Being in place: Citizenship in long-term mental healthcare

Ootes, S.T.C.

Citation for published version (APA):
Abstract

One of the goals of mental healthcare is to support long-term clients in the activities of daily life. At the same time, striving for clients’ citizenship is one of mental healthcare’s principal policy objectives. In this article we study whether we can make big policy objectives and activities of daily life merge into a concept of ‘everyday citizenship’. More specifically, we ask how mental health clients can enact citizenship by going shopping. By analyzing ethnographic material on how clients of mental health care shop and literature on citizenship and shopping, we identify three ways in which citizenship is indeed enacted by going shopping. Firstly, we discuss the prevailing ideal of independent citizenship that for its accomplishment in practice proves to depend on the help of other citizens. We call this the enactment of in/dependent citizenship. Secondly, we identify bonding citizenship, which is enacted when, by going shopping, close ties between family members or friends are cultivated. Thirdly, some clients enacted bridging citizenship by making contact with relative strangers while shopping. Based on this study we develop new ways of thinking about citizenship, which may be useful to long-term mental healthcare professionals.
4.1 Introduction

One of the goals of long-term mental healthcare is to support clients in the activities of their daily lives. Liberman, for instance, advocates training clients in practical skills like those of personal hygiene, recreational activities and shopping in order to improve their lives (Liberman et al. 1986, Liberman and Corrigan 1993). At the same time, mental healthcare advocates political ideals such as citizenship, rights, empowerment, and democracy (Van Houten and Jacobs 2005, Mezzina et al. 2006, Sayce 2000, Shardlow and Barnes 1997, Ware et al. 2007). Taken together, everyday activities and abstract political ideals merge into a concept that we propose to call “everyday citizenship”. While more established concepts of citizenship involve the study of exemplary civic practices such as doing volunteer work, visiting internet forums, or joining demonstrations (e.g. Pattie et al. 2004, Stoker 2006), our notion of everyday citizenship is constituted by people’s everyday activities. In this sense, “everyday citizenship” corresponds to concepts used by other authors, such as “citizenship-as-practice” by Lawy and Biesta (2006) and “lived citizenship” by Lister (2007).

But how can we correlate everyday activities with civic ideals? For some activities it is more easily done than for others. Activities in which the correlation is apparent are considered to be important ideals in mental healthcare. Think, for instance, of the emphasis mental healthcare places on work rehabilitation (Bennett 1970, Leff and Warner 2006, Van Weeghel 1995) and social integration (Sayce 2000, Ware et al. 2007). Working readily correlates with civic ideals such as independence and productivity, while social integration correlates with civic ideals such as community and relationality. Both work rehabilitation and social integration thus correlate with citizenship and both are realized through activities of daily life. The correlation between citizenship and activities such as tending to personal hygiene, recreational activities and going shopping, however, is not so easily shown.

A study by Jeannette Pols investigates what civic ideals are enacted when long-term mental health care professionals help clients tend to personal hygiene (2006). In her analysis of everyday personal washing practices, she describes how washing correlates with civic ideals such as privacy, independence, self-actualization and relationality. The correlation between activities of daily life and citizenship is studied
within an institutional setting. She asks what conceptions of the community are relevant for the different washing practices she distinguishes. This research further develops her work within the context of a community setting. In this study we witnessed clients engaged in numerous activities in the community, like walking in the park, taking public transport and shopping. Of these activities we selected the case of shopping for intense study, because this case was the most promising example of where a correlation might be found between an everyday activity and citizenship. In this article we therefore ask: how can we correlate the everyday activity of shopping with the citizenship of long-term mental health clients? We provide insight into how big ideals correlate with everyday practices in the community and show how this produces new ways of thinking about citizenship.

4.2 Theoretical Framework

We were inspired to study the relationship between citizenship and shopping practices by the work of other authors, especially those employing actor-network theory (ANT) (Law and Hassard 1999). Actor-network theorists maintain that concrete practices are not merely a reflection or application of theories, but have their own dynamics in which entities can have multiple meanings or “enactments”. Hence ANT urges researchers not to focus on concepts or ideals, but on the way in which concepts and ideals are “performed” or “enacted” in daily practice (Latour 1987, Mol 2002). The multiple enactments that exist often have distinct political consequences. Taking a lead from ANT, we therefore followed actors – mental health clients – in field to see how they enacted citizenship, taking into consideration that these enactments may be multiple.

