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DOI

[10.1080/02671522.2018.1452958](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1452958)

Publication date

2019

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Research Papers in Education

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Nieuwelink, H., ten Dam, G., & Dekker, P. (2019). Adolescent citizenship and educational track: a qualitative study on the development of views on the common good. *Research Papers in Education*, 34(3), 373-388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1452958>

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To cite this article: Hessel Nieuwelink, Geert ten Dam & Paul Dekker (2019) Adolescent citizenship and educational track: a qualitative study on the development of views on the common good, *Research Papers in Education*, 34:3, 373-388, DOI: [10.1080/02671522.2018.1452958](https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1452958)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2018.1452958>



Published online: 20 Mar 2018.



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Adolescent citizenship and educational track: a qualitative study on the development of views on the common good

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ABSTRACT

Studies show adults' attitudes towards citizenship to be related to their educational level. It has been claimed that higher educated people more often possess 'good' citizenship values. However, only limited insight exists into how differences in citizenship attitudes between adolescents from various educational tracks develop over time. In this qualitative longitudinal study, we investigate the perspectives of adolescents from different educational tracks on aspects of citizenship. The results show that adolescents in higher tracks develop stronger political orientations with age and learn to focus more strictly on competition between perspectives and on formal procedures of decision-making. Those in the lower track remained rather uninterested in politics but stick to their emphasis on consensus and inclusiveness. Overall, our study shows that 'good' vs. 'bad' citizenship values do not simply coincide with educational level and provides a more nuanced insight into adolescent developmental trajectories towards citizenship.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 June 2017
Accepted 4 March 2018

KEYWORDS

Citizenship; education;
political socialisation;
educational track;
inequalities

Educational level is an important factor for explaining differences in orientations towards democratic citizenship. From early empirical studies on citizenship onwards, education has been shown to have a significant impact on adults' political and democratic attitudes and has been seen as a stronger explanation for these attitudes than other background characteristics such as gender, age, religiosity and ethnicity (e.g. Almond and Verba 1989; Converse 1972). Converse even stated that 'education is the universal solvent ... The higher the education, the greater the "good" values of the variable. The educated citizen is attentive, knowledgeable, and participatory, and the uneducated citizen is not' (Converse 1972, 324). Many studies from the years thereafter have shown that the higher educated people have more political efficacy, that they evaluate democracy more positively, they are more interested in politics that they want to participate more in politics and that they are less authoritarian (e.g. Lijphart 1997; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Sniderman, Tetlock, and Glaser 1989; Verba 1996; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). In the contemporary academic and public debate about citizenship, educational differences are still an important

issue (e.g. Eidhof et al. 2016; Gesthuizen 2006; Kriesi et al. 2006; Manning and Holmes 2013; Norris 2011). For example, Dutch political scientists Bovens and Wille (2009) have launched the provocative concept ‘diplomacy-democracy’ to call attention to the extreme overrepresentation of higher educated people among politicians and the risk that they are increasingly ignoring the interests and concerns of lower educated citizens.

Adolescence is an important period in life in which political attitudes are formed. A large amount of research shows that an association between educational level and citizenship already exists during adolescence. Additionally, among adolescents, the relationship between education and political attitudes is often observed. Many scholars have investigated this issue by comparing lower and higher educational tracks (e.g. Amadeo et al. 2002; Gaiser et al. 2003; Hout 2012; Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta 2002). However, because of the dearth of longitudinal studies, only limited insight exists into how differences in citizenship attitudes between adolescents from various educational tracks develop. What happens during this crucial phase in the political socialisation of young people and do students in different educational tracks show different developmental patterns? In the present study, we focus on changes in the outlook on youth citizenship in lower and higher school types in the Netherlands. By following a longitudinal approach, we aim to gain insight into how their views on citizenship develop over time, and to determine whether and in what ways patterns related to educational track already exist and how these evolve when they age. The qualitative character of our research enables us to explore the meanings adolescents attach to important aspects of citizenship in depth.

