

(E)MERGING VOICES: UNDERSTANDING CONSTRUCTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP FROM THE ECONOMIC MARGINS

By: Stacia Kock, MA
Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Introduction

Over the past decade, America has witnessed a decline in the financial sector and a growth in the number of individuals identified as working poor or impoverished. In 2009, U.S. Census data estimated that roughly 43.6 million Americans were living in poverty – a figure that increased nearly 4 million from 2008 (U.S. Census 2009). An increasing number of individuals, from long-standing activists to those new to poverty, are mobilizing within their communities in an effort to contest exclusions, challenge notions of inequitable citizenship, and reclaim power as low-income individuals. Using feminist theory as a background, this study explores the relationship between citizenship and economic identities, specifically looking at how those living in poverty define citizenship. Whether political or social in nature, citizenship as both an identity and a political construct influences the lives of all Americans. Feminist theorists (Jaggar 2006, Kymlicka & Norma 1994, Lister 1997, 2003, Young 2000) have long argued that citizenship excludes certain individuals on the basis of gender, racial, sexual, economic, and national identities. Recently, others (see Cruikshank 1999, Ong 2006) argue that neoliberalism has influenced the inclusivity of citizenship with a neoliberal emphasis on measuring good citizenship by economic productivity. Yet, as this study aims to explore, do those who are thought to be excluded from citizenship understand themselves as excluded?

In order to investigate the materiality of the theoretical claims of citizenship's exclusivity, members of two Midwest-based organizations were interviewed. Overall 15 members from the groups – Women Uprising (WU) and Families Helping Families (FHF) –

were interviewed over a 6-month period. Fieldwork focused on how the groups engage with both political and social citizenship rights for low-income citizens and the claims they made regarding inequitable power dynamics and exclusions. As Lister and Beresford (2000) explain, antipoverty activist efforts will be stronger if it involves research that “illuminates the views of” those living in poverty (290); my project hopes to contribute to such research by reflecting on the voices and experiences of low-income activists.

The paper is divided into three main parts. The study first offers an overview of the feminist theoretical approaches arguing against citizenship as an exclusionary construct. Here, the paper explores the connection between citizenship, the liberal state, and the current neoliberal influence, and introduces theoretical arguments focused on how citizenship can be re-envisioned as more inclusionary. The paper then moves to examining more specifically the ways in which WU and FHF members define citizenship. Pulling from interview data, this section explores how the participants to define citizenship in their own words as how they view citizenship as connected to economic marginalization. The final section of the paper discusses the ramifications of WU and FHF participants’ critiques and puts them in conversation with feminist political theorists and citizenship studies.

Body I: Citizenship As Exclusionary

Citizenship as an identity, status, and construction is valuable as it offers individuals both material and perceived privilege. A citizen is someone who has the power to vote in elections, to participate in the political process, and to influence policies. A citizen is also someone who possesses specific freedom of choice protected by the state, such as the right to freedom of speech or the right to freedom of religion. In addition, citizenship presents individuals with a sense of belonging within a specific community, as well as a sense of equal status alongside

other citizens (Cohen 2009). Hence, the status of citizenship is one to which individuals aspire because of its material and perceived benefits. For the purposes of the project, citizenship is defined as the status of possessing individual rights, privileges, and duties based on membership into a specific community. This definition develops from citizenship studies literature that posits citizenship as a “political principle of democracy; juridical status of legal personhood; and form of membership” (Cohen, 1999, p. 248). The definition works across binaries such as public / private, local / global, and social / civil (Acklesberg, 2005; Hemerijck, 2001; Lister, 1997; Young, 2000). The definition incorporates the idea of citizenship as both an individual status and as a membership within a specific community. Further, it combines two central components of citizenship: individual rights (the tangible things one is benefited from possessing the status of “citizen”) and individual responsibilities (the duties to which one is required to adhere as a result of possessing the status of “citizen”).

Individual rights and responsibilities exist in multiple ways. For instance, rights are political, civic, and social in nature. Lister describes political rights as denoting the legal and political status of a citizen “as symbolized by possession of a passport” (p. 44). Within the United States the concept of political and civil rights relies heavily on legal documentation such as the Bill of Rights and the Constitution and the notion that citizenship incorporates entitlements as founded through the U.S. Constitution. Political and civil rights include the right to speech, to vote, to run for political office, and to a trial by jury (Oldfield, 1990, p. 179). According to T.H. Marshall, civil rights ensure individuals the right to freedom (i.e.: right to properly, right to justice) while political rights ensure the right to exercise that freedom (as cited in Shafir, 1998). Civil and political rights rely upon the image of the abstract citizen who requires no identification to a specific group in order to act upon civil and political rights as citizens. In

other words, political rights are granted to individuals regardless of race, gender, and class boundaries. Social rights, on the other hand, are often fixed within societal institutions and pertain to relationships in areas of the economy, education, and the family. Examples of social rights are, for instance, the right to an education, to health care for individuals and their families, and the right to work and engage in the labor market. Within the United States, social rights are not necessarily prescribed by legal documents, but are entitlements that citizens often accept as necessary in order to lead a productive and just life.