We benefitted from the work of Michel Callon, who applies ANT to economic markets (Barry and Slater 2002, Callon 1999, Callon 2005). His analyses explain how economic and social framings of the world come together in enactments of economic transactions. These framings also exist for the practice of shopping: while shopping can be studied in the context of economic framings, sociological descriptions of shopping as a practice exist, too (e.g. Miller 1998). Callon maintains that neither economic theories
relying on calculative actors, nor social theories explicating how a web of relational ties propels these actors, adequately describe what goes on during an economic transaction. More importantly, neither of these framings consider the political consequences of economic transactions. In our research we analyze the economic and social framings of shopping practices and in analogy with Callon’s work, we describe and study how these framings are political: we show how they enact different civic ideals. While perhaps not doing justice to Callon’s whole argument, his work prompts us to study the everyday shopping activities of mental health clients for their political consequences.

Finally, we also benefitted from Bang and Sørensen’s hallmark study of “the everyday maker” (1999). The “everyday maker”, they say, is a newly emerging political identity that defies conventional conceptions of civic engagement. It is a citizen who is engaged with the community on his own terms, outside of the formal structures of government bodies or local organizations. Thanks to Bang and Sørensen’s article we were also open to finding unconventional enactments of citizenship; ways of enacting citizenship that do not relate to an established body of citizenship literature. Part of our analysis, then, focuses on an organization of actors, which is not traditionally described in terms of citizenship, but in which civic ideals are enacted nonetheless.

4.3 Method & Setting

The ethnographic material underlying our arguments was gathered as part of a broader study into the nature of ‘relational citizenship’ (Pols 2006). For this study, two consecutive rounds of fieldwork of two and three months respectively were conducted at a mental health centre in the south of the Netherlands. Granted permission for on-site participant-observation in a selected range of settings, the first author studied the various social settings in which clients live. Although all the material was studied, in this paper we only give examples of field note material written down in the rehabilitation home. At this semi-independent home, twelve clients are trained in living on their own in a homely setting over periods ranging from several months to years. Performing participant-observations enabled the fieldworker to have many informal conversations about the research topic with the actors involved. To gain
insight into the perspectives of participants and as a form of triangulation, key informants (care professionals, clients and members of clients' social networks) were also subjected to in-depth interviews. This resulted in 32 audio-taped, semi-structured interviews in Dutch. All participants gave informed consent for (recording) the interviews.

4.3.1 Analysis

Initial analysis of all the ethnographic fieldwork material showed shopping to be a recurrent phenomenon in which clients interacted with other citizens. It was therefore chosen as a focus for studying (relational) citizenship. Based on this initial analysis and in an iterative process, we drafted a set of keywords with which to retrieve fragments of field notes and interviews related to the topic shopping. The following keywords emerged: ‘to buy’ (and verb conjugations), ‘purchase’, ‘shop’, ‘to shop’ (and verb conjugations), ‘customer’, ‘commercial/ad’. Computer-assisted data retrieval using these key words (MaxQDA 2001) enabled us to obtain all the relevant material from the fieldwork material.

We subsequently analysed these coded fragments by comparing them to key themes in literature on citizenship, shopping and consumption. Our analysis was neither purely inductive, nor purely deductive, but instead we traversed the hermeneutic cycle. We kept going back and forth between the literature and fieldwork material and ultimately established a conceptual scheme in which to index our coded material, enabling us to identify three types of answer to our research question: in/dependent citizenship, bonding citizenship and bridging citizenship. These three enactments exhausted the ethnographic material for shopping activities relating to citizenship.

