

GRITTY CITIZENS?

Exploring the Logic and Limits of Resilience in Social Policy during times of Socio-Material Insecurity

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The Rise of Resilience

- Broadly defined, resilience concerns how and whether a unit of analysis responds to and overcomes unanticipated setbacks, shocks or adversity (Hickman, 2017)
- Increasing interest in the productive potential of resilience within domestic and international public policy
- Reflects institutional limits to respond to societal challenges in a manner that 'neo-austerity' permits (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018)

Who needs evidence anyway?

- Partial and problematic evidence base on role of resilience in shaping outcomes (Rimfeld *et al.*, 2016; Bull and Allen, 2018)
- Despite this, growing interest in encouraging citizens to acquire acquire 'the resilience and resources to lift themselves out of poverty' (Duncan Smith, 2012: n.p.)



Rationale and Questions

- Plenty of attention has been given to how resilience is and could be fostered through social policy (e.g. Chandler, 2014)
- **But** much less attention on how resilience is **experienced, negotiated and undermined** through social policy design and intervention.

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1. How is the concept of resilience conceived, deployed and pursued in ways that seek to tackle socio-material insecurity in UK social policy?
2. To what extent do strategies that seek to foster active citizenship through greater degrees of welfare conditionality and paternalism engender the capacity for resilience?

From 'Active' to 'Gritty' Citizenship?

- 1997-2010 saw a range of reforms intended to redesign the welfare state into an 'enabling' one.
 - Encouraging and sometimes compelling citizens to assume personal responsibility through active participation in labour market and broader civil society (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009; Prideaux, 2010; Wright, 2012).
- New Labour sought to (re-) equip citizens with the skills, competencies and orientations deemed necessary to engage with the shifting uncertainties and opportunities of socio-economic life.

The Third Way and Risk

Within Third Way approach, the idealised citizen was someone able to:

‘translate potential threats into rewarding challenges, someone who is able to turn entropy into a consistent flow of experience. The autotelic self does not seek to neutralise risk or to suppose that ‘someone else will take care of the problem’, risk is confronted as the active challenge which generates self-actualization’ (Giddens, 1994: 192).

Contradicting Resilience

Attempts to foreground individual agency are detached from ‘the means by which benefit recipients could attain the prerequisite “ontological security”, “inner confidence” and “self respect” that might allow such self-assured engagement with life’s challenges’ (Wright, 2016: 237).

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1. Uncertainty is interchangeably presented as both a risk and opportunity for targets of social policy intervention
2. Resilience is understood as a necessary resource and disposition to adapt to or overcome socio-material insecurity

However, resilience requires some degree of financial and ontological security

Fostering Resilience?

- ‘Agency’ at centre of Cameron’s plan to ‘transform the life chances of the poorest’ by ‘developing character and resilience’ (2016).
 - Aim to tackle problems argued to be associated with disadvantage: urban disorder, social ‘irresponsibility’ and poor motivation (DWP, 2010; 2012; Duncan Smith, 2014; 2015).
 - Policy presents these as **both cause and effect**.
- Pushed focus on to the **individual**:
 - Attention on the ‘importance of building personal qualities such as resilience and application’ in helping people to lift themselves out of poverty and avoid ‘risky behaviour’ (DCLG, 2013: 19).

Three shifts that suggest something distinctive...

1. Structural conditions that negatively affect citizens' outcomes, opportunities and well-being are presented as a **permanent fixture of UK social policy**

... 'creating stronger and more resilient communities' and supporting people to help themselves 'get back on their feet' (Cabinet Office, 2015; Jones, 2015)

2. Government's main duty is to enhance the psychological competency and capability of 'vulnerable' citizens to **tolerate immovable conditions.**

... equip 'vulnerable' people with the psychological capacity 'to work hard and respond resiliently to failure and adversity' (Cameron, 2016)

3. **Punitive and paternalistic** forms of welfare conditionality implemented and presented as **most effective way to motivate low-income groups** to find paid employment and **lift themselves** out of poverty.

