

## Aging Citizenship

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Volume 2, numéro 1, printemps 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1044662ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1044662ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Centre de recherche en éthique de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

1718-9977 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Lanoix, M. (2007). Aging Citizenship. *Les ateliers de l'éthique / The Ethics Forum*, 2(1), 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1044662ar>

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DOSSIER: IN MEMORIAM, IRIS MARION YOUNG (1949-2006)

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PRINTEMPS 2007  
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AGING CITIZENSHIP

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Audrey Lorde stated with some regret and certainly with much anger that, within western institutional frameworks, difference always escaped conceptualisation that was not oppressive.<sup>1</sup> As a rightful heir to these concerns, Iris Marion Young devoted many of her writings to analysing difference in addition to arguing that proper attention to difference is crucial for a more just society. Class, social position, gender, race, ethnicity, ability and sexual orientation are all human variations that affect access to social and political institutions.

While attention is fittingly directed at the challenges of the pluralist state, which imply different cultural locations, I believe there are other sources of difference which require attention: namely, age. If age is currently mediatised, attention is focused on the possible scarcity of resources, especially in health care, that will result from an increased numbers of seniors. Consequently, reflection on age and citizenship has been circumscribed to issues of distributive justice that will be brought about by this demographic change. If the practical implications of aging have gained attention, theoretical discussions of the citizen usually omit considerations of age. In traditional liberal democratic theories, the concept of the citizen is taken to be an ideal devoid of such contingent particularities. I challenge this apparent age neutrality and I support my claim by drawing on Iris Marion Young's critiques of universal citizenship and of the social institution of labour.

Two of Young's articles on citizenship and group inequities are central to my paper. First, I examine Young's critique of the ideal of universal citizenship which she puts forward in 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship'. Second, I examine the article 'Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice'; here, Young targets labour as a foundational social institution which can disadvantage certain groups of individuals. I show that the first article redirects our thinking on citizenship rights, while the second highlights some of the problematic assumptions associated with the implicit notion of the citizen as a productive labourer, and therefore, as an adult. Both articles support my contention that the implicit concept of the citizen needs to be brought to the fore, that it is problematic and needs to be critically examined.

## CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

As T.H. Marshall explained, the understanding of citizenship has evolved to encompass not only civil and political citizenship but also social citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Political citizenship is tied to an ideal of the citizen as a self-governing individual and civil citizenship is linked to the notion of a self-possessing one. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an acceptance of the risks brought about by fluctuations in the market entailed a broadening of the notion of citizenship to include social citizenship. In liberal democratic theories, if the ideal of the citizen as self-possessing is not always embraced, that of self-legislating is never questioned.<sup>3</sup> There are historical reasons for this, but the notion of citizenship as the right to self-determination is foundational to liberal democratic theories of justice. This implies that the ideal of the citizen is strongly correlated to that of a self-governing individual, which means, therefore, that of an adult with full mental competency.

Recent feminist writings have challenged some of the assumptions implicit in theories of citizenship. In particular, such scholarship has made evident the problems inherent in an uncritical acceptance of the ideals of the male bread winner and of productive work that are implicit in the traditional meaning of citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Some feminist revisions propose to conceptualise the citizen as a carer instead of a producer and some put forward the idea careful citizenship.<sup>5</sup> This call for a broadening of the notion of the citizen is also echoed in Young's work.

## UNIVERSAL CITIZENSHIP

Situated within a deliberative democratic framework attentive to political participation, Iris Marion Young argues that traditional liberal theories subsume difference to the detriment of true plurality. Treating everyone the same does not imply equal treatment; in fact, it can only lead to the perpetuation of oppression and, hence, injustice.<sup>6</sup> In this section, I show that her critique of universality helps to displace the primacy of civil and political citizenship rights, leading to a more complex understating of citizenship.

In 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship', Young locates a difficulty in "[t]he assumed link between citizenship for everyone, on the one hand, and the two other senses of citizenship—having a common life with and being treated in the same way as other citizens—on the other."<sup>7</sup> An impediment to the realization of genuinely universal citizenship is the conviction that persons should adopt a universal point of view and, furthermore, that these laws and rules should apply to all citizens in the same way (426). For Young, however, difference needs to be acknowledged for true representation to take place, thus leading to a more equitable society.

Young argues that citizenship in its ideal of capturing everyone must be sensitive enough to the differences that adversely affect oppressed groups for it is only by acknowledging such differences that they can be remedied. Adequate representation of the groups constitutive of a particular society implies that institutional mechanisms need to be implemented to organize, inform and facilitate input by these groups into policies that directly affect them (413). The ideal of citizenship may be a guiding one, but when applied to real situations in which oppression is present it can effectively obscure the effects of such oppressive circumstances.