We describe the three enactments of citizenship below by means of three secondary research questions: what characteristic elements are essential to clients’ shopping, how are interactions between citizens ordered and what specific civic ideals are enacted? Afterwards, we compare the three enactments by discussing how citizens may benefit from enacting them and what is required of the citizens enacting them. We will also discuss how our analysis affects ways of thinking about citizenship.
4.4 Grocery Shopping: In/dependent Citizenship

A well-established theoretical model of citizenship, which also serves as an objective in mental health care, is independent citizenship. We use a fieldwork example to discuss this model. In the example, a client explicitly professes to act as an instructor of shopping to a new caregiver: he will show others how to shop independently. However, as we shall see, it is not at all evident that this client shops independently himself.

Susan – an intern – is new at the rehabilitation home I [an ethnographer] am studying. Pete, a client, agrees to show her around a bit by taking Susan and me grocery shopping. At the home, we are asked to take the trolleys with recyclable waste with us. At the recycling point next to the supermarket, Pete shows us how the recycle is done. There are gloves in the trolley, which can be put on in order to keep our clothes clean, but Pete does without and quickly throws the milk cartons here, tins there and glass in yet another recycling container. He gets the sleeves of his jacket dirty, but does not seem to be bothered by that. Susan and I, on the other hand, are struggling to keep our clothes clean and because of that do not make much progress with the enormous heap of rubbish. After some time, Pete has had enough and starts randomly to throw stuff in the three containers.

On to the supermarket: we park our shopping trolleys at the “trolley-park” where I’ve seen people from the rehabilitation home park them before. Pete shows Susan where to put hers. Then into the shop. We have our shopping list: sugar, milk, chocolate, cheese… I would have expected Pete – who comes here regularly – to know where everything is, but if he does, he doesn’t show it. Looking for but not finding applesauce, Pete opts for apple compote. “That’ll do as well,” he says; like recycling, shopping seems quickly to bore Pete. When done, Susan and I put everything on the conveyor belt. At the counter, Pete makes his favourite joke: “This lady is paying for everything”, he says with a broad grin, while at the same time nudging me forward. Luckily, I picked up the rehabilitation-home purse before we left.
On our way out, Pete starts to take his role of instructor very seriously again. He even tells me how to get my 50 cents back from the shopping cart. On the way back home, Pete shows us the way through the city streets. But because Pete is walking a bit criss-cross, cutting corners and crossing streets without minding us with the trolleys, Susan’s trolley gets stuck as she pushes it off a pavement. Luckily, she manages to pull it free again.

The type of shopping Pete advocates is a means to an end: it is purposive. According to Pete, shopping is a task to be fulfilled and the task is to get the groceries needed, in this case for the home. It consists of a number of recognizable elements with which Pete is familiar and he shows the intern and the ethnographer recycling, parking the trolley, getting the products on the shopping list, paying for them and finding the way back home. Also, Pete “teaches” the ethnographer how to get her 50 cents back from the shopping cart. This element of Pete’s instructions exemplifies Daniel Miller’s ethnographic description of shopping: in certain task-oriented types of shopping thrift is a key element (1998). In reclaiming the 50 cents, Pete advocates thrifty shopping.

If the shopping Pete advocates constitutes citizenship, then in what way are interactions between citizens ordered by his type of shopping? This example shows elements of both dependence and independence that resonate with discussions of dependence and independence in the literature. We shall first discuss Pete’s independence. Given the way Pete instructs going shopping, interaction with others is not strictly necessary: he could have ordered online, as other clients sometimes do, and that would have fulfilled the same purposes. Pete is also teaching others to shop independently. Independent shoppers are independent citizens: calculating individuals bearing certain rights and preferences (see for instance: Van Gusteren 1998). Enacting independent citizenship through shopping consists of successfully procuring goods in the public space of the (super-) market. Others inherently become distant others in this civic ideal, since direct interaction about the exchange of products is either relegated to the market, or to the government that should safeguard the conditions under which citizens can shop. The same is true of buyers of fair-trade or bioorganic products who are described in the literature as ‘citizen-consumers’ (Johnston 2008, Jubas 2007, Mol
2009): citizen-consumers create better worlds for distant others, like Pete does when he recycles.