*... active citizenship alongside resilience in the contemporary context is characterised much more by welfare **withdrawal** as opposed to **re-visioning** for low-income citizens*

The Ideal 'Gritty Citizen'

- Equipped with necessary attributes, resilience and 'mental toughness' to safeguard their own well being and security during endemic conditions of insecurity.
- No longer enough to work hard, pay taxes and abide by the law.
- Citizens must exhibit and deploy 'the **secret** ingredients for a good life character, delayed gratification, grit, resilience' to take charge of their own lives (Cameron, 2016).
- Key strategy for 'helping people get on' > is also understood and pursued as a necessary expectation that citizens thrive in and through a life of socio-material insecurity.

the
struggle
you're in
today
is developing the
strength
you need for
tomorrow

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**ACHIEVEMENTS
DON'T HAPPEN BY
THEMSELVES...
IT'S CALLED GRIT**

- RISA RIEPMA -

Key features of both studies

	Study 1 (15 interviews)	Study 2 (26 interviews)
	2013-2014	2015-2016
Research Sites	Leeds	East London, Pembrokeshire, Cornwall
Employment Status	All unemployed: for between 2 weeks and 19 years	The majority of participants were in some form of employment (FT, PT, casual/zero hours, infrequent/unstable). A small number were long term unemployed.
IMD status	All research participants lived in the top 30% of most deprived Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).	All participants in top 50% most deprived LSOAs (Cornwall sites in top 40% of IMD; Pembrokeshire sites in top 50% of IMD, London site in top 10% of IMD).
Income	All below poverty line	Self-identified as suffering hardship through debt, insecure (or no) employment and/or low-income.
Age	Between 24 and 66 years old	Between 18 and retirement age.
BAME	Almost 50% were Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)	BAME participants concentrated in East London
Gender	Two thirds were female	Just below two thirds were female
Gatekeepers	Principally leafleted but accessed a small number of participants through gatekeepers.	Principally accessed through gatekeeper organisations such as advice charities, foodbanks, etc. Key informant interviews were undertaken with some gatekeepers.

Building Resilience to What?

I did a lot of courses and I got lots of bits of paper but it was only when I left [employment agency] and went back to the Job Centre, by which time the regime was a lot tougher and within a week of going back there they sanctioned me [...]
I'd been used to with [employment agency] had been paper based and then we went onto the computer and for some reason I missed out of one job or something and it was a four week [sanction]. After that, I mean you feel under pressure continually, you feel you can't say anything...
(Barry, S2)

Gritty Citizenship: Resilience, Welfare and Insecurity

It comes sometimes, where I might have to borrow something off a friend, off my mum, you know, till when I get paid. And then, when I do get paid, I'm handing it back out to my mum. Then I'm left with nothing again... (Beth, S1)

She's [daughter] really struggling at the moment.... Not in a good way at all... So I been trying to help her out and that with some money. But it's hard cos I aint got much meself (Dave, S1)

Resilience as a way of being?

You know, getting through every day is enough for me at the moment do you know what I mean. At the moment in my life I don't feel like I have much left to give. (Ashley, S1)

I don't always eat breakfast and I sort of like budget that way, I kind of might have something kind of that's gonna fill me up a bit by lunch, night-time, sometimes I survive on say one meal a day rather than three meals a day. (Steve, S2)

Conclusion

The relational nature of social disadvantage serves to highlight contested focus of resilience.

The insecurity engendered through welfare reforms and conditionality undermined individual and collective resilience.

Resilience operates 'as a way of being' for those confronted with socio-material insecurity but in contorted ways that reflect recent restrictions on the resources, agency and autonomy of low-income citizens.

532 Frenchmen St 10PM

Stop calling me

RESILIENT

Because every time you say,
"Oh, they're resilient,"
that means you can
do something else to me.

I am not resilient.

Tracie L. Washington - Louisiana Justice Institute

Fetishizing struggle

George Osborne, Conservative Party Conference 2012:

- ‘Where is the fairness we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next-door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits’
- ‘Strivers’
- ‘Hard-working families’
- ‘Struggling to make ends meet’

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More Recent Trends (2010+)...

- Strategic importance for:
 - **Housing/homelessness** (Smith, 2010; Scott and Gkartzios, 2014)
 - **Youth transitions and employability** (DeLuca *et al.*, 2010; Duckworth and Schoon, 2012)
 - **Fuel poverty** (Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015)
 - **Area deprivation** (Batty and Cole, 2010)
 - **Health and disability** (DWP, 2016)
 - **Communities** (Cabinet Office, 2015; Jones, 2015; Marsen, 2017)
 - **Ageing** (Resnick *et al.*, 2010).
 - And, of course, **poverty, welfare dependency, and worklessness** (e.g. DfE, 2012; Welsh Government, 2015).

