

Towards a Social Psychology of Citizenship?

Introduction to the Special Issue.

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Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 2011 (forthcoming)

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Abstract.

The concept of citizenship is currently the subject of extensive, and often heated, debate on the part of policy makers and social scientists. Many of the key concerns encapsulated in the idea of citizenship – collective identity, solidarity, pro-social behaviour, group boundaries, intra and intergroup conflict – also represent longstanding concerns on the part of social and community psychologists. However, at present, very little psychological theory or research directly addresses the subject of citizenship. The aim of this Special Issue is to explore how the construct of citizenship might contribute to social psychological understandings of social conflict and solidarity and, conversely, to consider how social psychological theories and methods might contribute to contemporary understandings of citizenship. The authors of the six articles in the Special Issue apply a range of theoretical perspectives (self-categorization theory, social identity theory, rhetorical psychology, the theory of social representations) and methods (experiments, surveys, interviews, ethnography) to examine situated understandings of citizenship in a variety of domains (civic and political participation, immigration attitudes, minority identities, nationalism). Despite their different approaches and foci, the authors display a common concern to recognize complexity, contradiction and contestability as inherent, and often productive, features of the everyday construction and performance of citizenship.

Keywords: Nationalism; Ideological dilemmas; Social identity; Social conflict; Diversity.

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What is citizenship?

Citizenship is a multi-faceted and hotly contested concept that eludes precise definition. However, most commentators would accept Olson's (2008 p. 40) minimal definition of citizenship as pertaining to the "status of individuals in relation to a political unit". This formulation applies equally to contexts in which political units (or *polities*) are understood as regimes (impersonal institutions and offices responsible for the governance of designated territories or populations), and those in which they are understood as publics (communities of people who constitute the subjects and/or collective agents of governance). Similarly, this definition embraces both objective citizenship status (the bureaucratic classification, and consequent treatment, of persons as members of an particular polity), and also subjective citizenship status (an individual's personal awareness of, and possibly investment in, their own polity membership). Olson's definition is also helpfully agnostic concerning whether the subjective aspects of citizenship take the form of identification with a human community (*horizontal citizenship*) or with a political institution (*vertical citizenship*) (see Gibson & Condor, 2009). Finally, Olson's vague formulation allows for the possibility that community identification may be experienced as self-knowledge ("being"), psychological commonality ("being-like"), territorial propinquity ("being-with"), or political solidarity ("being-for") (see Condor & Abell, 2006; Condor, Gibson & Abell, 2006).

Tacit models and values of citizenship are necessarily implicated in all forms of democratic governance. However, over the past twenty years the construct has increasingly become subjected to critical reflexive concern. Policy makers now often make explicit appeals to citizenship in the context of debates concerning globalization, immigration controls, national security, social integration, welfare provision, and law and order. In Scobey's (2001, p. 21) words, the ideal of citizenship "has become a 'big tent' under which a wide range of initiatives from immigration restriction to multicultural pedagogy can find shelter...public and policy intellectuals have reclaimed it as a legitimating sign under which to pursue new, diverse, and conflicting projects of political transformation and cultural renewal".

As Scobey intimated, contemporary discussions of citizenship in the context of policy implementation typically take place alongside, and often in dialogue with, parallel debates in political science, sociology, history and education. In the early 1990s, Kymlicka and Norman (1994) noted an "explosion" (p. 325) of recent scholarly interest in citizenship. Subsequently, it has become apparent that this did not represent a temporary surge of enthusiasm, but was in fact the start of a chain-reaction of academic concern.

Contemporary work in citizenship studies is characterized by disagreement, and often by heated argument. In fact, the only point on which academic commentators are currently inclined to agree is that citizenship constitutes an exemplary instance of what Gallie (1956) termed an "essentially contested" concept: an idea which is complex, normatively-laden, and which involves "endless disputes about [its] proper use" (p. 169). Recurrent debates concerning citizenship may be summarized in terms of four broad, often overlapping, concerns. I will term these: Boundaries, Dimensions, Models and Membership.