Yet Pete’s independence relies on (at least) two ways in which Pete’s shopping is actually dependent on others. Firstly, Michel Callon reminds us that economic transactions never occur in a social vacuum (Callon 1999, Callon and Muniesa 2005). In a specific framing of products, producers and consumers, those active in the production chain can become so distant that they seem almost non-existent, resulting in the perception of independence. Only when the ordinary chain between producers, products and consumers breaks down – if the dairy sector should go on strike, for example – do these distant others suddenly pop back into the fore: no milk for Pete. Secondly, and contrary to his own instructions, Pete is dependent on more proximate others to make his shopping trip a success. To some extent, others help him – by taking care of payment, for instance. When he is not helped, things go wrong: he buys the wrong products, he gets bored with recycling and he does not wait for those pulling the trolleys with groceries on the way home. If the task was to get the groceries, Pete certainly did not fulfil it alone. Taken together, these two kinds of dependency resonate with criticisms voiced by feminist scholars who have debated that one would be hard pressed to think of a situation in which complete independence could be achieved at all: each of us is continually dependent on care from (proximate and distant) others (Sevenhuijsen 1996, Tronto 1993). Thus, although the ideal of independence is ingrained in a wide range of political theory, in actual practices like the one described here it would appear that independence implies dependence. We therefore call this blend between the political ideal and empirical reality in/dependent citizenship.

4.5 Shopping with Friends: Bonding Citizenship

Our second example of shopping focuses on maintaining relations with friends, or family. The following field note shows this in a shopping trip undertaken by a different resident of the rehabilitation home.
Lately, David, a client, has fallen back into his habit of drinking. Drunk, or hung-over though David may be, today he takes the initiative to go and buy the bacon that is required for supper from the supermarket, even though Mary – the household help who is cooking tonight – has offered to go and get it herself. “Rich, do you feel like coming to the supermarket with me? It’ll be fun to go together.” David asks one of the care professionals at the home. When I put myself forward for the outing, it’s all “the more the merrier”. Paul, another client, who has recently been reluctant to do anything much about dinner at all, is even coming along. Since David has staged this trip as a social outing, in the supermarket, caregiver Rich makes a big point of the fact that neither men need worry about the groceries that have to be bought: he will fix all that. He stresses that the shopping list is in fact quite a distraction from what this trip to the supermarket is all about. “No, this is a social outing,” he says merrily, and the shopping list isn’t really part of that.

In this example, shopping is not – at it was for Pete – simply a task that must be fulfilled. In fact, there are no pressing reasons for going shopping at all, since household help Mary is happy to go shopping herself. This fact is in line with the observation that while shopping, any task-oriented aspects, such as actually buying the bacon or other items on the shopping list, are obscured. But even though this type of shopping is not task-oriented, it is still purposive. Shopping is a means to an end, only the end is different. Having fun is continually highlighted during this shopping trip, thus the purpose of this type of shopping appears to be to have fun. What makes shopping fun is doing it together: the more the merrier. David, Rich, and Paul understand shopping as a pleasurable social activity to undertake at their leisure.

In what way are interactions between citizens ordered in this field note? While the relative unimportance of buying groceries may have rendered the trip to the supermarket meaningless, the shoppers have a different way of assigning purpose to the

---

6 In the actual quote the Dutch word ‘gezellig’ was used, which is characteristic of the Dutch language and not easy to translate. Its meaning is close to the German ‘gesellig’, although the Dutch ‘gezellig’ is more generally applied. ‘Gezellig’ denotes an informal, easy and relaxed way of being together with others.
outing. They continually underscore the social nature of the outing explicitly. As such, they work on the ties between themselves: they make them stronger – they are bonding. In his ethnography on grocery shopping, Daniel Miller observed treats being bought for loved ones and couples attuning to each other’s habits and preferences by going shopping together (1998). With his description, he counters the image of shopping as a practice in which individualism is expressed (by buying particular products instead of others) with an image of shopping as a practice in which relationships of care and concern are cultivated (Miller 1998: 35). This is also how we understand the way in which David, Rich, and Paul shop. In their own right, they form part of a household together⁹: the bonds between the household members are strengthened by going shopping together. In the process of going to the supermarket and buying bacon, the relationship between the men is cultivated.