Citizenship and civility

What ‘good citizenship’ entails in democratic societies is part of a highly normative debate. In some perspectives, the critical role of citizens towards authorities is emphasised (e.g. Westheimer 2015; Westheimer and Kahne 2004), while in others, the importance of growing into customs and conventions of a community is primarily accentuated (Miller 2000). Another contrast lies in the question of what the main locus of citizenship is. Some authors claim that political participation is the highest form of participation (some call this *republicanism*; Van Gunsteren 1998), while others argue that the political community is one among many domains that people are part of and that participating in social domains is at least as important (*communitarianism*; Van Gunsteren 1998; cf. Barber 1984; Kymlicka 2001).

Notwithstanding the different discourses on democratic citizenship, there are also some central, shared aspects. One of these is what Shils (1991) called ‘substantive civility’. This concerns the virtue that people should be willing to moderate their personal preferences and search for the common good for society as a whole. To operationalise citizenship, we focus on three central aspects of civility according to Shils: engagement, collectivity and freedom of speech. The first aspect is the willingness to be engaged in society cannot function without their active participation. The level of involvement is debated but the premise that citizens should participate in communities is (largely) undisputed (Ekman and Amnå 2012; Fung 2006; Held 2006). Secondly, citizens should consider others as fellow citizens with equal rights and obligations, even when their interpretations of the common good differ. Trying to find shared interests, i.e. value the collectivity, is part of the democratic process. Thereby, citizens should be willing to focus on the common good and when doing so try to include conflicting interests and the interests of minorities (e.g. Goodin 2008; Thomassen 2007).

Finally, citizens have the right to be able to voice their views in trying to find the common good, even when others find these obnoxious or objectionable. At the same time, those who are voicing their opinions should consider the sensibilities of other citizens and prevent exclusion. With the right of freedom of speech, citizens should thus find a balance between the democratic need to voice and exchange opinions and recognition of the sensitivities of other citizens (Dekker 2009; Shils 1991; Walzer 1974). We will call this reflexive support for the freedom of speech.

In this research, we investigate the views of adolescents from different educational tracks regarding these central aspects of citizenship in a developmental perspective. Consequently, we explore whether adolescents' views are associated with certain interpretations of citizenship and how these develop over time.

Previous research about citizenship and educational track

Research, most often cross-sectional research, shows that between adolescents, differences exist with regard to citizenship orientations that relate to the level of education. Adolescents in higher educational tracks appear to have more political knowledge than those in lower tracks. They are to a larger extent familiar with the concept of democracy and with political institutions, actors and events than other students (e.g. Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta 2002). Differences for educational level are also found for attitudes towards democratic citizenship. A study shows that students in higher educational tracks show higher levels of support for democracy, while those in lower tracks are more often disinterested in democracy and more often reject the idea altogether (Gaiser et al. 2003). Furthermore, students in higher tracks also have a greater intention of participating in politics (Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Gaiser and De Rijke 2008; Torney-Purta 2002), and are more interested in political and social issues than their peers in lower tracks (Gaiser et al. 2003). Students in higher educational tracks also tend to show higher levels of tolerance and lower levels of ethnocentrism (Elchardus, Herbots, and Spruyt 2013; Hooghe, Dassonneville, and Marien 2014; Vollebergh, Iedema, and Raaijmakers 2001).

However, while these studies find that among adolescents differences already exist regarding their attitudes towards politics and democracy, they do not touch upon individual trajectories during adolescence. To our knowledge, only a few studies have yet investigated development during adolescence with taking into account differentiation for educational tracks (Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Elchardus, Herbots, and Spruyt 2013; Geboers et al. 2015; Janmaat, Mostafa, and Hoskins 2014; Keating and Janmaat 2015; Lancee and Sarrasin 2015; Persson 2012, 2014). With the exception of Geboers et al.'s study that only shows evolving track differences regarding citizenship knowledge, adolescents in higher tracks are generally found to develop more interest in politics, greater willingness to participate, more political trust and greater levels of tolerance than their peers in lower tracks. These differences seem rather stable or even increase over time.