In contrast to rights, the notion of responsibilities stems from the idea that citizens have a “duty” to the state.¹ Citizenship requires both a political duty to vote or participate in formal politics as well as a social duty to be economically productive in exchange for civil and political liberties. According to Mead (1986), it is the obligation of a citizen to engage in paid work that represents “as much a badge of citizenship as rights” (p. 229). The “duty” discourse implies that citizens are not passive recipients of rights from the state, but rather individuals who engage in civic, political, and social action in exchange for rights. Individuals complete various political and social obligations in exchange for their right to vote or to have educational services. The state grants rights and privileges in exchange for civic duties and citizenship responsibilities.

A second dichotomy within citizenship studies compares citizenship as an individual versus community construct. At its core, citizenship exists as an individual status, yet, for some citizenship theorists, the status also relates to one’s membership within a community, thereby marking citizenship as a collective entity, not merely an individual status. Marshall’s work on social rights grounds citizenship as not only a status necessary for political agency, but more

¹ Some theorists (Lister 2003) argue that the “duty” discourse stems from post-World War II rhetoric claiming that because governments provide for citizens, citizens should respond by engaging in various forms of civic duty activities such as voting, serving political committees, and “giving-back” to society.

importantly *membership* into a community. His definition states that “‘ citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed’” (Crowley, 1998, p. 169). For Marshall, existing as a citizen grants access to a larger community of individuals who share similar rights and responsibilities to the state. Rights are designated to individuals because of their status as citizens, and in return, citizens must defend those rights within political, social, and civil contexts. The community, for Marshall, acts as a protective net for individual rights and responsibilities, and for him, is viewed as a primary location for citizenship activities.

Both dichotomies of “rights versus responsibilities” and “the individual versus the community” reflect ways in which citizenship can be constructed and defined as exclusionary for certain populations. For instance, examples of political citizenship rights are the right to vote, to participate in government, and to have a voice in public interest. Yet, as feminist theorists argue, women were historically excluded from the public sphere, and this exclusion hindered their ability to participate as political citizens. In addition, the rights/responsibilities framework relies on the image of the autonomous, abstract, individual citizen void of identification with specific groups – an image which itself excludes women. As Coole (1994) argues, the historical impact of their separation from the public realm means women still are not seen as “autonomous, independent, [or] public” and therefore, women are not understood as rational actors (p. 203). Citizenship as a status gives preference to the autonomous male figure that is not connected to any gender, race, ethnic, or class difference and perpetuates a “realm which blanks out the identities of individuals by neglecting their differences” (James, 1992, p. 51). When women have entered into the public sphere, their experiences of citizenship continue to be compared to that of men (Acklesberg, 2010). In other words, upon entering the public sphere, women

continue to be labeled “emotional” and “not rationale,” limiting the extent to which they can exist as full citizens.

Further, as some critical race and feminist scholars argue (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Mills, 1997; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1999), the historical legacy of racial hierarchies influences the citizenship rights of people of color. For example, the struggle for the right to vote, own property, and hold political office all influenced the creation of an atmosphere of political inequality for African-American citizens. Some feminist scholars argue (i.e.: Grewal, 2005; Narayan, 1997), the history of racism within political, social, and economic structures clouds the plight immigrants attempting to obtain citizenship equality. In this light, women and people of color experience exclusion from citizenship benefits as they are significantly marked by their inability to act independently of their gendered and raced identities.

In addition to exclusions based on gender and race categories, theorists also outline the exclusion of economically marginalized groups. Allison Jaggar (2005) explains that proper citizens are believed to be economically “independent, productive, and social contributors” (p. 93). Similarly, Judith Shklar (1991) argues that modern citizenship under the liberal state is based upon the notion of work and labor, which hinders women’s ability to become full citizens since gainful employment is not always available to women (p. 64). If citizenship is constructed such that in order to receive rights one should engage in civil, political, and economic work, then women, for instance, can be considered marginalized as citizens based on their historic exclusion from the civil, political, and economic spheres. Further, according to T.H. Marshall (as cited in Shafir 1998), social class hierarchies influence the ability of economically marginalized individuals from achieving full citizenship status. As he explains, “the rights with which the general status of citizenship was invested were extracted from the hierarchical status system of

social class” (p. 103). Thus, those individuals whose economic status exists outside the periphery may be unable to uphold specific responsibilities and thereby also excluded from specific rights.

With regard to the individual versus community dichotomy, emphasizing the needs of individual citizens may work to hinder the ability of marginalized groups to be recognized. The image of the abstract citizen who exists independently of community ignores the influence gender, race, class, nationality, and religion. As a result, individuals whose daily practices rests on experiences of group identification may be excluded within this framework. As indicated by Young (1989), dominant articulations of citizenship are not created according to the “heteronomous realm of particular needs, interests, and desires” but rather exist as an expression of universal individualism, (p. 253). Constructing the citizen as independent, abstract and individualistic excludes the means through which non-abstract concepts and personal needs play a role in daily life. Thus, the image of the abstract individual who disassociates from gender, race, and class-based categories perpetuates an image of citizenship as universal.