What civic ideals are enacted in this shopping trip? In shopping, David, Rich and Paul enact a type of citizenship that understands the citizen as a person defined by his social relationships with others. They participate in the community by relating to each other. In her analysis of washing practices in mental healthcare, Jeannette Pols describes friendships and personal relationships as ways of practicing citizenship, too (2006). Indeed, the idea of social connectivity as a public good is deep-seated in social and political theory. Theorists from John Dewey to Robert Putnam argue that local, face-to-face associations are important seedbeds of civic participation and democracy (Dewey 1927, Putnam 2000). A rehabilitation home, with its inhabitants and professionals, associated families and the various other people involved, may be considered to be such an association. A rehabilitation home is a relatively closed social unit with its own system of values and ways of doing things: a group of people with strong social ties (Granovetter 1973). The example shows that going shopping together

⁹ To call Rich, the caregiver, part of the household amounts to a specific understanding of the role of the caregiver. Usually, relationships between caregivers and clients are restricted by formal codes of conduct, in which professionalism is often understood as remaining detached from clients. Our caregiver Rich appears not to be opposed to more personal relationships with his clients. We elaborate on the differences in professional styles of relating to clients and the consequences thereof for the citizenship of both client and professional in chapter three.
affirms the relationships within this association. By going shopping together these people enact what might be called bonding citizenship.

4.6 Shopping in the City: Bridging Citizenship

In our third example of shopping, shopping is performed as a pastime. The following field note describes how another resident of the rehabilitation home performs this type of shopping.

I have been asked by the overburdened staff at the rehabilitation home to go into town with Jason, a client, to help him run some errands. Jason wants to buy a file folder at the big department store in town. At the store, we slowly make our way to the file folder section, while Jason checks out the stuff we encounter along the way. He saunters around near the suitcases before spotting the stationary section in the far corner of the basement level. He fiddles about for a bit with paper and plastic folders, until I finally point out a rack nearby: “Look: ring binders!”

At this rack, he picks up one black ring binder after the other and checks out the insides: 23 rings, 4 rings, et cetera. Sometimes he picks up a couple of binders that have been folded into each other: “These aren’t right,” he says. I point to the 2-ring ring binders. He opens a couple of these, too. Eventually, he says: “I’ll take a 4-ring and a 2-ring ring binder”. It’s taking so long that I’m getting a bit impatient. Nevertheless, I remind Jason of the different colours they sell: I pick up a silver-coloured binder and show it to him. Jason scrutinizes it before deciding to take it. The black ring binders are casually dropped into a nearby rack.

When we’re finally queuing with our stuff, I notice that the price tag is missing from the ring binder. There is a long queue and the cashier is taking his time, so I think I have enough time to run back and quickly change the binder for one that is priced. When I get back to the counter, Jason is chatting with the slow, aged cashier, as he checks-out his stuff. They are speaking in dialect. I
smile at the cashier, hoping he gets a move on, but the man just keeps on talking. Since I don’t speak the dialect, I don’t understand a word and am relieved that Jason is happy to do all the talking. I think they are talking about common interests; it all sounds so cordial. They are still chatting when Jason and I are already moving towards the escalators: the cashier and Jason just keep on shouting one-liners at each other, having a jolly time. When the cashier has cracked the last joke and we’re half way up the escalator, I ask Jason in a whisper: “Did you know that guy?” “No,” Jason says, “this is just what folks are like down here.”

Like the previous two, this field note appears to be about tasks to be fulfilled and social activity. But contrary to the first field note example, the shopping list Jason starts out with turns out to be more of a provisional guideline, rather than an actual goal. Nor does working on existing relationships seem to be Jason’s reason for going shopping, as was the main purpose of going shopping in the second example. What stands out in this field note is that every act is spun out: Jason is slow in choosing the right binder and he is slow in paying and leaving again. A light-hearted idleness is the main element of his way of shopping. In this type of shopping, shopping is not purposive, shopping is a purpose in itself (cf. Lehtonen 1999). Jason has a lot of time on his hands and one of his ways of filling time is by going shopping.