That educational level is strongly associated with differences in adolescents' citizenship attitudes can be explained by several factors. Schools themselves could play a role in it. Studies indicate that the goals set for citizenship education differ for lower tracks and higher tracks. Goals set for the former type more often focus on pro-social behaviour and discipline while the latter type is more often directed towards emancipation and critical thinking (Ichilov 2003; Leenders, Veugelers, and De Kat 2008; Ten Dam and Volman

2003). Other studies put forward the notion that the higher cognitive skills and abilities of students in higher educational tracks probably account for higher levels of political knowledge and greater willingness to participate in politics (Cassel and Lo 1997; Hillygus 2005). Additionally, socio-economic milieu appears to be an explanatory factor. In many countries, adolescents from higher social milieus are overrepresented in higher educational tracks (Bol et al. 2014; OECD 2014). Some longitudinal studies show that differences already exist before educational tracking, implying that socio-economic milieu are causing variations among adolescents (Lancee and Sarrasin 2015; Persson 2012, 2014). At home, children in families with higher socio-economic status more often encounter situations that enable them to develop democratic attitudes than children from lower status families (i.e. discussions about politics or negotiations about house rules) (Gniewosz, Noack, and Buhl 2009; Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009; Neundorf, Smets, and García-Albacete 2013). Besides SES, there are of course also other student characteristics that relate to the development of citizenship attitudes – gender in particular, but also ethnicity, and religiosity (e.g. Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Geijssels et al. 2012; Godwin, Godwin, and Martinez-Ebers 2004). However, these characteristics are barely linked to educational level.

Present study

How do adolescents from different educational tracks view important aspects of citizenship and how do these views develop over time? In this article, this research question will be answered with help of an interview study among Dutch adolescents. By taking a longitudinal and qualitative research approach, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of what happens with young people's perspectives during this important life phase. We provide a more in-depth description of the development of adolescents' views on citizenship from those from different educational tracks in order to explore whether different development trajectories are related to tracks differences. Moreover, given that gender is an important factor in citizenship, we also explore the possible differences between female and male adolescents.

In our study, we focus on three aspects of citizenship, namely social and political engagement, orientation on the common good (collectivity) and reflexive support for the freedom of speech, as being important aspects of civility (Shils 1991, see above). Converse's unambiguous claim (1972) that education is strongly associated with having 'good values' and the results of the empirical studies published in the last 40 years on this issue suggest that adolescents from higher tracks become with age more socially and politically engaged and more oriented towards the common good and thereby emphasise on consensus and inclusivity, and increasingly argue that both freedom of speech and sensitivities of other citizens are of great importance. Those from lower educational tracks are to lesser extent expected to develop such positive orientations towards these aspects. Focusing on developmental trends among young people, we investigate from an in-depth perspective whether this relationship between 'the good values' and educational level holds for the participating adolescents as well.

Methodology

Participants

For this study, we interviewed 40 Dutch adolescents twice: when they were in their second year of secondary education (aged 13–15; 2011) and two years later (2013). We chose to

interview students in eighth and tenth grades primarily because previous studies indicate that this period is pivotal for the political socialisation of adolescents (see above).

The respondents were equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV, lower status) and pre-academic (PA, higher status) educational tracks. These students attended one of the four following schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a homogeneous population of non-minority students in the northeast of the Netherlands; a public school providing pre-vocational education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country; a public school providing pre-academic education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam; and a Roman Catholic school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country. Regarding the selection of participants, a well-balanced dispersion was aimed at with regard to gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background and religious orientation. By selecting participants with different backgrounds and varying characteristics, we opted for a diverse sample which helped us to find perspectives on democracy from many walks of life.

Interview and procedure

Semi-structured interviews were organised in the same way in both rounds of interviews and lasted approximately 90 min. The interviews involved answering a few introductory questions followed by the presentation of two cases about ways of dealing with the common good. In the first case, participants were asked how they would deal with disagreement among students about the rescheduling of a class. During the discussion of this case, interviewees were asked to explain their views in more detail and whether they would change their preferences whenever the situation in the case would be different (e.g. 'Does it matter how many students object to rescheduling the class?' 'Does it matter what kind of argument is being used?'). This case confronted the interviewees with several principles of citizenship, such as collective decision-making, and inclusion of varying arguments and interests, that are at play when dealing with issues regarding the common good.