Citizenship as Inclusionary

In contrast to the image of the exclusive, abstract, liberal citizen exists the notion of citizenship as a collective construct based on “social relationships between individuals” (Lister, 2003, p. 15). Within this framework, citizenship consists not merely of the granting of rights and status to an autonomous individual, but also of a social identity and way of situating oneself within a community. Crowley (1998) states that if citizenship is defined as membership into a community, then citizenship relates to an equality of rights, requiring a “common belonging and stimulates the feeling of such belonging” (p. 170). Feminist and critical race scholars have long grappled with the idea of citizenship as a collective identity and have worked to develop new

means of analyzing citizenship as a communal membership. Yet, does defining citizenship in this fashion allow space for non-exclusionary definitions to form?

Feminist and critical race scholars have begun to shed light on the need for focusing on issues of difference when theorizing citizenship. For them, incorporating issues of difference into the definition fosters the communal aspect of citizenship. Iris Marion Young (2002) argues that to think of citizenship as abstract ignores difference amongst individuals and the historical marginalization of populations. Utilizing the universal definition of an abstract citizen is problematic since universalizing rights and responsibilities of individuals excludes the specific nature of rights per group identity (as cited in Kymlicka & Norman 1994, p. 370). For Young, in order to create a unifying definition of citizenship, the concept of difference needs to be emphasized; for her, the ideal citizen is based on a “differentiated” definition (as cited in Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, p. 370). Incorporating difference may help excluded populations challenge their status at the margins. As Anne Phillips (2000) states, if “difference is attached only to the marginal, their citizenship is still second class” (p. 41). By creating a form of citizenship that centralizes all difference, then difference is no longer thought of negatively and those who “differ” from the historically abstracted citizen are no longer thought of in inferior terms.

In her text on citizenship rights for women, Ruth Lister (2003) explains that if citizenship is based on group identity, then it should be “premised on recognition of difference rather than on sameness” (p. 81). A comprehensive approach to citizenship rights would allow for individuals to take “into account their different social positions and group affiliations” while simultaneously allowing them [individuals] to “see themselves as equal individual members of the polity” (Lister, 2003, p. 59). In addition, other theorists support a multicultural approach to

citizenship that requires the promotion of minority rights to the majority (as cited in Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). In response to diverging interests within specific minority groups, the regulation of individual rights within such groups would allow for the maintenance of diversity but control of identity-based hierarchies that may arise when dealing with multiple sets of “differences”. Within such a multicultural form of citizenship, individuals are “incorporated into the political community” not merely as individuals, but also as part of specific identity groups (in Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, p. 370).

An important common feature of all arguments for inclusionary citizenship is the support for returning focus to, and reorienting citizenship within, the *community*. This project understands the community as a specific location or space based on various factors such as geography, shared identities, or shared ideals. I substitute the term “community” instead of civil society as I understand community spaces as relating to both the theoretical approaches to citizenship as inclusive and exclusive and the material forms of social activism occurring in small, local spaces. The term “community” encompasses spaces as small as local families and neighborhoods, to as large as national organizations and global activist networks. All these spaces exist within the broader realm of civil society, but labeling them as “communities” gives attention to the ways in which marginalized populations understand their situation vis-à-vis the state and the economy.

The individualistic model of citizenship perpetuates exclusions based on difference. Yet, refocusing citizenship as based in the community rather than the state may open possibilities for incorporating difference and including marginalized groups. Specifically, attention must be given to the role of citizens within the community, and it is necessary to explore how citizens deemed marginalized through liberal and neoliberal frameworks actively engage in the

community. As Young (2002) explains, a deliberative democracy in which all individuals have access to equal voice must allow space for political engagement outside of formal institutions. Examining local communities, and the activism that exists within, may help reveal ways in which marginalized citizens, who otherwise struggle to possess political voice in formal institutions, are able to develop and share their political voice. While citizens are acted *upon* within a liberal and neoliberal state, an inclusive approach to citizenship focused on action within the community may help secure agency for marginalized citizens.

Though citizenship can exist as inclusionary within a community aspect, it remains an exclusionary practice and status. I wish to begin to explore how those living at the economic margins understand citizenship for themselves. If, as feminist theorists posit, an ideal citizen is one who engages in the labor markets, how might those live on the economic fringe understand their own citizenship status? As Lister (2003) posits, “poverty is corrosive of citizenship both as a status and a practice, undermining rights and the ability to fulfill the potential of citizenship” (p. 141). The economic nature of citizenship status holds significant influence over the ways low-income citizens maintain a voice within the public sphere. The next section explores low-income individuals’ experiences of citizenship within neoliberalism. Understanding how those living at the economic margins understand citizenship for themselves is useful when discussing the potential for more inclusionary citizenship to emerge.

Body II: Activists’ Definitions

Given the importance of gender, race, and economic status on the construction of productive citizenship today, those who exist at the margins of dominant citizen imagery may feel excluded within the broader social and political spheres. Whether political or social in nature, citizenship influences the lives of all Americans, regardless of identity issues. This

section works to reveal the ways in which those living at the economic margin understand citizenship, as well as the ways in which citizenship influences their own lives as low-income individuals.

