and treated one another. The young people attributed this lack of community spirit variously to a lack of time in people's current lifestyles, a decline in family values, the fact that people move about more and do not necessarily live where they work or go to school, and the move towards a more individualised and competitive culture:

> *"I think people just want to do their best in life and they're not really bothered about*
> *anybody else. Because I think that it's the way that people are brought up nowadays*
> *or something. I sometimes am quite selfish and I know that I should stop it but it's*
> *kind of like what you do at the time kind of thing. And I don't know, it's kind of, erm,*
> *I think that people generally don't care about anybody else these days, they're more*
> *bothered about themselves"*
>
> - Faith, aged 15

Many young people were critical of the increasing emphasis on individualism in society, and concerned at the loss of mutual respect and bonds of affection with other people in their communities. Young people's concerns here are very close to some the New Labour government has raised in relation to the perceived fragmentation of society. What this also shows is that New Labour's focus on the need to address young people's behaviour as a prerequisite to solving these problems is somewhat misplaced. Contrary to this view, young people themselves share concerns about the general uncaring nature of their communities and wider society.

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It may be argued that it is easy to refer to an idealised version of the past, mutually caring and supportive, as a way of highlighting discontent with a current lack of community care. Ironically many who use this comparison may well be reluctant to put in the time and put up with the intrusion into their lives that being part of these communities from the past would have entailed. However, it was also the case that a number of participants did actually belong to a community club or organisation, and that the majority of these highly valued the sense of belonging, respect and care that they encountered there:

> *"The people around me [in church] are like, they want to come and talk to me… I feel more accepted which, in a way, is better for me and they're, they're like, the mates that are there, they are genuine, they are real people… Within my church group, yeah, I feel respected"*
>
> -   Ed, aged 15

Rather than rejecting and rebelling against adult society, as often claimed, many of the young people taking part in this research instead coveted inclusion within adult communities, at least where they felt respected and valued. Young people's desires for separation therefore cannot be said to be the cause of their exclusion from their wider communities.

It was also apparent that there was a lack of opportunities for young people to become involved in community activities, particularly with regard to leisure activities. Many research participants complained that there was not enough desirable and affordable provision for young people, especially in the evenings:

"You got to go walking around or walk to McDonald's and just eat in there and stuff, so you're not really doing that much"

- Isa, aged 15

While accepting the validity of young people's comments on this issue, it is at the same time important to bear in mind that in the few cases where they mentioned that they were aware of the existence of youth clubs in their communities, they did not tend to use them. Reasons given were that these clubs were not well advertised so none of their friends went, or that they were more into outdoor activities and not interested in going. For some, the very term 'youth club' appeared to immediately turn them off:

"If they make it like a 'youth club' it just sounds like it's for little kids"

- Matt, aged 15

When asked about the sort of provision they would like, however, young people mentioned a variety of indoor activities including music, computers, basketball, snooker, games and 'chill out' space, to outdoor activities such as climbing and football, including having tournaments. Despite it not being entirely clear how successful this type of provision would be in practice, this does not detract from the fact that statements about the need for something for young people were by no means uncommon amongst participants. That young people feel there is currently little provision for them within their communities may lead to further feelings of exclusion and unimportance within these communities, regardless of the resultant problems they may then encounter through socialising on the street.

The New Labour government has taken note of some of these criticisms. In *Youth Matters*, published by DfES in 2005, we see some acknowledgement that young people have been sidelined within their communities, and a stronger rhetoric around engaging and empowering young people to have a say and impact on community life. This led to the development of the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund, which ring-fenced funding for Local Authorities whereby young people could apply for finance to support the development of facilities in their communities they themselves wanted (O'Donnell et al. 2007). However, the kind of engagement that the document describes has been criticised by some as failing to facilitate real democratic citizenship and, instead, offering a more 'consumerist' form of citizenship, where young people will be able to have some choice over already prescribed options and services (Oliver 2005). This may result from fixed ideas of ideal citizenship and behaviour to which young people have no input. It is the case that none of the young people taking part in this research had been consulted about leisure facilities in their area, although formal consultation may have taken some time to be fully implemented.

What these findings suggest, contrary to much popular Government and media rhetoric on the position of young people as anti-social and breaking away from their communities, is that most young people are actually seeking, instead, membership and inclusion within them. Their exclusion appears to have more to do with cultural and institutional practices that position young people as a potential danger to their communities and impact on their ability to engage with community members on an equal level. The fact that the young people here have demonstrated a desire to be part of their communities points to the need for the focus to shift from an over-emphasis

on the behaviour of the young, towards a more balanced approach that incorporates what Government and the adult community can do to facilitate this.

