Gritty Citizens? Exploring the Logic and Limits of Resilience in UK Social Policy During Times of Socio-Material Insecurity[i]

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Abstract

In recent years, resilience has been invoked as both a pre-emptive and responsive strategy to tackling socio-material insecurity. This article outlines a number of discursive and administrative features that distinguish the rise of resilience from longer-term shifts towards 'active citizenship' in British social policy. Within this context, we draw on data from two studies of financial hardship to examine how the fetishized ideal of resilience is reified and negotiated in the everyday experiences of low-income citizens. In light of the evidence, we argue that resilience is practiced as 'a way of being' amongst low-income citizens, but in contorted ways that reflect restrictions to their agency, resources and autonomy. This article makes an original contribution that has wider conceptual significance for the field by exposing a current paradox within resilience as a governing agenda: it is principally pursued in ways that compromise the material and ontological security necessary for its productive potential. If measures seeking to create 'gritty citizens' actually serve to undermine resilience, we conclude by reflecting on what conceptual and applied agendas this presents for policymakers, practitioners and academics in the UK and further afield.

Keywords: *austerity; citizenship; governance; poverty; welfare politics*

Introduction

Since the Great Recession, the concept of resilience has increasingly been deployed to frame understandings of, as well as policy responses to, a wide range of social, ecological and political challenges. State, societal and individual resilience have been presented as both a pre-emptive and responsive strategy to adapt to or overcome socio-material insecurity. There are multiple, on-going debates about what constitutes resilience: whether it comprises an individual attribute, inter-personal resource or institutional condition is greatly contested (Chandler, 2014). Broadly defined though, resilience is concerned with the extent to, and ways in, which people respond to and overcome unanticipated setbacks, shocks or adversity (Hickman, 2017). Despite its amorphous definition, resilience has received a relatively privileged position as a policy concept worldwide (Dagdeviren *et al.*, 2016).

Domestic political administrations and supranational organisations have all heavily drawn upon interpretations of resilience as a solution to overcoming, and in certain instances embracing, socio-material uncertainty (e.g. Mitchell, 2013). For example, the European Commission (2017: 2-3) considers its 'strategic approach to resilience' central to Europe's economic development in a 'more connected, contested and complex global environment'. At the international and domestic level, the rise of resilience as a (social) policy agenda has been fuelled by a growing discord between globally intractable determinants of socio-material insecurity and national responses deemed politically and economically desirable through welfare state intervention. On the one hand, an inter-related set of social, economic and political crises has emerged out of the most recent global financial crash. This has underlined domestic vulnerability of livelihoods and communities to the highly financialised and disembedded nature of global markets, including the negative externalities that feed and flow from their volatility. On the other hand, post-crisis welfare politics has converged on a neoliberal approach to fiscal consolidation centred on cuts to public social expenditure, labour market de-regulation

and an elevated role of private markets (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018). Within this context, resilience seems to demonstrate the limits of the nation state's strategic imagination (and ostensible capacity) to respond to societal challenges through the existing logics and apparatus that 'neo-austerity' permits (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018).

Resilience promises a (re) centring of individual agency in solutions to overcoming socio-material insecurity and in turn, reduces the prospective liabilities associated with welfare state intervention. Under conditions of austerity then, resilience appeals as a process of individual risk assessment and management in which citizens take 'ownership' of their problems (Joseph, 2013: 49). This methodological and ontological individualism falls neatly within the confines of liberal democracy that shape how socio-material insecurity tends to be explained, justified and responded to within capitalist welfare economies.

In spite of a contested evidence base (Rimfeld *et al.*, 2016; Bull and Allen, 2018), the potential of resilience, alongside 'aspiration', 'perseverance' and 'grit' in shaping socio-economic destiny has been highly influential in recent developments in UK welfare governance (Harrison, 2013). In great part, this can be explained by the pervasive notion within liberal meritocratic settings that individual effort, will and inclination to 'get on' are the principal determinants of social (dis-) advantage (Cameron, 2016: n.p.). Through successive welfare reforms and measures to 'modernise public services', emphasis has been placed on encouraging citizens, families and communities to acquire 'the resilience and resources to lift themselves out of poverty' (Duncan Smith, 2012: n.p.; DWP, 2016, 2017). This, we argue, is part of the continued reorientation of social citizenship towards neoliberal, productivist ends. These rhetorical and administrative shifts seek to reform, revise and govern the idealised citizen character and its contribution towards a Schumpeterian Workfare State to promote 'permanent innovation and flexibility in

relatively open economies by intervening on the supply-side' of labour market productivity and economic development (Jessop, 2018: 353).