Young's article can be read as a prescription for legislative reform. Affirmative action plans, for example, not only redress past injustices, but for Young, are concrete measures that compensate for "cultural biases of standards and evaluators used by schools or employers" (424). However, I understand Young's critique on a deeper level. Her point that these various meanings of citizenship can be at odds with each other has theoretical implications for citizenship, not only pragmatic ones.

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In her critique of the ideal of uniform political participation, of the same formal rights for everyone, there is the implicit understanding that political citizenship is tied to civil citizenship. Those with less property and status will not be heard in the political arena, even if they have the same formal rights as their more endowed counterparts. If less civil citizenship implies less than effective political representation, it can also undermine the social citizenship rights of disadvantaged groups that do not have proper representation to address issues of direct concern to them.

If there are policies affecting single mothers, for example, these women must be able to have input into the policies that affect them, according to Young. By ensuring that these women have political access and that such access is sensitive to their lived realities, better policies can be formulated. Their increased participation will not only enhance their civil and political citizenship but also their social citizenship rights. For these mothers, these latter rights may be the ones that affect them on a daily basis. Thus it can be seen, in light of Young's argument, that all three components of citizenship are linked closely.

Historically, only a property owner was entitled to political participation. Gradually, property ownership and the right to vote became dissociated. The ideal of universal citizenship implies that civil and political citizenship rights do not interfere with each other. However, Young's critique of universal citizenship reveals that, in fact, citizenship rights are not dissociated from each other; they do not run in non-interfering parallel lines but can have detrimental or positive effects on one another.

In neoconservative critiques of citizenship, social citizenship rights are seen in opposition to civil and political citizenship rights; accordingly, a citizen on welfare is not an authentic citizen. Once again, Young draws our attention to the impact of citizenship rights on each other. For example, if single mothers are given adequate access to day care so that they can participate in policy forums, the day care, which is a right of social citizenship, will increase the mothers' political participation. In addition, accessible day care and other social programs can help women who are marginalised enter the labour force, in a way that will not compromise their parenting; here social citizenship rights enhance civil citizenship. Understood in this manner, social citizenship rights are not the 'poorer second cousins' of the more authentic civil and political citizenship rights. By empha-

sising the variability of access to meaningful participation at the social and political level, Young calls for a more complex understanding of citizenship rights that makes room for the complementarity of these rights.<sup>9</sup>

## PRODUCTIVE LABOUR

In 'Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice', Young makes the case that an analysis of the inequalities between groups as opposed to individuals is effective for locating structural inequalities within a given society. Determining how such inequalities occur implies that oppressive circumstances can be redressed.<sup>10</sup> Her article is useful for an examination of the citizen, since it reveals the type of citizen that is assumed to inhabit these social institutions.

In order to make her argument, Young first needs to identify the relevant structures since they "refer to the relation of basic social positions that fundamentally condition the opportunities and life prospects of the persons located in these positions" (14). Young identifies the same major social institutions which make up the basic structure as the ones Rawls includes in his list, but she adds "the basic kinds of positions in the social division of labor" (12). The explicit recognition of labour as a potential source of structural inequality is crucial. As feminist critiques of citizenship have shown, linking productive labour to citizenship institutes a hierarchy that privileges wage earners. Thus Young is in agreement with Lister, Fraser and Gordon, and Tronto, to name a few theorists, who argue that those who labour primarily in the private sphere are disadvantaged since citizenship is tied to a male bread winner model of citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Productive labour as the gateway to citizenship is problematic for those who labour outside such a paradigm. The implicit notion of the citizen as wage earner creates unjust conditions for those, usually women, who perform unpaid care work in the home. This disadvantage is reflected in public policies that fail to recognize the importance of unwaged care labour. For example, parents who have taken time off waged work to care for children will not have the same pensions as individuals who did not take any leave.

Feminist proposals that focus on the recognition of caring activities as being as worthy of access to citizenship rights as productive labour posit, nevertheless, the citizen as an active agent. Thus, whether the citizen is a productive adult or a universal carer, she is

always an adult who is active. Although I am in agreement with these critiques, I want to make a stronger claim, however, and suggest that those who are neither workers nor carers are also adversely affected. Put differently, if the group which is disadvantaged is the one that is outside the paradigm of productive labour, it includes not only those who perform care work, but also individuals who are not yet workers, are no longer workers or will never be workers.

Young's analysis helps to locate the groups disadvantaged by the institution of labour. It not only highlights the inequities generated by social structures that rely on the paradigm of productive labour, it also reveals that those who are neither caregivers nor producers are also in potentially oppressive circumstances.

## CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

The notion of the citizen implicit in traditional liberal democratic theories and in the various critiques of these theories is that of an adult who is active, either as a carer or a producer. The implication of the citizen as a producer or a carer is that this ideal citizen is an adult who does not age, since this individual is never posited outside the paradigm of activity. Thus the citizen is a perpetual adult. My claim, therefore, is that the concept of the citizen inherent in the theories and critiques viewed thus far is that of an active adult and that, furthermore, this adult never ages.

To understand the implications of my claim, it is useful to look at the rights of citizenship. In the first article cited, Young highlights the interactive aspect of citizenship rights. In traditional liberal democratic theories, however, the rights of citizenship are assumed to be in a static relationship to the citizen herself. That is, civil and political rights are taken to be rights of citizenship which all citizens possess and it is assumed that social citizenship rights can be accessed under the proper circumstances. It is informative to focus on this latter right. Social citizenship rights are understood to manage risk; they act as a safety net against the vagaries of the market. However, as seen earlier, social citizenship rights actually do more than simply manage risk; they can enhance political and civil citizenship rights. Young's critique of universal citizenship reveals that traditional theories obscure the interconnection of the various rights of citizenship.

A different understanding of citizenship rights also necessitates a reconceptualisation of the citizen. At birth, a citizen has rights of civil and social citizenship but not rights of political citizenship

such as voting rights. This will change as she ages; therefore, how she accesses these rights and which ones become of prime importance will vary throughout her life. I am suggesting, therefore, that a concept of the citizen should be responsive to the realities of infancy, old age, and of the varying capacities of individuals, and should not privilege a short period of adulthood.

## CONCLUSION

Young's work is innovative because it uncovers the relational aspect, whether of citizenship rights or of basic social institutions at play within theories of justice. This, I believe, is a major achievement that needs to be further explored. Making use of her writings, I have started this inquiry by examining the structural deficits brought about the privileged status of wage labour. In light of this, I have argued that the value placed on productive work casts individuals who do not fit the category of productive labourer as citizens of lesser status. This is problematic for an understanding of citizenship that is inclusive; as Young saw it, inclusiveness should be a constant concern for a just society.

This worry is not limited to philosophers. Reflecting on policies directed at care giving, social theorists Kemp and Glendinning caution that "[t]he emphasis on paid employment...as the main route out of poverty and social exclusion at an individual level, risks marginalising those who cannot work because of illness; who have exited the labour market because of age; or who prioritise looking after close relatives (children or older people) because of normative beliefs or a perceived lack of alternate options."<sup>12</sup>

Some of the problems identified by Okin and Kittay pertaining to the family and dependency are tied to the foundational notion of the citizen as an adult.<sup>13</sup> As Kittay has argued, individuals who are not working adults are nonetheless present in society and theories of justice need to take them into consideration. However, it is only by recasting the notion of citizen that such structural deficits can finally be addressed. The citizen conceptualised as an adult links the formulation of citizenship rights to a type of social participation that is quite limited; it fails to capture the realities of the citizen as she ages from birth to death. Therefore, in order in order to capture the complexity of the relationship of citizenship rights and the lived realities of individuals, the concept of the citizen needs to be broadened from that of an ageless active adult to one who shares a social space<sup>14</sup>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Audrey Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefine Difference' in *Sister Outsider*, (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 114-123.

<sup>2</sup> T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

<sup>3</sup> As evidenced by the numerous discussions between communitarians, libertarians and welfare liberals.

<sup>4</sup> See the writings of Ruth Lister for her critique of the male bread winner paradigm. Linda Gordon and Nancy Fraser, as well as Joan Tronto examine the issues surrounding care and care labour. There are other critiques worth noting such as the implicit heteronormativity in theories of citizenship.

<sup>5</sup> Proposed by Fraser and Lister respectively.

<sup>6</sup> This is the thrust of her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).

<sup>7</sup> Iris Marion Young, 'Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship' in *Feminism and Politics*, Anne Phillips, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 402.

<sup>8</sup> Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon discuss this.

<sup>9</sup> Because her focus is on participation, Young privileges the notion of citizen as self-determining. I cannot engage this issue in this short paper but it is worthy of further analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Iris Marion Young, 'Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgments of Injustice', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2001, pp. 1-18.

<sup>11</sup> I put such individuals in a group because they are treated in that manner by social policies; however, they are diverse. Here I cannot address the impact of race and class which are important.

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Glendinning and Peter A. Kemp, *Cash and Care*, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2006), p.6.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, (New York; Basic Books, 1989); Eva Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> I am only gesturing to this new concept here; however, I develop this more fully elsewhere.

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