Gender and citizen potential in adolescent students

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Abstract
This study examined several qualities related to good citizenship in 669 British students (mean age = 16.7 years; range 15 - 19) and asked whether these differ for males and females. Qualities explored in this research included; civic participation in the form of volunteering, social and personal values, personal qualities, leadership skills and demographics. The results demonstrated clear gender differences in several variables associated with citizenship qualities. Results are consistent with research on gender and pro-social behaviours. Understanding gender differences in citizenship qualities will help educators focus on relevant areas of interest 'to adolescents that encourage specific civic involvement.

Introduction
Citizenship education in schools throughout the United Kingdom (UK) has been driven by government concerns over issues such as voting, entry into the workforce, voluntary work and positive involvement by adolescents in their communities. Furthermore, studies have shown civic education to be a powerful generator of social capital (Print & Coleman, 2003) and this has provided support for the inclusion of citizenship education in the school curriculum. However studies have suggested that the notion of citizenship in adolescents and what it means to them is much broader than what is provided in the curriculum. What adolescents' perceive citizenship to mean for them is different from what is being presented in school primarily because of the limited focus in the delivered subject matter (Lister, Smith, Middleton & Cox, 2003).

Studies have found that adolescents deemed meaningful activities that may not be a direct expression of citizenship but include activities that strengthen citizenship through strengthening social capital (Lister et al., 2003; Print & Coleman, 2003). This constructive social participation is termed citizenship responsibility and its elements focus on; a) voluntary work in its various forms, b) altruistic acts that are generally random but not defined as voluntary work, and c) general social participation which are activities that suggest an interest and concern for the welfare of one's community and neighbours and involvement in local organisations for the benefit of the community.
A key question is how adolescents are likely to be pre-disposed to become good citizens. What are the qualities that are sought after or, once identified, to nurture? Understanding what qualities are conducive to good citizenship in adolescents may provide indications of how to encourage development of these qualities in all adolescents. Factors that have been shown to contribute to these personal qualities include individual disposition (personality attributes), pro-social tendencies (motivations for volunteering, interest in helping others and learning leadership) and family and social background (family structure and socio-economic status).

This paper reports on a study that profiled a sample of adolescents in terms of certain citizenship qualities and determined if gender makes a difference in the manifestation of these qualities. Such an examination of whether these qualities differ between genders will assist educators to focus on what might be more important for males and females to be involved in and directed toward in terms of activities and instruction. As a definitive list of citizenship qualities does not exist qualities that have been shown to be important to good citizenship behaviours in adolescents were investigated. These were a) civic participation, b) social and personal values, c) personal attributes and leadership potential and d) demographics.

a) Civic participation - The most obvious and well documented form of civic participation is that of volunteering which is strongly connected with 'good' citizenship (Lister et al, 2003). Nevertheless it is recognised that some adolescents who volunteer do not do so for purely altruistic reasons (McLellan & Youniss, 2003). Therefore voluntary activity alone is not a marker of good citizenship potential. Instead, assessing a person's motivations for behaviour such as volunteering, their attitudes toward civic participation and their interest in their communities is likely to provide a more reliable measure of their pre-disposition toward citizenship behaviours.

b) Social and personal values - Research on adolescent volunteerism typically identifies multiple motives for volunteer involvement (Clary et al., 1998; Eley & Kirk, 2002) that reflect both altruistic and self-serving interests and adolescents typically see volunteering service as an 'opportunity'. This opportunity although largely used in a self-serving capacity can nevertheless be reflective of an individual's personal and social values. If we consider 'values' as a personality trait that is relatively stable and indicative of enduring beliefs and personal behaviours, then a person's values might be predictive of their tendency toward pro-social behaviour and good citizenship (Serow, 1991).

c) Leadership potential - Personality characteristics may be related to a pre-disposition toward leadership potential in adolescents because leadership requires skills such as confidence in dealing with people, communication and personal traits such as being organised and setting goals. Leadership skills may also help indicate a pre-disposition toward good citizenship because it is showing an interest in dealing with others and a desire to interact. Furthermore, individuals who are naturally high in leadership potential may be drawn toward activities such as volunteer work in the community that allow them to practice and improve their skills.
d) Demographic variables – Social class or socio-economic status, level of education of parents, living in a one or two-parent family of number of siblings may also play a part in a tendency toward good citizenship behaviours (Penner, 2002).