I selected Women Uprising (WU) and Families Helping Families (FHF) as case studies for four specific reasons: size, leadership, activities, and national connections. Both groups are small in size with board membership of approximately 10 individuals, and both are located within metropolitan areas of the Midwest. In addition, both FHF and WU were influenced by the welfare reform legislation of 1996, and both organizations have strong female leadership of women who were significantly affected by the legislation. I was interested in focusing on agencies that took a broad approach to poverty issues within their local community, as it seemed that they might offer a diverse understandings of citizenship and the state. Lastly, I chose the two agencies for their similar involvement with the larger economic human rights movement, spearheaded by an umbrella agency entitled The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC). Although I was mostly interested in the work the two agencies conducted on the local and state levels, I viewed their alignment with a larger national movement as important to the construction of their agency missions and outreach programs.

This paper's data pulls from fieldwork conducted across six months during 2009. During fieldwork, I engaged in participant observation of meetings and programs, collected organizational brochures and materials, and interviewed staff, board members, and volunteers. This section attempts to fuse the interview voices of WU and FHF activists with theories of citizenship and poverty within America in order to ascertain what critiques and new visions of citizenship emerge at the economic margins.

Citizenship Defined

There were two themes across the participants' responses: citizenship as community and citizenship as responsibility. First, the participants explain that citizenship is inherently connected to the idea of a community, which for this study is defined as a specific location or space based on various factors such as geography, shared identities, or shared ideals. Some of the participants explained that citizenship is not an individual status, but rather a communal entity that requires all individuals within a specific population to support each other. The specific boundaries and components of "community" varied across and within individual interviews. Some referred to the community as their neighborhoods or their larger city, while others alluded to the informal community of their organizations and families. In addition, many of the participants also referred to their network of other social justice organizations as part of their "community". Through activism, they are connected to a larger community of organizations through which they can share stories and develop citizenship (Barbara, 2009; Edgar, 2009; Kayla, 2009; Tina, 2009). Their sense of communities are both real and imaged as WU and FHF members articulate both a necessity of face-to-face interaction among some communities but a sense of shared common good and ideals in others. Regardless of boundary or nature of the space, a critical component of all their approaches to community remained the centralization of the collectively engagement of citizens in specific ways.

Many of the participants explained that citizenship is not only about being a member of a community but also about playing an *active part* in that community. For some, citizens cannot exist on a singular level but must be conscious of other individuals and their needs. Jade, a longstanding FHF board member and retiree, claimed that citizenship is "about making a responsible commitment to act or view your giving as a whole." Alice, another undergraduate student and WU member, echoed the idea of existing as part of a whole by claiming that citizens

need to be aware of not only their individual needs but also the needs of the community. According to WU and FHF participants, citizens cannot exist individually but must exist as an active member of a larger community, incorporating their individual needs with the needs of others in their local areas. As Clinton, one of WU's few male members and longstanding community advocate for the poor, summarized, "citizens take care of others as they take care of themselves."

A second theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the concept that as citizens, individuals have specific responsibilities. Similar to the notion that individuals are part of a larger entity, the theme of "citizenship as responsibility" connects to the idea that in order to be considered a citizen, individuals have responsibilities to act for both themselves and *others*. In particular, WU and FHF members expressed three types of responsibilities in which citizens should engage: 1) a responsibility to help those who have difficulty helping themselves; 2) a responsibility to educate fellow marginalized individuals about power structures that contribute to their marginalization; and 3) a responsibility to educate those who are in positions of privilege about power structures that support their privilege. A key component of all three forms of responsibility is a sense of "obligatory action" and service towards others. For WU and FHF members, citizenship is not merely an identity but rather a process that requires action and reflection; the ideal embodiment of citizenship is active participation in the public setting.

The idea of citizenship responsibility and civic service was thematic throughout all 15 interviews. For Edgar, a member of FHF's board and longtime welfare activists, a citizen is very simply "someone who gives back" and shares resources to others in their local communities. For Jade from FHF, citizenship is about "making responsible commitments to act" and benefit your larger community. Providing provisions and goods to other individuals is also a component of

serving others, as outlined by Robin, an undergraduate student and WU member who explained that all citizens, regardless of means, should “provide for each other what you can.” Having a responsibility to others was repeatedly mentioned as part of being a good citizen: “fulfilling one’s obligation to the people” of one’s community was central to many of the respondent’s definitions (Sherry, 2009). Clinton said that “a citizen is one who cares about what he does, who serves from the heart, not from the pockets. A citizen does it and he doesn’t look twice about it.” Others echoed the necessity of the responsibility to serve as an element of citizenship. Sherry from WU stated that citizens have a responsibility to actively participate in the community, whether that is “walking around your neighborhood to check on elderly people, volunteering, engaging in neighborhood beautification” programs. For her, any form of service towards other individuals fulfills the responsibility requirement of citizenship.