Debates over **boundaries** focus on the limits of polity membership, and also on the fuzzy frontier between citizenship and other related concepts in the social and political sciences. These debates centre on questions such as: What is the relationship between values of citizenship and of human rights? Should the boundaries of citizenship be equated with those of the nation/state? In what ways can citizenship be conceived in transnational, post-national, or global terms? What do restricted understandings of citizenship community imply for the treatment of various categories of outsider? (see, Bosniak, 2000; Nash, 2009).

Debates concerning internal **dimensions** normally take as their point of departure Marshall's (1950) tripartite sub-classification of *civil citizenship* (equality under the law); *political citizenship* (the right to participate in governance) and *social citizenship* (the right to economic welfare and security and to live like "a civilized being according to standards prevailing in society", p. 74). Subsequent commentators extended the range (cf. Skinner, 1989) of the citizenship construct to include factors such as *economic citizenship* (rights and obligations relating to employment, investment and taxation, see White, 2003); *cultural citizenship* (rights relating to language, sense-making and cultural practices, see Stevenson, 2003); and *environmental* or *ecological citizenship* (rights and responsibilities relating to the natural world, see, Bell, 2005; Dobson, 2006).

Commentators have attempted to identify distinguishable **models** of citizenship according to the precise ways in which the legal, political and social dimensions are understood and prioritized. The standard formulation involves a binary classification in which Republican or Communitarian forms of citizenship (which emphasize the duties of citizens to actively participate in political deliberation and decision-making) are contrasted with Liberal versions (which emphasize the

unconditional rights of citizens). Variations on this schematic formulation distinguish between citizenship as practice and as status (Oldfield, 1990); active versus passive (see Isin & Turner, 2002), and thick versus thin (McLaughlin, 1992) models of citizenship. These simple taxonomies have been questioned (e.g. Walzer, 1989) and may be qualified by further binary distinctions. For example, some commentators have emphasized the need to make a further distinction between formal citizenship (which in principle bestows access to rights and duties) and substantive citizenship (the extent to which these rights and duties are or can be actually taken up) (Brubaker, 1989). Others have distinguished between market-based (libertarian) and state-based (egalitarian) sub-categories of liberal citizenship (e.g. Delanty, 2000).

Finally, contemporary debates about **membership** centre on two, often connected, considerations. The first concerns the criteria used to determine membership of a particular citizenship community and/or the bases upon which individuals may claim legal protection or political entitlements. The most familiar formulation involves a simple dichotomous classification between ethnic (hereditary) and civic (acquired) forms of citizenship (e.g. Ignatieff, 1993). However, commentators have noted the absence of consensual understanding of either sub-category, and observe that in practice most bureaucratic schemes for designating citizenship do not fall neatly into ethnic or civic types (Condor, in press; Thomas, 2002). A related set of debates concerns competing representations of any particular *body politic*. These typically involve competing notions of liberal equality, in which values of universalism are pitted against normative concerns over recognition of diversity (see Purvis & Hunt, 1999).

Where is the social psychology of citizenship?

Alone amongst social scientists, psychologists have remained notably absent from public conversations on citizenship, and have rarely addressed these debates directly in their theoretical writings or empirical research. The extent of this neglect can be illustrated quite simply by a survey of articles published in Psychology journals between 2001-11¹. The search term “citizenship” entered into the PSYCHINFO database yielded a mere 267 results. This in itself hardly suggests an explosion of interest in the subject. However, on inspection, it was evident that more than 80% (N=215) of these articles did not in fact address citizenship as generally understood by political or social scientists. Rather, they concerned the particular construct of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB, Organ, 1988), pertaining to voluntary (“extra-role”) activities undertaken by employees in the service of their organization or in the interests of their co-workers.