Having a voice

Most of the young people taking part in the research had not thought about trying to do anything themselves about the lack of youth provision, or any other issue they were concerned about in their communities. In this sense they could be said to be passively discontented. It is on their political agency, however, that young people's negative experiences of their own citizenship appear to be having a particularly detrimental effect. Many participants felt that there was no point even trying to affect change due to the belief that they would not be listened to because of their age:

> Jay: *"The best thing to do is go to the Council but then what's, you know, a young teenager gonna do?"*
>
> Dom: *"They think they know more than you"*
>
> Jay: *"Yeah, 'cause like they say, it's best staying out of politics and religion and, stay out of trouble, 'cause it's kind of hard to get involved with it when you haven't got much say at all"*
>
> -   Both participants aged 16

Just one young person had attended a community meeting in order to put forward a case for increased leisure provision for the young people in the area. Unfortunately, the response he experienced appeared to confirm this belief that young people would not be listened to due to being judged according to age-related stereotypes:

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"When we said that, our views, there was some people that said erm, said that so-and-so names cause problems and we'd chuck it back in their face. They're just judging us on that, when there's other people that would actually look after it at every given opportunity"

- Cameron, aged 15

This belief in age-related stereotypes was also something that appeared to have some impact on young people's willingness to become politically active more generally and outside of their communities:

"The Government, they're mainly, they don't, if they are going to advertise something about poverty or something they won't aim it at, like, us even though we're sitting here and talking about poverty, but they don't know that we're talking about poverty because, you know, they don't listen to us because they just think 'oh teenagers in a school or whatever'. They don't value our opinion as much as they might someone else's 'cause we're not old enough"

- Leo, aged 15

"You can't really write to places if you're young, they just think 'oh it's just a little kid's letter' and they just don't really read it, they just overlook it, but when you're a bit older they'll actually take it into account and maybe even consider reading it"

- Jake, aged 15

This is not to make the claim that there are no other issues contributing to young people's disengagement from traditional politics. However, their sense of themselves as second class citizens within their communities has certainly not empowered them. Of course, it may be argued that young people are using the issue of disrespect as an excuse for not attempting to have a voice in their communities, when in reality they

have no interest in this. However, this conflicts with their stated wish for inclusion and respect. Moreover, the perception that they would not be listened to stands, regardless of whether they'd want to be engaged or not, and could in fact be said to itself contribute to their desires on this front (O'Toole et al. 2003). If young people are to be encouraged to be politically active within their communities, they need at the very least to believe that those communities would be open to and interested in what they had to say.

Conclusion

What this article has sought to demonstrate is that the current New Labour government agenda on citizenship has contributed to a situation where young people feel discriminated against and disrespected due to their age, and find it difficult to develop any positive sense of themselves as (young) citizens. In positioning young people as in need of responsibilisation and guidance in appropriate citizenship values and behaviour, they have effectively been excluded from a citizenship based on normative values, and denied any equality of voice in articulating what is important to them and how they may wish to participate. Young people's real experiences of age-related discrimination and disrespect in their local communities may be viewed, in this context, as part of a wider culture within society towards young people which has been informed and reinforced by the increasing articulation of this normative citizenship agenda in the mass media.

For the young people taking part in the research, how they were treated and interacted with in their everyday lives was fundamental to their sense of inclusion as citizens.

Being recognised, respected and listened to were the factors that young people stated as being of most importance with regard to the development of a sense of belonging and engagement within their communities as equal citizens. This was clearly not happening in reality. I have argued that for this to be facilitated, what is needed is a move away from the normative citizenship agenda promoted by Government and towards, instead, a citizenship informed by a cultural or difference centred approach. In stressing the importance of recognition and respect to the development of a citizenship that takes inclusion and equality seriously, a cultural citizenship approach can be said to be much closer to the way that young people conceive of and articulate citizenship. A cultural citizenship approach would not seek to measure young people's citizenship against a pre-defined adult 'norm' but, rather, to uncover and challenge the institutional and cultural practices which serve to define and exclude certain groups as 'Other', including young people. In this way, normative assumptions of citizenship would be displaced in favour of taking seriously the subjective concerns of citizens and allowing them an input into what a revised citizenship might mean in the 21st century.