Finally gender is a variable that could influence a pre-disposition to good citizenship because gender differences are well documented in all the above qualities affecting pro-social behaviours, eg, civic participation through volunteering and helping, (Eagly & Crowley, 1986), personal values (Serow, 1991), leadership (Karnes & D’ilio, 1989, 1990) and school attainment (Tinklin, 2003). The effect of gender on these important qualities for this study has been determined through questionnaires. It was hypothesized that female students would portray higher levels of the qualities related to good citizenship as compared to their male counterparts.

Methods

Data
This article draws on data from a larger research project into volunteerism and leadership in adolescent students that were part of a Millennium Volunteers (MV) programme.

Approximately half (341) of the participants in this sample were due to begin a programme with the MV in the coming months and were recruited from across the UK to complete the research questionnaires prior to any involvement with the MV programme. Access to these students was achieved at a training course associated with the MV. The remaining students in this sample (328) were recruited randomly from schools across the UK and access was achieved through their school head teacher's permission. All students in this research were in full-time education and represent a wide cross section of schools from throughout the UK. All questionnaires were completed in a classroom setting with adult supervision.

Measures
Motivations toward volunteering were assessed using the Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI), (Clary et al., 1998). This inventory assesses each of six functions (or motivations) potentially served by volunteering (Clary & Snyder, 1999). These motives are 'values' (the individual volunteers in order to act on important humanitarian values), 'understanding' (the volunteer is seeking to learn and gain experience or exercise skills), 'enhancement' (psychological development and enhancement from volunteering), 'career' (the volunteer has a goal of gaining career-related experience), 'social' (volunteering allows for social relationships) and 'protective' (volunteering is used to reduce negative feelings or address personal problems). In the current sample internal consistency assessed by Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1952) for all six subscales ranged from .73 - .79.

1 The Millennium Volunteers is nationwide initiative that aims to promote and recognise a sustained commitment by young people aged between 16 and 24 to voluntary activity which benefits the community.
Perceived leadership skills were assessed using the Leadership Skills Inventory (LSI) (Kames & Chauvin, 2000). These are 'group dynamic skills' (skills that involve serving as a group facilitator, effecting compromise and achieving consensus), 'personal skills' (which include self-confidence, sensitivity, reliability and affability), 'character building skills' (such as understanding personal feelings, humility, sensitivity to others and setting personal standards), 'planning skills' (include setting goals; being organised and flexible) and 'speech communication skills' (such as defining one's viewpoint, speaking in front of a group and offering constructive criticism). Split-half reliability was used to assess the internal consistency of these categories and all were satisfactory ranging from .74 - .82.

In addition, all participants provided personal demographic information that included age, sex, social class, ethnicity, prior volunteer experience and prior volunteer experience of parents. Questions on citizenship and personal and social values were also asked.

**Personal and social values**

In order to assess the importance of various personal and social values, a modified rank-order procedure was adapted from Serow (1991). From a list of 11 items the students were asked to choose the three most important values in their life and rank them first second and third in order of importance. Points were assigned (three, two and one respectively) and un-ranked items were assigned zero. The list of values were; creativity/self expression, family, friendship, helping other people, personal satisfaction, religion/spiritual fulfilment, social justice/equality, working for a better community/society, material comfort/wealth, pleasure/new experiences and recognition from others. The majority response of the whole sample ranked 'family', 'friendship' and 'helping other people' first second and third respectively, however, females ranked 'helping other people' as a more important personal value than males.

**Statistical analysis**

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to explore differences between males and females in the variables of motivations to volunteer, perception of leadership skills and attitudes toward citizenship. Chi square analysis examined relationships between genders on all other variables.

**Participant demographics**

Participants were 669 in total with a mean age was 16.7 years (SD = 0.81) and a range of 15 - 19 years. Males represented 55% (n = 368) of the sample. Ethnicity was predominantly white (94%) with the balance represented by Pakistani and Black Caribbean groups. Analysis of the social class of the whole sample was based on the Standard Occupational Classification (Office of National Statistics, 2000) of both parents and showed there was no difference in the mean age or age range between males and females or a difference in the distribution of social class categories by gender.

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2 This method of measuring internal consistency was used by the authors who developed the instrument and so was also employed in this study.

There was no difference between male and female participants in the amount of prior volunteer experience of either parent.