Of the remaining 52 articles, in eight the term citizen/ship was simply used in the course of describing research respondents (e.g. “101 US citizens...from a university in an American city...were recruited” [Lee & Ottati, 2002, p. 617]). In nine further cases, the term was simply employed in the course of discussing public attitudes towards immigration or multiculturalism. In these cases, the author did not display any general reflexive concern over the construct of citizenship, and did not cite any existing literature on the subject.

On the basis of this small survey, it would therefore appear that over the past decade, only 35 papers published in Psychology journals have engaged directly with the topic of citizenship. At present, there is no evidence that these faint flickers of interest are in the process of developing into a coherent body of theory or a

comprehensive research agenda. These 35 papers covered a wide range of substantive topics, and were published in a diverse variety of outletsⁱⁱ. There was virtually no cross-referencing between the articles, and little overlap the references cited in them. There was little evidence that individual authors were developing a particular interest in citizenship, or that teams of researchers were collaboratively developing programmes of empirical researchⁱⁱⁱ.

The omission of psychologists from debates concerning citizenship, and the absence of debates concerning citizenship from the psychological agenda, is in many respects quite remarkable. After all, many of the key concerns of social and community psychologists – such as group cohesion, intergroup conflict, prejudice and discrimination, quality of life, social justice and legitimacy, self-regulation – are closely related to concerns addressed by scholars in the field of citizenship studies. Current appeals to citizenship on the part of policy makers typically involve some reference to psychological states and processes, such as identity, opinions, values, understanding and aspirations (Condor, in press). Academic theorists often emphasize the importance of the “psychological” aspects of citizenship (e.g. Carens, 2000). One early commentator went so far as to suggest that, “a study of citizenship which does not take account of social psychology might [only] apply to a native of Cloud Cuckoo-land” (Johnson 1927, p. 243, cited in Barnes, Auburn & Lea, 2004).

From contestable construct to dilemmatic practice: Contributions from social psychology.

The general aim of this Special Issue of the *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* is to explore ways in which social psychologists might profitably engage with current debates concerning citizenship. The six articles address

a range of topical concerns in citizenship studies: the relationship between citizenship and national identity (Sindic, Passini & Morselli); public responses to immigration and multiculturalism (Gibson & Hamilton; Hopkins & Blackwood); the social dynamics of recognition (Hopkins & Blackwood; Renedo & Marston); civic (Renedo & Marston) and political (Passini & Morselli) participation; and competing constructions of citizenship competence (Gibson & Hamilton; McNamara, Muldoon, Stevenson & Slattery).

The authors approach these topics from the vantage points afforded by a variety of general social psychological theories and sensitizing constructs: Social representations and positioning (Renedo & Marsden); Social identification and intergroup relations (McNamara et al., Sindic); Social and self-categorization (Hopkins & Blackwood); Prejudice and intergroup differentiation (Gibson & Hamilton; McNamara et al); Rhetorical psychology and ideological dilemmas (Gibson & Hamilton); Obedience to authority and legitimacy dynamics (Passini & Morselli).

Unlike most existing academic work on citizenship, all of the contributions to the Special Issue have an empirical emphasis. Two of the articles report experimental work, employing direct self-report data (Passini & Morselli) and measures of implicit social cognition (McNamara et al). Four articles present qualitative data gathered through ethnography (Renedo & Marsden), group discussions (Gibson & Hamilton) and one-on-one interviews (Hopkins & Blackwood; Sindic).

Notwithstanding their different research foci, conceptual frameworks and methods, all of the authors display a concern over the tensions inherent in everyday understandings and experiences of citizenship in concrete social encounters. As outlined above, a good deal of existing work recognizes the complexity, and potential

ambiguity, of the citizenship construct. However, extant approaches generally treat conceptual vagueness as practical, political and analytic problem. Consequently, authors often attempt to impose conceptual order by formulating tidy taxonomies of dimensions or models of citizenship. Researchers typically contribute to these reifying tendencies (see also Gibson, in press) by classifying particular bureaucratic regimes (e.g. Brubaker, 1992; Greenfield, 1992) or individuals (e.g. Levanon & Lewin-Epstein, 2010; Tilley, Exley & Heath, 2004) according to the model of citizenship that they exemplify, or the kinds of criteria of citizenship that they endorse.