In the second case, students were asked to select a group they objected to (e.g. atheists, religious fundamentalists and nationalists) from a list. Then, the interviewees were asked to give their views on the possibilities these groups should have to voice their opinions publicly. Thereafter, the participant was asked to discuss the situation where these groups would formulate views that offended the sensibilities of other citizens and what kind of solution the interviewee would prefer in such situations. The last aspect of the discussion of the second case was that the interviewees were asked to give their views on whether or not that group – if it were to constitute a majority group – should be allowed to abolish the freedom rights of other groups. This case was meant to provide insight into the reasoning of adolescents with regard to potential boundaries to collectively define the common good and the potential conflicting principle of fundamental freedom rights.

Thereafter, several statements were discussed that focused on social and political engagement and their perceptions of the workings of Dutch politics (e.g. 'I like to talk with people about what is going on in the world', 'I find it important that people are engaged with creating a just world', 'It is important that people vote in elections' and 'Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives'). The adolescents were also asked to formulate their

views about statements that dealt with issues related to the common good in the political domain. They were asked about collective ways to deal with issues regarding the common good (e.g. 'Politicians should be listening to all citizens when coming to a decision'; 'When coming to a decision, it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time') and about autocracy and theocracy (e.g. 'A strong leader should tell us what we should do' and 'It would be best if our country was ruled by God's will').

Coding and analysis of data

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti, the interviews were coded and analysed on the basis of the concepts that were derived from the theoretical framework and research question with a focus on discerning similarities and dissimilarities in the patterns of responding (Miles and Huberman 1994). The transcribed interviews were coded using the following categories and subcategories:

- Social and political engagement: Engaged with creating a just world; discussing current events; discussing political issues; egalitarian or elite perspective on participation in politics; voting; and evaluation of Dutch politics.
- Focus on the common good (collectivity): Preference for collective or non-collective ways of dealing with social and political issues; focus on inclusivity, consensus and compromise with decision-making or focus majority and decisiveness with decision-making; comparability of their reasoning in school context and political context regarding these aspects.
- Freedom of speech: Importance of voicing one's opinion; importance of other citizens' sensibilities; possibility of banning opinions from public debate.

To determine the reliability of the coding, the fragments of the transcribed interviews were coded independently, resulting in a satisfactory Cohen's κ of 0.84.

Respondents are the units of analysis and analysed according to the categories stated above. As regards the three central aspects of citizenship, we looked for the following information in the transcripts of the interviews. First, we sought for signs of engagement in statements about social and political activities and the wish to be involved in, or provide explanations for, the importance of being active in creating a better world. Furthermore, we searched for their views on the current state of politics in the Netherlands and we looked at their perspectives on the issue whether all citizens should be able to participate in the political domain. Second, indications for a focus on the common good were that interviewees took into account the preferences and interests of others – preferences for procedures that gave room to deliberation, negotiation and majoritarian decision-making and stimulated the search for common interests as well as an awareness of a tension between these aspects (as is in line with theoretical approaches on this, see above). Furthermore, we searched for their perspectives on similarities or dissimilarities between searching for the common good in the school context and in the political context.

Third, we searched for ways in which the interviewees deal with situations where both freedom of speech and the sensibility of others are at play. We investigated how they prefer to deal with such situations and whether they think both principles are equal or one should have overriding importance.

Results

How do our adolescents develop views as regard to engagement, the common good and freedom of speech? What differences can be seen along the lines of educational tracks or gender?

Different perspectives on social and political engagement

Democratic societies require socially and politically engaged citizens. The interviewed young people in the higher educational track (PA) and the lower track (PV) talked in different ways about engagement. The dominant views among adolescents in PA-track were that they are willing to be engaged in society and that political engagement is important. With age, being engaged to create a more just world became an even more dominant aspiration among these adolescents. From their perspectives, contributing to justice is related to doing something about global poverty and being engaged with national politics. The statement of one girl was exemplary in this regard:

I think it is interesting to see how things are organised in other parts of the world ... Because you can think about how our society is organised and why we act in a certain manner If people in the third world are not able to solve their poverty problem it is our responsibility to help them ... Youth especially should be engaged, because we are the future of our country.