**Motivations for volunteering**
Males and females showed similar trends in their ranking of volunteer motivations (VFI). Most important to this sample of adolescents were the motives of 'understanding', 'career' and 'values'. This not only suggests a desire to learn and acquire new skills and reflects the concern these young people have regarding their future education and employment prospects, but also indicates that their altruistic awareness of helping others is high. Least important were the motives of 'social' and 'protective' suggesting that these students do not think of their volunteering as a social opportunity or to alleviate aversive feelings. Consistent with previous work (Switzer, Switzer, Stukas & Baker, 1999), ANOVA showed that females had significantly higher (p < 0.01) levels of all volunteer motivations compared with males, (see Table 1). Furthermore more females than males reported prior volunteering of some kind (defined as any volunteer activity prior to completing the questionnaire) ($\chi^2 = 10.3; df = 1; P < .001$).

**Attitudes towards civic participation**
Several questions were presented to the students that dealt with attitudes toward civic participation such as volunteering. The majority response to the question, what is the biggest attraction to volunteering was; "I want to get experience", "learn skills" and "help job prospects". There was no difference between males and females in the frequency of this response. Although not significant, more females than males chose 'working in the community' as their biggest attraction.
Attitudes toward citizenship
Several statements reflecting attitudes toward citizenship were presented to the students. Females were significantly (p< 0.05) stronger in agreement with all statements regarding knowledge of and concern for social issues and in taking an active role in the community. Males and females did not differ in their level of agreement to statements regarding their responsibility to set a good example to others in their school or workplace or in their understanding of what it takes to be a good citizen.

Perceptions of leadership skills
The trends in the ranking of leadership skills were similar for males and females.

The highest ranked was 'personal skills' (self confidence, sensitivity to others) followed by 'group dynamic skills' (effecting compromise, group facilitating) and 'character building skills' (understanding personal feelings and sensitivity to others). The lowest ranked were 'planning skills' (organisation, goal setting) and 'speech communication skills' (speaking in front of others, offering constructive criticism). Females had higher perceptions of the following skills: 'group dynamics' (F (1,631) = 28.3; p<0.01), 'personal' (F (1,643) = 24.6; p<0.01), 'speech' (F (1,641) = 4.45; p<0.05) and 'character building' (F (1,644) = 30.4; p<0.01) as compared to males. This concurs with previous work in this area (Karnes & Dilio, 1989, 1990).
In summary the results have demonstrated clear gender differences in several variables associated with citizenship qualities. In particular females are higher in levels of motivation toward volunteering, report a better understanding of and concern for social issues, feel stronger about young people taking an active role in helping to improve their communities, perceive themselves higher in most leadership skills and rank 'helping others' as more important life values than males.

**Discussion**

This study examined several important qualities related to good citizenship in adolescent students and asked whether these differ for males and females. The results from this sample of adolescents clearly indicate gender differences in most of these citizenship qualities. Particular emphasis was placed on behaviours associated with volunteerism because it was established that adolescent perceptions of what citizenship means to them focussed strongly on volunteering as a means of civic participation and a criteria for good citizenship (Lister et al., 2003). This study found that females were higher in all levels of volunteer motivations as compared with males. Likewise, females had stronger attitudes towards the importance of citizenship. For example they felt stronger about taking an active role in their communities and report a better understanding of and interest in social issues. Females also ranked helping others as a more important personal value than males.

Broadly speaking these results are consistent with a wide body of research on gender and helping or pro-social behaviours (Karniol, Grosz & Schorr, 2003) and extends to classic work by Gilligan (1982, Gilligan & Wiggins, 1988) on the analysis of men and women's morality and the 'ethic of justice' versus the 'ethic of care'. Briefly these divergent ethical orientations contend that girls and boys experience different socialisation processes, such that girls develop an ethic that promotes caring and empathic concern for others that might manifest itself in volunteer work and concern for the community and other people. On the other hand boys are socialised into an ethic of justice that is concerned with righting the situation rather than concern for the welfare of those suffering from the situation. The scope of this paper does not allow sufficient elaboration on Gilligan's theory of socialisation to morality but it is relevant to this research because it is strongly related to gender (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). These observed gender differences in relation to helping and pro-social behaviours are also related to our results on personal values and lend further support to the different way adolescent males and females view what is important to them.