Underlying most of this classificatory effort is a normative concern on the part of the author to valorize particular dimensions or models of citizenship over others. It is certainly rare for authors in the field of citizenship studies to display an appreciation of the possible affordances of vague concepts for effective political rhetoric, academic innovation, or cooperative social intercourse (see Condor, in press; Jucker, Smith & Ludge, 2003; Lowy, 1992).

It is, then, interesting to note that notwithstanding the fragmented, piecemeal, character of previous social psychological studies of citizenship, these have tended to share one thing in common: a concern to appreciate – and often positively to celebrate – diversity and contradiction as part of the essence, and key to the productive potential, of everyday citizenship. For example, adopting a dialogic psychology approach, Shotter (1993) argued that practices of citizenship operate within the “contradictory, ambivalent, and indeterminate time-space of negotiation” (pp134-5). Sanchez-Mazas & Klein (2003) stressed the potential for Social Identity Theory (e.g. Tajfel, 1978; Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994) to treat citizenship as “non essentialized and inherently linked with action” (p. 2). Barnes and her colleagues’ (2004) discursive psychology (cf. Edwards & Potter, 1992) approach led them to cast

citizenship as a dynamic, flexible, action-oriented, activity. Adopting an ideological dilemmas perspective (Billig et al., 1988), Condor and Gibson (2007) emphasised the productive tension between norms of active citizenship and liberal respect in young people's reasoning about political participation.

Similarly, it is notable that all of the contributions to this Special Issue treat complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence as central constitutive features of what Shotter (1993) termed "citizenship in action". Hopkins and Blackwood elegantly demonstrate how Self Categorization Theory can shed light on the "multiplicity, variability, and contested nature" of identities in debates over mis/recognition. Sindic adopts a similar position when considering the various ways in which people may orient to national identities, but also notes how social psychological perspectives on implicit identities may enable us to appreciate additional layers of nuance in the ways in which individuals attribute citizenship status to self and others. McNamara and her colleagues adopt an intergroup relations approach to explore the ways in which social stereotypes may draw upon competing norms of citizenship competence. Respondents from less deprived areas of Limerick city tend to regard residents from disadvantaged areas as less "responsible" than those from the relatively advantaged areas. In contrast, people from the disadvantaged areas of the city tend to regard residents of the less disadvantaged areas as more "concerned for others". The authors point to ways in which this asymmetric pattern of representations may "doubly disadvantage" residents from the less affluent areas, and consider how more inclusive understandings of citizenship might foster the potential contribution of disempowered social groups.

Gibson and Hamilton's microanalysis of young people's talk draws attention to the ways in which speakers do not adopt straightforward and consistent "positions"

on questions relating to immigration and multiculturalism. Rather, they can be seen to wrestle with the dualisms of liberal citizenship. On the one hand, they welcome diversity. On the other hand, they assert the primacy of majority culture through a series of practical criteria for polity membership.

Renedo and Marston's nuanced ethnography of "patient and public involvement" (PPI) in healthcare delivery in the UK draws attention to the contradictory ways in which healthcare professionals position the lay involvees, reflecting both contradictions in liberal values of democratic authority, and also tensions inherent in the practical context in which they are acting. These contradictory formulations are, in turn, reflected in the involvees' own self-understandings, and set practical limits on their effective participatory activity.

Passini and Morelli's paper focuses on political participation, and in particular on the normative ambivalence of civil disobedience in liberal democracies. On the one hand, social movement activists who employ tactics of civil disobedience may be viewed as contravening values of democratic citizenship in so far as they challenge the authority of the State and its agents, and fail to display pro-social solidarity towards co-nationals. On the other hand, some forms of civil disobedience may be regarded as the perfect instantiation of values of active citizenship. In these cases, challenges to the authority of the State may be cast as a prosocial defence of the People, and also as a challenge to restricted (nationalised) boundaries of citizenship community.