The PA-students were also interested in politics and this increased with age. These boys and girls increasingly argued that it is important to be informed about social and political issues and to discuss them with others, and their ability to provide examples of the political events (such as elections) developed over time. One boy stated, 'I think it is important that you are able to form an opinion about politics and the news, that you are aware what is going on in the world, and that you learn to take different perspectives into account.' In the views of these adolescents, politicians are focused on public interests and responsive towards citizens' preferences, and the interviewees therefore argued that their own opinions count. Another boy formulated this as follows: 'They think about rules for the country and thereafter you can vote for the party of your preference. So they are trying to make the Netherlands a better place.' This positive outlook on the workings of politics and the importance of political participation, however, does not imply that these adolescents felt that all citizens should have a similar role in politics and democracy. An increasingly larger group argued that it is not preferable for people with a low educational background to be able to become politicians because of the complex nature of politics that not all people can understand. A girl argued for example that

Perhaps it is a prejudice but I think that those in the pre vocational-track have less well-developed views than those in pre-academic education. Those in pre-academic education can have a better insight into situations and formulate better arguments. Pre-vocational students have only a simple perspective ... So I think that only smart people should become politicians.

Among the boys and girls in the lower educational PV-track, a different perspective on social and, especially, political engagement emerged. Although a substantial group argued that social engagement is important, this was to a lesser extent than their peers in PA-track and did not increase with age. In the perspective of these adolescents, people can help create a better world, but it is certainly not a priority. The statement of one girl is exemplary of this way of thinking: 'I am not involved and don't think it is that important ... I just wanna

have fun and with my exams coming up and I don't have the time'. Moreover, when these adolescents stated that engagement with creating a just world is important they referred to global poverty but also increasingly to being socially responsible for their own community. One boy (PV) explained his perspective as follows: 'Respecting each other, not making fun of each other and not bullying one another ... Just being polite'.

Over time, the political engagement of these boys and girls remained low and even tended to decline. The dominant view among these interviewees from pre-vocational education was that it is rather unimportant to follow political news and discuss it with others. One girl explained this viewpoint clearly:

I do not really follow politics ... I think it is dull. They talk about topics that I do not care for. [...] They also talk about complicated things that I do not understand. So, it is not of my interest.

With age, these adolescents become more critical about the functioning of Dutch politics. In their view, politicians are not engaged in doing something for the country. One boy explained this position:

I do not really notice anything they are doing. [...] On television, I see them sitting in parliament while they are half asleep and only some of them are having a discussion. And then Wilders [radical right-wing populist politician] is making a silly statement. It is crazy!

The PV-students also had different outlooks than their peers in PA-track about the desirability of equal participation regarding educational level. Almost all claimed that all people should be able to actively participate in politics. One girl expressed this position as follows:

It is all about your perspective on society. You do not have to be very smart for that ... It is not necessary that you're very good with math and speak several languages ... It is all about having a good opinion.

While we have observed differences between students from different educational tracks that are in line with the expectations, we have not found any substantial differences for gender. The boys and girls in the PA-track showed virtually the same development in socially and politically engagements, and the boys and girls in the PV-track remained both rather politically unengaged.

Searching for the common good

An important aspect of citizenship is that people focus on the common good when dealing with issues that have an impact on the whole community and thereby trying to find as much agreement among the participants as possible. An important community that young people are part of is their class at school. Therefore, the interviewees were asked how they would deal with a case where competing perspectives existed in situations involving the classroom. Boys and girls from both tracks and in both rounds of interviews showed preferences that took into account the common good instead of focusing solely on their personal interests. The interviewees claimed that they were willing to listen to perspectives of others and explain what their personal preferences are. However, the extent to which the adolescents stated that they were willing to find a solution that all participants to agree to, differed sharply and this difference increased with age. Among the interviewees, from both educational tracks and primarily girls, there was a substantial group that emphasised in both rounds of interviews the importance of coming to a decision collectively but also the necessity of taking the interests of all into account. These interviewees took several

principles into account when dealing with the common good, such as competing views, inclusiveness of stakeholders, and that at some point a decision has to be made. However, an increasing group of adolescents, again from both educational tracks and this time primarily boys, argued from a different perspective that developed over time. They emphasised with age on finding a quick and simple solution for disagreements. To these interviewees, a discussion was relevant to provide insight into the preferences of all participants, but the majority should decide what the solution for the existing problem is, without considering the objections of others. A boy (PA) explained this in the following manner:

Those three students do not really have a say. No matter what they come up with, the others students will want to reschedule the class. [...] Even if they all are limited majority [...] As long as they are with more people, they can have it their way.

Thus, although differences regarding the focus of adolescents on the common good in the context of the classroom along the lines of educational track were largely absent, gender differences were clearly visible. Girls from both tracks focused in both rounds of interviews on both successful decision-making as well as inclusivity and finding agreement. Only among boys was an increase observable in focusing solely on successful decision-making. To them, other aspects of civility (e.g. finding consensus and inclusivity) became less relevant as they aged.

Another aspect of adolescent citizenship we distinguished is dealing with issues regarding the common good in the political community. To the young people from both educational tracks and in both rounds of interviews, a strong leader or theocracy were not appealing options because this would violate individual liberties or would not take into account the perspectives of others. For example, some of the adolescents with an orthodox Protestant background argued that in their perspective, it would be best if the country would be ruled by Gods' will, but also these adolescents were of the opinion this would not be a just way of dealing with collective issues in a democratic society considering the various interests.

The boys and girls from both tracks argued that in the political domain, a representative body should be dealing with issues that affect many. However, as was the case with the classroom issue, differences did exist regarding the question where the emphasis should lie but they were now also alongside the lines of educational track. Compared to the classroom situation, PA-boys put more emphasis on majority rule and thus on the importance of making decisions when they age. Minority interests, arguments and consensus became less important in the political sphere. Coming to an agreement when many people are involved was increasingly viewed as too difficult. One boy explained this position as follows: 'Whenever there is a majority in favour of something they should come to a decision ... I think that you should not make democracy and bureaucracy too slow and laborious.'

Yet, with age, many of those in PV-track and PA-girls developed views with stronger emphasis on the necessity of inclusiveness. Just because of the weight of the decisions that are made in this domain, all parties should be involved in the decision-making process. One girl stated, 'I think that in politics it is important that they can find agreement and that can take longer [than in other situations], and everyone should be taken into account.'

The differences found for educational track and gender were also apparent regarding issues where freedom rights and equality between citizens are at stake. The interviewees were asked how they would deal with perspectives on the common good that advocate the abolition of freedom rights. Among PV-students and girls in both rounds of interviews, the dominant opinion was that freedom rights for all forms the foundation of the political

community of the Netherlands and should thus not be abolished. However, boys in the PA-track increasingly stated that whenever a majority of people argue that rights of religious groups, atheists or migrant groups are conflicting with their perspective of the common good it is legitimate to abolish these rights. A central element of the outlook on citizenship of these PA-boys is the ability of a political community to define their own laws, even if there is only a simple majority that wants to abolish freedom rights.

In sum, those in the PA-track and boys increasingly stressed their views on citizenship procedures for just decision-making and thereby more or less neglect minority rights, arguments and inclusiveness. Students in PV-track and girls, on the other hand, stuck with age to their emphasis on the importance of finding collective ways of dealing with the common good and also the necessity of consensus and inclusivity.

Support for freedom of speech

It is often argued that in a democratic society, both the voicing of obnoxious viewpoints and the taking into account of the sensitivities of others is important. This issue was explicitly discussed with the interviewees. They were asked to pick a group from a list they strongly object to (such as nationalists, religious fundamentalist and fundamentalist atheists) and were asked about whether these people should be able to voice their opinions even though they are humiliating for other citizens, sexist or racist.