Overall, the activists’ definitions of citizenship appeared inclusionary, with all individuals, regardless of gender, race, class, nationality, or sexuality, able to participate as full citizens. Yet, many of the respondents acknowledged that oftentimes citizenship remains exclusive and is denied to various groups based on economic status, racial backgrounds, and gender identities. In their interviews, interviewees recognized two main problems that hinder the creation of their ideal citizenship: territorial exclusion and exclusion based on identity “isms”.

Many of the participants explained that citizenship still remains contingent upon various “isms” such as classism, racism, and sexism. For Alice from WU, citizenship remains based on “what color your skin is, what sex you are, what your sexuality is, what job you have, what car you’re driving... it all plays into that.” Another one of WU’s few male members, Dustin, explained that in order for citizenship to ever be truly equal, individuals need to let go of their personal prejudice towards issues of “difference”. Such prejudice does nothing more than

“hinder” society and in order to move forward towards a more inclusionary form of citizenship, individuals need to be more receptive to issues of difference. For the participants, individuals are consistently denied access to full membership in a community because of these “isms”. With regard to issues of class, responses from the participants support the idea that without proper economic status, one cannot be considered a full member of the public community. Further, as Tina, one of the founding members of WU and former executive director, explained, in order to have access to full citizenship, individuals need to be on “stable footing”; for her, those who experience marginalization based on “isms” struggle to even participate in the system, let alone enjoy full citizenship benefits.

Participants also understood citizenship as directly connected to the economy and economic productivity. Some of the participants believe that the government is driven by money, and those who lack economic clout also lack political voice. For Edgar from FHF, the root cause of exclusion is money: “I say that inclusion is not when you’ve been exposed or been removed from being exclusive. It all has to do with money.” Jade, another FHF participant, understands the construction of the American society as being built entirely on class divides; as she stated:

If you don’t have any money, you don’t have any power . . . everyone gets some type of monetary reward. You know? [Laughs] You can be a Girls Scout and do all the chores and duties and club things and you still get a reward. The whole system is set up on rewarding.

In addition, as another WU member Clinton claimed, “in order to be rich, someone else has to be poor.” The entire social system, for these participants, is predicated upon economic success and monetary status. In their eyes, it is those individuals who do not have high economic status that experience difficulty establishing their social and political existence. Further, for the WU and

FHF participants, it seems as if society cannot function without some type of economic stratification.

In addition, the participants also explained ways in which they viewed economic privilege influencing their lives in other forms. For some, growing privatization and neoliberal influences has caused a decrease in community life. In their minds, Americans today are encouraged to draw inward, to become more private and disengaged from community life. Alice from WU explained that “it’s disenchanting that community no longer exists. We’re taught to stay in our houses, watch our TVs, don’t get involved.” For her, increasing public privatization has led to an increase in personal privatization as well, diminishing community life. Robin, another WU member, echoed the sentiment that neoliberalism’s influence has led to a distancing amongst individuals and a disintegration of community. As she stated:

I think one of the biggest problems with American society is the individualism that’s so imbedded in the past 50 years . . . and when you’ve got a society that every little person in there thinks only of “me”, that’s not a society. It’s not going to function. It’s just going to get sicker and sicker and fall apart.

For her, the gradual increased emphasis on the individual, due to the increasing influence of neoliberalism, has led to a destruction of a “community ethic” in which people helped others and supported a larger good.

For the participants, the centrality of money in American society supports the state’s emphasis on meritocracy, thereby further limiting those individuals of low/no class standing. The “system” supports the notion that hard work creates financial independence, but WU and FHF members disagree. For them, those who struggle the most gain the least (Jade 2009). In their eyes, those who cannot financially support themselves are criminalized because of the meritocratic emphasis on economic productivity. In describing her feelings on meritocracy, Alice from WU explained:

It's hard to survive just off of a paycheck. It's hard to make all your ends meet and do anything without any sort of help. Even though I don't make very much money, it was decided this year that I made too much money. So there are all these lines drawn over who deserves something and who doesn't.

For the participants, the "system" is set up for those at the lower end of the economic ladder to fail, regardless of the rhetoric of meritocracy. As Tina and others explained, the state supports economic stratification by perpetuating the "bootstraps" myth.

In relation, some participants believe the government favors the voices and input of affluent citizens, thereby keeping the voices and input of impoverished individuals silenced. The state supports the capitalist system that rewards those who 'work hard' and make a profit. For those who are unable to make a profit, the system is not so rewarding. Yet, as many of the WU and FHF interviewees claimed, in order for someone to profit, someone else has to lose. For instance, Francine from WU explained that:

You've got people all over the country, all over the world, who are in sweatshops working for cents a day . . . and that's part of the downfall of the idea of self-determination and the idea of capitalist market system. There has to be a winner. You know and . . . you can't have winners and not a loser.

