The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Sociology

K a t e  B u t l e r
2006 Ryerson University M.A.
2004 Queen’s University Hons. B.A.

“Negotiating Citizenship Practices:
Expressions of citizenship in the lives of youth-in-care in
Greater Victoria”

April 22nd, 2013
1:30 pm
SSM building, room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Cecilia Benoit, Department of Sociology, UVic
(Supervisor)
Dr. Helga Hallgrimsdottir, Department of Sociology, UVic,
Dr. Karen Kobayashi, Department of Sociology, UVic
Dr. Douglas Magnuson, School of Child and Youth Care,
UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Barbara Mitchell, Department of Sociology and
Gerontology, Simon Fraser University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. J. Allan Mitchell, Department of English, UVic
Abstract

Expressions of youth citizenship are evident in young people’s actions, behaviours, and embodied experiences. Young people in late (post) modernity occupy a liminal position when it comes to citizenship. On the one hand, they are conceived of as rights-bearers with particular responsibilities to themselves and others; at the same time, they are presumed to belong to a family unit that will take care of their major interests. Young people with government care experience (henceforth referred to as “youth-in-care”) practice citizenship at an intersection of private and public in their lives as wards of the state.

While youth citizenship literature has proliferated in the last two decades, the focus has often been on rights and responsibilities, rather than the differences in citizenship practices amongst youth themselves. Expressions of citizenship by youth-in-care are contextualized by internal and external factors that shape these young people’s lives. Furthermore, the history, politics, cultural difficulties and social implications of child protection systems have received much attention from academics and policy-makers, but research on youth-in-care as citizens remains rare.

This dissertation explores the gap in the literature by examining the ways that citizenship is complex, multilayered, and fluid for this group of young people. Using a mixed methods design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants between the ages of 14-24 in Greater Victoria, all of whom had been in government care at some point in their lives (n= 20). Transcripts were coded using an analytical hierarchy strategy. Findings indicate that the social group in question – youth-in-care – practiced citizenship in a multitude of ways, and that it was important to take situational or social context into consideration when
examining how they expressed citizenship. Analysis of participants’ narratives revealed three types of citizenship practices, namely self-responsible citizenship, dissenting citizenship and reluctant citizenship. Expressions of citizenship were navigated through experiences of self-responsibility and rights, belonging and exclusion, and risk and resilience. The dissertation concludes with a consideration of the implications of the findings for the literature on youth citizenship, focusing on the ways that youth citizenship is contextualized by experiences with family, peers, institutions, and the government care system.

**Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships**

2010-2012 SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship  
2010-2012 University of Victoria President’s Scholarship  
2007-2010 University of Victoria Graduate Fellowship  
2004-2006 Ryerson Graduate Studies Award  
2000-2004 Canadian Millennium Foundation Excellence Scholarship

**Presentations (selected)**


3. 2010 - “Collective Identity in Transnational Feminism: Negotiating and creating a strategic ‘we’ in late (post)
Publications (selected)