A study by Serow (1991) with adolescent students showed that motives for volunteering were associated with personal and social values and was the reason for its inclusion in this study. Serow found that a person's values can be thought of as 'enduring beliefs' and can act as guides to behaviours in certain situations. In other words, an individual's motives, which help direct his or her behaviours for a particular action or deed would seem to be consistent with their values (Serow, 1991). This notion might be implied through the results of our study. Females were higher in their levels of motivation for
volunteering and had a greater interest and concern for their community which is consistent with the higher importance they placed on 'helping others'. If values do reflect a person's beliefs and ultimately their behaviours, then we might assume that females in the present study who had higher motivations to volunteer and a greater concern for their communities were predisposed to higher levels of behaviours that reflect good citizenship.

Another area where gender differences manifested themselves was in perceptions of leadership skills. Female students had higher perceptions of most leadership skills as compared to males. The literature varies regarding gender and leadership and some studies clearly show a difference between males and females in leadership roles that are evident in all areas of the workforce and society, while others show there are few differences between male and female leaders (see review by Northouse, 2001).

The data collected for this study do not examine leadership style but is more to do with leadership potential or emergence that is more relevant when talking about adolescents. This research was concerned with qualities that may contribute toward good citizenship and certainly good leadership skills are conducive to taking on leadership roles. An individual competent in leadership skills may be more likely to portray leadership behaviours and take on leadership roles. These roles could contribute to good citizenship through using those skills in the community. In this respect, our data are consistent with social role theory (Eagly, 1987) that assumes sex differences in social behaviour are in part caused because people tend to behave in a manner consistent with their gender role. Therefore men are more likely to portray agentic qualities such as controlling and task oriented behaviours toward leadership whereas women display socially facilitative leadership behaviours such as sensitivity, understanding and effecting compromise. This might be related to our results where females perceived themselves higher in these types of leadership skills. such as group dynamic skills (serving as a group facilitator, effecting compromise and achieving consensus), personal skills (self-confidence, sensitivity, reliability and affability), character building skills (understanding personal feelings, humility, sensitivity to others) and communication skills (defining one's viewpoint, speaking in front of a group and offering constructive criticism).

Another point relevant to this sample and our results is that female adolescents are more likely to develop and exhibit leadership behaviours and skills in greater variety and depth than males (Zacharatos & Barling, 2000) as a means to overcome barriers and meet challenges toward their leadership potential (van Linden & Fertman, 1998).

If we relate this to the observed 'gender gap' evident in school attainment levels several parallels can be drawn. First we must put aside the established relationship of social advantage and school attainment (Tinklin, 2003) in regards to our data because the demographics of our sample comprise a relatively homogenous group of students from primarily middle class socio-economic backgrounds. However, even when social background, family composition, ethnicity and school are taken into account, Tinklin found that girls still out perform boys. Explanations for this gender difference focus on
the different attitudes that females have towards school work, being more conscientious, respectful and prepared (Warington, Younger & Williams, 2000) as well as the influence of the peer cultures experienced by girls. Tinklin (2003) also found that girls value academic success among their peers, while doing well at school for boys could jeopardise their peer standing and suggests that peer pressures can inhibit boys towards achieving at school and do not allow them to do well.

Finally any explanation for the gender differences seen in this study needs to consider the wider cultural changes that are underway in our society. Over the past three decades women's position in society has increasingly become more independent with domestic roles and responsibilities being overtaken by career aspirations and a steady rise in representation throughout the workforce. Furthermore young people worldwide are in strong agreement of equal opportunities and gender equity with the media targeting in particular achievements of females excelling in the labour market, sports or business - areas that were previously a male domain.

Limitations of this study include the fact that the sample of participants is a relatively homogenous group of students of middle class background. However the sample comprised a large cross section of the schools from across the UK and therefore may be representative of full-time students in many areas. Other limitations are that other important variables such as religiosity (Penner, 2002), more detail on family involvement in civic functions such as voluntary work and educational level of parents should have also been investigated (Print & Coleman, 2003). These variables have been shown to be highly influential to adolescent's civic involvement.

This study provides support for gender differences in qualities associated with good citizenship in adolescents. Many of the results presented are consistent with and can be related to those already evident in the schools in terms of attainment levels that alone may be of interest to educators. They are also consistent with published work on gender differences in pro-social behaviours such as helping, civic participation, volunteering and life values. Understanding that adolescent girls and boys differ in their perceptions of citizenship may assist educators and the Government to tailor volunteer programmes and citizenship education that cater to and encourage boys in particular to take an interest in civic participation and strive toward becoming good citizens.

Selected References
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