For Francine, the low-income earners and those individuals living in poverty are the "losers" in the capitalist economic model. Similarly, Clinton from WU claimed that "in order to be rich, someone else has to be poor." WU member Sherry explained that it is not democracy that the United States government encourages, but rather capitalism. For her, the state is able to prosper because it has "people who are disadvantaged who will do the nasty grunt work. It can't exist without that." A key message that comes from all the interviewees, then, is that the relationship between poverty and the state is co-dependent. For them, because the state and affluent individuals benefit from the detriment of low-income people's labor, there is a desire to support and uphold economic stratification. Low-income individuals often are dependent on the state for

social service and welfare programs; on the other hand, the state is dependent upon the “poor” for their ability to do, as Sherry states, “the grunt work.” Without the labor of the low-income individuals, the state and its economic interest would not thrive. Thus, it is within the interests of the state to maintain a population of low-income individuals.

This section was dedicated to organizing the WU and FHF interview responses and understanding what types of critiques members are making of American citizenship. The final section of this paper aims to analyze their comments and connect them to citizenship studies and feminist theories. Using feminist political theorists to critique and support some of their arguments helps uncover the multiple ways in which WU and FHF attempt to build constructions of citizenship for marginalized groups and are expanding the scope of inclusionary citizenship.

Body III: Connecting Activism to Theory

Overall, two interlocking themes emerge from the participants’ responses and exploring each theme reveals ways in which the participants’ critiques connect to the development of a model of inclusionary citizenship. First, participants situate their understandings of citizenship as based on productive action whereby individuals are considered either good or bad citizens based on their productive activities. The second theme exists in response to the first and centers on the development of nuanced views of the “community”.

Good and Bad Productivity

A central theme in WU and FHF members’ responses was the notion that citizens have responsibilities to serve their community and engage in positive productivity. For them, citizenship is available for those who responsibly engage other individuals and maintain an active presence in the public sphere. The centralization of “service” connects to some aspects of the civic republican approach to citizenship that argues that citizens should act in the best interest of the collective good, therefore making them virtuous citizens. As Oldfield explains, “pursuing

the common good is the core of the communal citizens' civic virtue" (as cited in Shafir, 1998, p. 11). Most of the WU and FHF members align with the civic republicanism model of citizenship, as they center civic action, and citizenship duties within the scope of the community whereby individual citizen action benefits the larger citizenry community.

The focus on service also connects to the dichotomy of good citizen versus bad citizen. While many of the participants believe that citizenship requires civic action, they stated that what type of action a person conducts influences one's citizenship. As Oldfield claims, citizenship as community is not merely a fact that "people act, but how they act" (as cited in Shafir, 1998, p. 82). Thus, for WU and FHF members, it is not simply that citizens have a responsibility to help other individuals, but that they serve in mutually beneficial ways. As Sherry from WU described, citizenship includes anything that "results in direct positive contact with the people around you." She elaborated by stating that citizens should participate in meaningful and positive ways and encourage others to similarly participate. Other WU and FHF participants echoed Sherry's sentiments, arguing that those who participate in negative ways, such as committing crimes and harming others, are negatively affecting their communities, and therefore are labeled "bad citizens."

In his text on citizenship within the 21st century, Russell Dalton (2009) explains that to be a "good citizen" today often requires individuals to adhere to what he calls "engaged citizenship" (p. 5). Engaged citizenship includes concern for the welfare of others and also social rights and responsibility of citizens. WU and FHF participants align themselves with Dalton's notion of engaged citizenship by outlining a definition of citizenship that is predicated on service to others in their communities. By supporting Dalton's notion of engaged citizenship, the participants are

also sustaining the notion that “good citizenship,” or inclusive citizenship one could argue, *requires* some type of engagement within civil society.

In addition, centralizing citizenship on service to one’s community opens up space for marginalized groups to develop a political voice within local spaces. In this way, the WU and FHF thoughts on community service connect back to Young’s (2000) notion of inclusionary citizenship as centered in the community. In her text, Young supports expanding citizenship to the public sphere, which for her includes the physical public space, the relationships among citizens within that space, and the forms of speech conducted within the public sphere (p. 168). For Young, civil society allows freedom in which marginalized groups can “find each other and form associations [such as WU and FHF] to improve their lives through mutual aid and articulation of group consciousness” (p. 165). The activities in which WU and FHF dub “good citizenship” relate to Young’s argument in that those activities provide opportunities for WU and FHF members to connect to other low-income individuals and give support not offered by the state or economy. As expressed by WU and FHF members, their responsibility as “good” citizens is to help those who cannot help themselves by providing services and aid not available or not provided by the state. Providing such services allows those left outside of exclusionary citizenship an opportunity for support and also gives opportunity for WU and FHF members to act on their citizenship responsibilities. Thus, by centering citizenship on community service, WU and FHF members embody some of the tenants of Young’s suggestions for developing inclusionary citizenship.