A substantial group of adolescents from both educational tracks and predominantly girls at both points in time argued that voicing opinions and taking care of the feelings of others are important democratic values. Additionally, those with obnoxious views should be able to express them but they do have the duty to take the sensitivities of others into account. When discussing a situation where a Dutch politician was deliberately insulting Muslim women with headscarves, a boy (PA) stated, 'Freedom of speech is important but you cannot say a lot of [humiliating] things and then only say "well, that is freedom of speech!"' That is not something that people should be allowed to do.

At the same time, we have found that some adolescents in both tracks increasingly focused on one principle only. Among those in PA-track and boys predominantly, a trend towards an exclusive focus on freedom of speech was observable. These boys increasingly argued that freedom of speech is more important than the feeling of others of being humiliated. A boy (PA) explained that it is problematic if the government starts to ban certain opinions:

Everyone can give their opinions ... If they want they can go and protest, it doesn't bother me ... I don't think that you should stop them if someone feels insulted because a lot of things can be insulting. You cannot forbid everything.

In the perspective of these adolescents, the prohibition of opinions is very problematic and would do more harm than good.

A development towards focusing on one aspect was also present among those in PV-track, and again primarily among boys. With age, these interviewees increasingly stated that there should be unconditional free speech, as did their peers in PA-track. At the same time, however, an increasing number of them stated that freedom of speech is important but when opinions are offending others, they should be banned from public debate. One of them (PV) explained his views on nationalists:

I understand that they are afraid that in the future the immigrants will be in the majority in the Netherlands. [...] But they should not be allowed to say everything because it can offend others. [...] I think it is more important not to offend others than that they can say what they want.

In sum, among boys from both educational tracks, we have seen a development towards a more one-dimensional interpretation of citizenship, while girls predominantly stuck to their initial views that both freedom of speech and the sensitivities of others are important.

Conclusion and discussion

An abundant number of studies show that adults and young people alike differ in their citizenship orientations along the lines of educational level (e.g. Bovens and Wille 2009; Elchardus, Herbots, and Spruyt 2013; Kriesi et al. 2006; Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta 2002). Many of these studies show that those with a higher educational level or in higher educational tracks more often agree with ‘good values’ (e.g. democracy, tolerance and political interest) whereas those with a lower educational level or in lower tracks to a larger extent seem to endorse ‘wrong’ values (e.g. political cynicism, political disinterest and authoritarianism). Even though some studies have focused on the development of adolescent citizenship over time, the developmental trajectories in relation to citizenship values and adolescents’ interpretations of ‘good citizenship’ remain largely unknown. In the present study, we have investigated this topic. In general, the results show that adolescents in higher educational track develop with age stronger political orientations but also gradually focus more strictly on competition between perspectives and on formal procedures when dealing with social issues. Their views on citizenship become more one-dimensional. Those in the lower track, at both ages, remained rather uninterested in politics but stick to their emphasis on cooperation, consensus and inclusiveness when dealing with issues that affect the whole community. Above that, gender differences play a role in adolescents’ views on citizenship. Boys increasingly focused on competition and formal democratic procedures while girls more often emphasised cooperation and inclusion. Overall, our study shows that ‘good’ vs. ‘bad’ citizenship values do not simply coincide with educational level. Using a dichotomy between higher and lower educational tracks is a too narrow lens to come to a clear understanding of developments in adolescent citizenship. Because of the design of our study, we do not know how these results are translated to larger groups of adolescents in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Even though we have a diverse sample, it is of course not possible to generalise from these findings. Only large-scale and comparative studies can show whether the conclusions also hold elsewhere.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the results of our study on the development towards citizenship and civility nuance the (implicit) assumption that students in higher educational tracks have more often a ‘better’ perspective on citizenship than those in lower tracks (Amadeo et al. 2002; Gaiser et al. 2003; Keating and Janmaat 2015; Lancee and Sarrasin 2015; Persson 2012). From a theoretical perspective, civility has been described as the preparedness of citizens to be willing to participate in society, to moderate views, to look for consensus and to be as inclusive as possible (Dekker 2009; Shils 1991; Walzer 1974). Regarding social and political engagement, it is noticeable that those in the higher educational track learned to focus more on critical participation in the political domain, while those in lower track stuck to their rather disinterested perspective on politics and focused more on taking care of one another in the social domain. The views of the higher educated