Why a social psychology of citizenship?

To what extent are we now closer to being able to speak of a social psychology of citizenship? On the one hand, we might question the singular formulation of social psychology in this rhetorical question. It is evident that social

psychological contributions to the understanding of citizenship are not likely to be limited to any particular meta-theoretical perspective. However, as we have seen, notwithstanding their diverse interests and approaches, the social psychologists who contributed to the Special Issue share a rather distinctive approach to matters relating to citizenship. Rather than focus on abstract issues or attempt to formulate generic assertions, they are inclined to focus on concrete cases and dynamic situated practices. This in turn can afford recognition of complexities of, and contradictions in, the everyday experience and performance of citizenship.

In so far as they treat dilemmas and disagreement as inevitable, and often productive, features everyday citizenship, social psychological perspectives also have the potential to rehabilitate the image of the citizen. Current appeals to the value of citizenship typically problematize not only citizenship as an abstract construct, but also particular groups of citizens. Policy makers often employ meliorist arguments, which attribute a variety of social problems to civic failings on the part of the general public (or some subgroup thereof), and advocate programmes of top-down entrainment (such as formal citizenship education classes in schools, or tests and ceremonies for new citizens). Academic authors, similarly, are inclined to present actual citizens (whether members of the general public, or those who inhabit formal policy-making roles) as in some way failing relative to abstract standards of competent citizenship. These kinds of approaches reflect a more general tendency on the part of elite commentators to establish the rationality and morality of own perspectives through contrast with the supposed deficiencies of popular common sense in general (Shapin, 2001) and “public opinion” in particular (e.g. Converse, 1964).

In contrast, all of the articles in the Special Issue illustrate the capacity for social psychologists to incorporate values of civic respect into their academic work. As Schwarz (2009:121) notes a “classic hallmark” of social psychological approaches to human behaviour involves an “emphasis on the power of situations”. Consequently, when addressing limitations of everyday citizenship, social psychologists may be less inclined to point to character flaws in the individuals or groups concerned, than to focus on structural and systemic limitations what is conceivable, speakable, or practically achievable in any actual social context. In addition, as the contributions to the Special Issue demonstrate, social psychological perspectives often afford recognition of ordinary social actors’ mundane capacity for public reason, moral judgement and social coordination. In fact, the kinds of complexities, contradictions, and contestations apparent in everyday reasoning that are often taken as evidence of public irrationality (see also Gibson, in press), are typically understood by social psychologists to reflect ordinary social actors’ capacity for conceptual flexibility, critical engagement, intersubjectivity and public accountability. These are, of course, the very qualities normatively expected of competent democratic citizens.

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NOTES

ⁱ For the purposes of this exercise, I considered only original research or theoretical articles, and excluded book reviews or commentaries.

ⁱⁱ Only two journals published more than two articles on citizenship between 2001-11 (*Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* [N=7], and *Political Psychology* [N=6]). Three titles (*American Journal of Community Psychology*, *Journal of Community Psychology* and *Social Psychology Compass*) published two articles on citizenship. The remaining 15 papers were all published in different journals:

Annual Review of Psychology; British Journal of Social Psychology; British Journal of Educational Psychology; Counselling Psychology Quarterly; Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, Cultural Diversity and Mental Health; Feminism and Psychology; Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology; Journal of Environmental Psychology; Journal of Instructional Psychology; Online Journal of Sport Psychology; Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology; Social Psychology of Education; Teaching of Psychology.

ⁱⁱⁱ In no case was the same individual first author on more than one paper, and there was only one instance of repeat-authorship over the 10-year sampling period. Fifteen (43%) of these papers were single-authored.