In what way are interactions between citizens ordered in this field note? First of all, while remaining cordial, the ethnographer keeps her distance as Jason shops. The contact between the ethnographer and Jason is limited to where she can help Jason in his shopping and where he can help her with her ethnography by explaining things to her. The other social contact Jason has is in an encounter he did not plan, with someone he does not know, but in which small talk leads to a lot of fun. Neither the contact with the ethnographer, nor the contact with the cashier is affirmed as a relationship during the shopping trip: all three may or may not meet again and whether they do is not important. In effect, this type of shopping creates ties, but the ties are weak (Granovetter 1973). This type of encounter between Jason and the cashier echoes Ruth Soenen’s sociological description of city life, in which she underscores the importance of small talk for positive encounters between strangers in public spaces, such as shops
(2003). She discusses how contingency is a key element in the contact between city-dwellers and explains how small talk helps citizens deal with this contingency and with differences between them and others. Indeed, talking – but in that case specifically reflective, self-critical talking – has also been reported to tie people to each other elsewhere and has been shown to have the ability to bridge (social) differences between people (Lichterman 2005).

What civic ideals resonate in these interactions? Like bonding citizens, in this field note Jason enacts citizenship by relating to other people. However, the weak ties that exist between him and the other citizens he meets lead to a particular way of framing a community. Political scientist Robert Putnam describes how up until the mid 1960s, a community consisted of people strongly tied to each other, with formalized modes of interaction, in which norms of reciprocity and trust were central (2000). From then on, he maintains, strong group ties have been increasingly diluted and formalized modes of interaction have become less prevalent. However, where Putnam witnesses the collapse of community life, critics deem community life to be changing rather than collapsing. The weak ties that exist between Jason and his contacts lead to a different conception of a community from the one Putnam describes: they produce a ‘community-lite’ (Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2004) consisting of ‘loose connections’ (Wuthnow 1998). Jason helps create a community by making contact with strangers in public space by means of small talk. Small talk, therefore, may be a relevant civic activity (cf. Shotter 1993). Since Jason bridges social distance through small talk with a weak social tie, we call this enactment of citizenship bridging citizenship.

4.7 Citizens & Societies

In the introduction we coined the concept of ‘everyday citizenship’ and asked whether citizenship can indeed be enacted through the activities of daily life. We studied this question by focusing on how long-term mental health clients performed one such everyday activity: shopping. By analyzing ethnographic material we have found three options for enacting citizenship through shopping: in/dependent citizenship, bonding citizenship and bridging citizenship. In this section we compare these types of
citizenship by looking at how citizens may benefit from enacting these types of citizenship and what these types require from the citizens enacting them.

The first type of citizenship, *independent citizenship*, proved to be complicated, since it describes what goes on when we confront a reputed civic ideal – independence – with actual practice. In practice, framings of independence turn out to depend on both distant and proximate others. In/dependent citizens can be perceived as independent only by negating the considerable efforts invested by other people (Sevenhuijsen 1996, Tronto 1993). In care contexts, the ideal of independence is criticized for being all the more inappropriate, since the people cared for so clearly receive this care in the context of a care relationship (Mol 2008). And this is true in general, too: the ideal of independence relies on the continual willingness of both the people performing ‘subservient’ work and those receiving the benefits of their labour to make this work invisible. As a descriptive concept, independence is, therefore, inadequate: independence does not construct societies.

We called the second type of citizenship encountered in our material *bonding citizenship* because of the strong ties that exist between the people enacting citizenship in this way. One of the main strengths of this type of citizenship is that it meets the feminist critique of the ideal of independence: it pays explicit tribute to the relationships both disabled and able citizens rely on in times of need (Sevenhuijsen 1996, Tronto 1993). In enacting bonding citizenship, relationships are always a focus of attention. Relationships can be nurtured by performing activities together. Bonding citizenship is enacted through strong ties characterized by sharing a stock of what sociologists have called “bonding social capital”: norms of reciprocity and trust that tie individuals together to form communities. Citizens may benefit from having a lot of bonding social capital, since close ties make it likely that people will stick by and support each other over long periods of time. This aspect is all the more interesting for citizens in need of care.