adolescents can be interpreted as being more in line with a republican perspective on citizenship. From a communitarian perspective, however, one could argue that looking after one another is just as important. Regarding dealing with issues related to the common good as well as the tensions between freedom of speech and sensibilities of others, a different and unexpected trend was observable in our study. Among students in the higher educational track, procedural orientations regarding dealing with sensitive issues became more dominant with age. From their perspectives, it is a fundamental right of people to express opinions and of majorities to come to decisions, as long as they follow the right procedures. On the other hand, students in the lower track remained to a larger extent focused on inclusivity. These latter adolescents stuck to the idea that arguments, interests and different groups should be taken into account as much as possible, especially with regard to situations in the political domain, and that the freedom of speech is important but that also holds for sensibilities of others.

What is seen as ‘the good end of the variable’ (Converse 1972) is part of a fundamental debate between republican, liberal and communitarian perspectives on citizenship (e.g. Kymlicka 2001; Miller 2000; Van Gunsteren 1998). Taken from the outcomes of our study, two types of citizenship in particular can be discerned among students in different educational tracks. With their emphasis on the political domain and procedural aspects when dealing with sensitive issues, among students in the higher educational track, a *procedural republican* type of citizenship is emphasised more with age. Students in the lower educational track, on the other hand, stressed the importance of decency in the social domain as well as cooperation and inclusivity at both points in time. Thereby an *inclusive communitarian* type of citizenship seemed to dominate their views.

That our results are not in line with the expectations about the relationship between educational track and the development of attitudes associated with civility can be explained by several factors. First, images that adolescents have about citizenship, politics and democracy are influenced by how politics is portrayed in the media (e.g. Gimpel, Lay, and Schuknecht 2003). In the media and political cultures in Europe and the Netherlands, the focus is now stronger on the importance of freedom of speech and not so much on sensitivities of others and the political culture has become harsher with less focus on minority rights and inclusivity (Manning and Edwards 2014; Sapiro 2004). That those adolescents with a clearer image of Dutch politics are also those with more one-dimensional views on freedom of speech and the common good can partly be explained by this change in media and political culture (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011; Hendriks and Michels 2011). Second, our deviating results can also be explained by the design of our research. Most studies on youth citizenship tend to focus on the political domain and find that education is linked to aspects like political interest, political efficacy and willingness to participate in politics (Amadeo et al. 2002; Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012; Elchardus, Herbots, and Spruyt 2013; Gaiser et al. 2003; Keating and Janmaat 2015; Persson 2012, 2014; Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta 2002). However, we have also taken into account social domains where the issue of civiness also arises. Whereas young people, and especially those in lower tracks, have limited experiences with the political domain, they do encounter situations in everyday life where they are confronted with issues related to citizenship (Nieuwelink et al. 2016). Therefore, more scholarly attention to situations that are meaningful to young people can provide us with a broader and more nuanced perspective on the development of adolescent citizenship. Furthermore, differences in adolescents’ attitudes related to educational track

are not necessarily caused by formal schooling. Different educational tracks generally host student populations with different characteristics (cognitive ability, family life socio-economic milieu) and can explain the disparities. Because of the small scale of our study, it was not possible to unravel the various mechanisms that drive citizenship development. Future research can shed more light on what is causing different developmental trajectories between groups of adolescents.

Finally, in quests for explanations for the low levels of political interest of students in the lower educational track, we plea for not only focusing on (individual) characteristics of these young people (such as knowledge, social milieu and intelligence), but also on the structural and cultural aspects of contemporary democracies that apparently give these adolescents the idea that politics is not of their business. Their feeling that politics is not something for people like them can be an adequate representation of realities in contemporary Western democracies (e.g. Bovens and Wille 2009). That their higher educated peers increasingly claimed that participating in parliament is not something for the low educated can be an indication thereof. In our view, the fact that young people with a lower educational background have the image that their role in the political domain is supposed to be limited is a fundamental problem for equal participation in democracy. Structural and cultural causes thereof deserve more scholarly attention.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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