Yet, while the image of citizenship as outlined by WU and FHF members does expand the definition of productive action to allow marginalized groups equal opportunities, WU and FHF articulations of productivity and the “good vs. bad citizen” dichotomy also can be

problematic. True, their image of citizenship pushes past the liberal subject, expands citizenship into community spaces, and includes acts of volunteerism and care work as forms of responsible work. Yet, centering “good citizenship” on productive action and service may work to reinforce the very exclusions WU and FHF members are against. In other words, their image of “good citizenship” may also work to perpetuate the liberal individualism model of citizenship and the neoliberal emphasis on productivity. Unlike the neoliberal vision of citizenship, the WU and FHF participants do not center productivity in the economic sphere. But supporting the concept of ‘productivity’ as a measurable indicator of citizenship is problematic as it reinforces the *necessity* of productivity for good citizenship. Only those individuals who positively “give back” to their communities through can claim the identity of “good” citizen; productive action remains a necessary component of the citizenship equation. While the WU and FHF members’ vision of good citizenship does open up the space for the inclusion of individuals who would otherwise be excluded, it also reinforces the idea that productivity guarantees rewards. In other words, civic engagement and volunteerism equals good citizenship status.

It is not evident through interview conversations whether WU and FHF members realize how their attitudes and actions maintains connection to neoliberal ideas of good citizenship, nor how their understanding of citizenship productivity is privileged. Yet, given their position as low/no income individuals, a possible connection between their attitudes and neoliberalism could relate to the relevancy of neoliberal policies and welfare programs within their lives. A central point to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) is the promotion of active citizenship and civic volunteerism as a moral substitute to paid labor. PRWORA emphasizes the meritocratic notion that hard work creates financial gain; yet the policy does not limit hard work as paid employment, but rather requires recipients to volunteer in

lieu of paid labor as much as 30 hours a week. Because some WU and FHF participants currently collect benefits through the state, they encounter messages encouraging economic productivity and community services as necessary parts of “good” citizenship. Perhaps their construction of a “good vs. bad” citizenship dichotomy is a result of their experience under new welfare reform?² As MacDonald and Ruckert (2009) argue in their piece on post-neoliberalism, the neoliberal state has often been “actively involved in the construction of the molding of bodies and minds” (p. 9). While WU and FHF members do re-center citizenship within the community, their support of productivity as a necessary clause of “good citizenship” may not be as liberating.

The Expanded Community

A second theme to emerge from WU and FHF members is the overview of what they consider and articulate as “community”. Though their ideas of productivity may align with those of neoliberalism, WU and FHF members’ ideas of community are not as similar. For them, the centralization of economic marginalization greatly influences their emphasis on the community-aspect of citizenship, their lack-of-faith in the government, and their understanding that money controls all social and political institutions. Because they have experience living as low-income individuals, they have firsthand knowledge of the realities of economic stratification on political structures. Further, their own experiences in poverty fuels their resentment and anger towards the governments’ dismissal of poverty as a necessary social problem. As evident in many of the

² Mary Hawkesworth (2002) claims that the neoliberal push for economic advancement of minorities and the incorporation of women into civil society “may be another instance where structures that count as progressive for men have markedly different consequences for women” (p. 307). PRWORA supports the idea that good citizenship necessitates economic productivity, yet as many feminist theorists argue (Hancock, 2004; Mink, 1998; Naples, 1998), such image is gendered, raced, and classed. Connecting back to Hawkesworth’s point, then, demonstrates that images of citizenship supported under PRWORA may not necessarily be as beneficial for marginalized citizens as it is for those constructing the policies themselves – upper/middle class politicians.

interviews, not only do WU and FHF members feel hopeless about the ability of the “poor” to have a voice in politics, but they also feel anger towards the state discounting their potential.

As previously discussed, the WU and FHF members view citizenship as centered in the community and focus on the responsibility to service to others. For them, the role of the community is to support individuals and provide space in which the three levels of citizenship responsibility can occur: to help those who cannot help themselves; to educate fellow marginalized individuals about power structures; to educate those in positions of dominance. As citizens, individuals have a responsibility to educate other marginalized people about power inequities as well as educate those in positions of power about their own privilege. The community acts as the location in which these citizenship responsibilities are developed and sustained. A key component of these three areas of responsibility is developing a political consciousness, which for the purposes of this study is defined as “the empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination” (Mansbridge, 2001). Though WU and FHF members differed on their definitions of the community, a common theme throughout their responses was the relationship between the community, social activism, and the development of a critical lens directed at power structures that keep them marginalized. Thus, they desire a community in which their ideal citizenship can exist.

For the participants, the community is where individuals make decisions, discuss grievances, support individuals, and share their voices. For WU and FHF, the ideal community represents the space in which political consciousness and critical discussions of power can develop and flourish, and their ideal views of citizenship can develop. Such view directly connects to certain theories of inclusionary citizenship, which encourages the incorporation of

gender, race, and class inequalities into the discussion. By re-centering citizenship in the community rather than the economy, WU and FHF members take the first step to re-define citizenship as inclusionary. WU and FHF members are aware of the ways in which political and social institutions, supported by economic forces, are gendered, raced, and classed. In their interviews, they demonstrate an understanding that citizenship and the state support various “isms” that work to keep groups separated and marginalized. For them, the community provides space in which those “isms” can be challenged. In addition, as Lister (2003) explains, establishing a sense of agency for individual citizens is a necessary component of the development of inclusionary citizenship rights for those to whom agency is often limited (p. 34-7). WU and FHF members centralize the issue of agency and empowerment within the community; to them, it is imperative that individuals feel they have a voice and presence in government and helping to develop that voice starts within local community spaces.