It is the case that New Labour's agenda on citizenship has been informed by fears about increased cultural pluralism and the potential for societal fragmentation. A citizenship that provides a value framework that otherwise disparate citizens may hold in common is therefore an attractive prospect in the current political climate, with dominant figures claiming that multiculturalism has gone too far and that we need to focus on what we have in common rather than what sets us apart (e.g. Trevor Phillips 2004). In this context, a citizenship that places difference at its heart is unlikely to receive an enthusiastic response. However, as stated previously, a difference-centred

citizenship is not equal to a citizenship that is value-less. Rather, it is a citizenship

with the potential for the development of commonality *through* difference, although,

as has been pointed out, it may require the existence of at least *some* common values

to work successfully. However, by giving all citizens a voice at the negotiating table,

it is not a citizenship that seeks to impose the values of a privileged group, with the

result that certain other groups feel discriminated against and excluded, as has been

shown to be the case with young people. What is acknowledged by a cultural

approach to citizenship is that the latter is not a fixed and bounded entity that can be

applied equally to all citizens regardless of their real lived situations. Rather,

citizenship is an evolving and contested concept which can only hope to achieve its

emancipatory potential if all citizens are enabled to have an equal stake in its

formulation (Moosa-Mitha 2005).

It may be argued that age is an exception to this argument in the sense that young

people have yet to reach the age of maturity and develop the appropriate cognitive

capacity to participate as citizens (e.g. Goldstein et. al. 1979). However this argument

is working from a normative definition of citizenship with fixed assumptions about

the capacities that citizens should display. What the young people taking part in this

research have shown is that they experience citizenship in the everyday reality of their

lives and, moreover, are perfectly capable of articulating how they wish to belong and

participate. In addition to this, a cultural citizenship approach does not aim to deny

difference or treat young people the same as adults. On the contrary, the core of this

approach is to acknowledge 'difference' and empower citizens, in the context of

normative conceptions of citizenship, to challenge their portrayal as 'less-than'

(Moosa-Mitha 2005). This is not to deny that there may be a very real problem with

anti-social behaviour amongst certain sections of the youth population (and, indeed, amongst certain adults). What this research has shown, however, is that a citizenship that excludes young people and denies them a voice is likely to alienate *all* young people and may be even more detrimental for the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour, who are also more likely than average to suffer from other forms of social exclusion (Muncie 2006; McDowell 2007).

Finally, it is important to raise the issue of difference *amongst* young people as well as between them and adults. It is the case that the experience of disrespect and an inferior sense of citizenship was a common one for the young people taking part in the research, which spanned the socio-economic and cultural axes of gender, class, 'race' and ethnicity. It is therefore clear that there are certain common citizenship experiences that are mediated by age. This is not to make the claim, however, that young people's experiences of citizenship are the same, or that other identity factors have no impact on their life experiences. Indeed, it is the treatment of young people as an homogeneous group in need of responsibilisation that has been indicated here as the source of much negative citizenship experience amongst the young. It could also be said to have reinforced the experience of age when compared with other aspects of young people's identities[9]. What a cultural citizenship approach would offer is an acknowledgement of young people's social location as young people, including differentials in power, status, knowledge and experience that this may entail. At the same time, it would recognise the many different voices and experiences of the young, and respect these voices, as an important part of an inclusive society. If young people are not respected as equal members of the community and society in which they live, it is difficult to imagine how a sense of mutuality and/or active engagement,

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essential for the successful development of their citizenship, may be fostered and sustained.

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[1] Blair cites rising crime, escalating family breakdown and drug use, and the widening of social inequalities as the 'devastating consequences' of the previous Conservative administrations' approach.

[2] The New Deal for the unemployed is compulsory for all those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for more than six months, in the case of those aged 16-24, or more than eighteen months for those aged 25-60. See http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/life/employment/government_employment_schemes.htm

[3] Encouraging voluntary activity is one of three main strands of Citizenship Education (CAG 1998).

[4] Both the Anti-Social Behaviour Unit and the subsequent Respect Task Force were set up, predominantly, to deal with the 'problem' behaviour of young people, although government has sought to deny that the young were an explicit focus (Muncie 2006).

[5] An ASBO may be imposed by the police or Local Authority on anyone aged over ten whose behaviour is viewed as threatening or likely to cause offence. Breaches may be punishable by imprisonment. Parenting orders may impose a fine on parents who fail to control their children's

behaviour. Neither of these measures requires the commission of a criminal offence (see Muncie 2006).

[6] Names of participants have been changed to conform to the ethics of confidentiality.

[7] The approach takes on board the significance or otherwise of difference *between* young people. This is developed in the conclusion.

[8] The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 gave police powers in designated areas to disperse groups of two or more, usually young people, where it was felt they were or may cause distress, harassment, intimidation or alarm to other members of the public (Crawford & Lister 2007).

[9] This also echoes Stuart Hall's arguments about the impact of negative and homogenising representations of black people as 'Other' (1996).