Although having many strong ties would seem like a good ideal to strive for, there are some constraints to enacting bonding citizenship that form a barrier for people who would like to enact citizenship in this way. Firstly, bonding social capital is mainly produced in homogeneous groups of people, which are said to be less apt at coping with divergence (Putnam 2000). Conforming to the interactional norms of bonding social
capital can be quite a challenge for people suffering from severe mental health problems. Secondly, outsiders do not easily penetrate the homogeneous groups in which bonding citizenship is cultivated. Those wishing to expand their social networks with close ties have to invest over long periods of time in order to achieve results. Although by performing activities together people may strengthen existing social ties and thereby enact bonding citizenship incidentally, marginalized people who simply do not have many strong ties to begin with have little chance of enacting citizenship in this way.

We called the third type of citizenship bridging citizenship because of the social differences that can be bridged through interaction between weak ties. This type of citizenship has several strengths. Firstly, enacting bridging citizenship generates bridging social capital, the type of social capital that acts as a social lubricant. The tolerance for (social) differences exhibited in weak ties is valuable to citizens in the interaction with people that are in one way or another different from them. Secondly, while strong ties may be of more value in the case of ‘helping each other out’ in daily life, weak ties are reported to be especially good for getting ahead in society (Granovetter 1973). The people citizens know outside of their own social group are generally most valuable in providing – for instance – job opportunities. Ambitious citizens may thus profit from making contact with (relative) strangers. Weak ties can also be valuable sources of information about volunteer work or community activities. Lastly, people that bridge social divides through small talk can ‘spiral outwards’ and come into contact with people from other social groups (Wuthnow 1998). This may be an enriching and empowering experience.

Bridging citizenship also places demands on both individuals and society. Firstly, it relies on other citizens to engage in contact with relative strangers, to take time and make an effort to make small talk. Secondly, framing small talk as a civic virtue can cause problems for individual citizens. It relies on people’s skills and their readiness to actually make small talk. This can be quite a challenge to some and not everybody will be inclined to do so. In other words: introvert or passive people have little chance of enacting bridging citizenship. They will perhaps better enjoy contact and blossom more in already existing close relationships that constitute bonding citizenship.
4.8 Conclusion

In this article we have established a correlation between shopping and citizenship and seen how various modes of shopping enact three distinct types of citizenship. But what do these results mean for the discussion on citizenship? Firstly, this research has consequences for the way in which citizenship is evaluated and studied. Citizenship research has generally focused on activities such as doing volunteer work, visiting internet forums and joining in demonstrations (e.g. Pattie et al. 2004, Stoker 2006). Although these activities may be necessary for ordering societies, they are by no means sufficient conditions for doing so. In fact, we would reason that the most important way in which societies are ordered is through citizens’ everyday interactions. Accordingly, we used the notion of everyday citizenship in our study (cf. Lawy and Biesta 2006, Lister 2007). By studying everyday interactions between citizens we have come to understand why an influential civic ideal like independence can only be realized as a paradox in practice and described an alternative that is more straightforward: relationality. Further on-site empirical research may yield other activities of daily life through which citizenship can be enacted and prompt the analysis of what specific ideals of citizenship are realized through them.

Secondly, our research makes a distinction between the kinds of relationships that may be constitutive of citizenship and argues for the relevance of weak ties to citizenship. Although the value of close ties is recognized in sociological citizenship discourses, ‘loose connections’ (Wuthnow 1998) between citizens have so far rarely been conceived as relevant to citizenship. Our description of ‘bridging citizenship’ demonstrates that this sort of interaction does indeed enact civic ideals such as bridging (social) differences. The capacity to bridge social differences is important in relation to mental health, but is also relevant to broader societal issues in which differences between people have become problematic. In this light, future research into everyday citizenship becomes all the more significant. Knowing whether and how differences between citizens are bridged while in the park, on public transport, or walking the dog provides a different perspective on public policy on these issues. In addition to existing arguments for the support of these kinds of provisions and activities, activities such as walking dogs might be stimulated as opportunities for people to come into contact with
others and bridge social differences. Research on these everyday ways of enacting citizenship may thus guide public policy and be instructive for mental health workers that seek to support clients in enacting citizenship.

References