Conclusion

This paper outlined the participants’ views regarding the distinct relationship between citizenship and economic stratification. What the paper demonstrated was the multiple approaches to citizenship from both theorists and activists alike. Giving attention to the perspectives of WU and FHF members helped reveal the ways in which everyday citizens understand political concepts, as well as how exclusionary citizenship influence one’s perceived existence in the political and social realm. Though the participants expressed an idealistic view of citizenship as inclusive and based in the community, they were quick to acknowledge that citizenship still remains exclusive with individuals marginalized based on their social identities and lack of membership in communities. As they express, American society remains swayed by class structures that acts to stigmatize and limit the voices of low/no income citizens.

It is WU and FHF's interjection into the conversation about citizenship, neoliberalism, and community activism that remains crucial. They put forth critical suggestions for the creation of community space in which their desired understandings of inclusionary citizenship can form. Yet, as I problematize, the influence of the neoliberal agenda may also influence the very understanding of ideal citizenship as presented by WU and FHF members. Despite the difficulties of living at the economic margins, and the multiple institutions working against them, WU and FHF members persist in their articulate for a desire of economic justice and of a more inclusive idea of citizenship belonging for all individuals across gender, race, and class lines.

References

- Acklesberg, M. (2005). Women's community activism and the rejection of 'politics'. In M. Friedman (Ed.), *Women and citizenship*, edited by M. Friedman (Ed.), *Women and Citizenship* (pp. 3-11). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, J. (1999). Changing paradigms of citizenship and the exclusiveness of the demos. *International Sociology* 14, 345-268.
- Coole, D. (1994). Women, gender, and contract: feminist interpretations. In D. Boucher & P. Kelly (Eds.), *The Social contract from Hobbes to Rawls* (pp. 191-210). London, England: Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., and Thomas, K. 1995. *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Crowley, J. (1998). The national dimensions of citizenship in T.H. Marshall." *Citizenship Studies* 2, 165-178.
- Cruikshank, B. 1999. *The will to empower: Democratic citizens and other subjects*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Dalton, R. (2002). *The good citizen: How a younger generation is reshaping American politics*. Irvine, CA: University of California.
- Grewal, I. (2005). *Transnational America: Feminisms, diasporas, neoliberalisms*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Hawkesworth, M. (2002). Democratization: Reflections on gendered dislocations in the public sphere. In M. Holmstrom (Ed.), *The socialist feminist project* (pp. 298-312). New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Hemerijck, A. (2001). Prospects for effective social citizenship in an age of structural inactivity. In C. Crouch et al (Eds.), *Citizens, markets, and the state* (pp.) Oxford, England:Oxford University Press.
- Jaggar, A. 2006. Arenas of citizenship: Civil society, the state, and the global order. In *Women and citizenship*. Edited by Marilyn Friedman, 91-110. New York: Oxford University Press.
- James, S. (1992). The good-enough citizens: Citizenship and independence. In Gisela Bock & Susan James (Eds.), *Beyond equality and difference: Feminist politics and female subjectivity* (pp. 43-60). London, England: Routledge.
- Kymlicka, W., & Norman, W. (1994). Return of the citizen: A survey of recent work on citizenship theory. *Ethics, 104*, 352-381.
- Lister, R. (1997). Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis. *Feminist Review 57*, 20-48.
- Lister, R. 2003. *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lister, R. and Beresford, P. (2000), 'Where are the poor in the future of poverty research?', in Bradshaw, J. and Sainsbury R. (eds), *Researching Poverty*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Mansbridge, J. (2001). The making of oppositional consciousness. In J. Mansbridge & A. Morris (Eds.), *Oppositional consciousness: The subjective roots of social protest* (pp. 1-19). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, L. (1986). *Beyond entitlement*. London: England: The New Press.
- Mills, C. (1997). *The racial contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Narayan, U. (1997). Towards a feminist vision of citizenship: Rethinking the implications of dignity, political participation, and nationality. In M. Shanley & U. Narayan (Eds.), *Reconstructing political theory: Feminist Perspectives* (pp. 48-70). University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Neubeck, K. & Cazenave, N. (2001). *Welfare racism: Playing the race card against america's poor*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Omi, M & Winant, H. (1999). Racial formations in the United States. In M. Bulmer & J. Solomos (Eds.), *Racism* (pp. 288-300). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

- Ong, A. 2006. *Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations in citizenship and sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Phillips, A. (2000). Second class citizenship. In D. Pearce et al (Eds.), *Tomorrow's citizens: Critical debates in citizenship and education*. London, England: Institute for Public Policy Research.
- Shafir, G. (1998). Introduction: The evolving tradition of citizenship. In G. Shafir (Ed.), *The citizenship debates: A reader* (pp. 1-30). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Shklar, J. (1991). *American citizenship: the quest for inclusion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- United States Census Bureau. (2009). Poverty highlights. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/index.html>
- Young, I. (1989). Polity and group difference: A critique of the ideal of universal citizenship. *Ethics*, 99, 250-274.
- Young, I. 2000. *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.