The rise of 'active citizenship' and resilience go hand in hand here with resilience as a component, but also legitimiser, of the broader conditions of late capitalism. This brings 'the contradictions of the neoliberal dream for a smaller state' into sharp relief (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018: 462). Contrary to an outright restriction in public sector activity, recent changes in welfare governance have underlined the centrality of the state in the efficient functioning of neoliberalism – in particular - its complicity in the production of negative externalities from and for the market. Alongside significant cuts to public social expenditure since 2010, the UK welfare state has also broadened and deepened its reach into the lives of those reliant on low-income social security through a range of disciplinary and regulatory techniques. These measures are underpinned by a 'behaviourist philosophy relying on deterrence, surveillance and graduated sanctions in order to modify behaviour' of (low-income) citizens to restore economic productivity and compel labour market participation (Fletcher and Wright, 2017: 326). Whilst this authoritarian approach has taken a particularly punitive turn in recent years, it is nonetheless part of a 'long-established feature of the state's response to economic crises' in the UK (Fletcher and Wright, 2017: 339). Historically, this response has problematized and endeavoured to revise the characteristics and subjectivity of those living in poverty and do so in the service of capital to commodify labour and extract surplus value. In this respect, the emergence of resilience as a governing agenda in UK social policy can be understood as one of the more recent regulatory tools operational within late welfare capitalism, as the state seeks to promote the 'free' exchange of labour and capital through supply-side reform and intervention (Offe, 2018).

Having said that, the rise of resilience in social policy has been far from linear or straightforward. With its roots in materials science, resilience originally denoted the

ability for a material to adapt under pressure and return to its original form afterwards. Within the social sciences, the central concern of resilience remains the same: the ability for a socio-economic household to 'bounce back' from shocks and adversity (Dagdeviren *et al.*, 2016). Resilience is broadly understood within the literature as a:

> 'process- and resource-related concept, as resilient practices emerge during crises by activating and mobilising latent social, cultural, or economic resources' (Boost and Meier, 2016: 372).

This dynamic, relational conception of resilience specified in academic research appears 'lost in translation' when it comes to its take-up across policy fields and practice, where it has principally been understood as a static characteristic or trait to be cultivated – especially amongst those afflicted by socio-material insecurity. Owing to its polysemic nature, resilience has been enthusiastically, if not consistently, taken up across a wide range of policy arenas within UK welfare politics (Harrison, 2013). As such, there is not one single 'resilience policy', but a myriad of social and public policies that invoke the stylised condition of resilience as a solution to withstanding pressures and bouncing back during times of socio-economic uncertainty. Having said that, resilience as a governing agenda has proven most influential in activation and employment policies, reforms to low-income working-age social security and poverty alleviation strategies. In this article, we critically examine the rise of resilience as a regulatory technique of welfare governance directed at low-income citizens and how this features as part of the wider moral-political economy of the UK welfare state (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2016: 891).

Whilst attention has been given to the particular ways in which resilience is and could be fostered through public governance (Chandler, 2014), much less attention has been given to how resilience is practiced, experienced and negotiated by those subjected to its disciplinary gaze. With that in mind, this article considers the following questions: How

is the concept of resilience conceived and pursued in ways that seek to tackle socio-material insecurity in UK social policy? To what extent do strategies that seek to foster active citizenship through greater degrees of welfare conditionality engender the capacity for resilience? And if measures seeking to create 'gritty citizens' actually undermine resilience, what conceptual and applied agendas do these present for policymakers, practitioners and academics? Drawing on two qualitative studies of individuals navigating life on a low income, we consider these questions and what they reveal about the existing logic and limits of resilience in UK social policy.

From 'Active' to 'Gritty' Citizenship: The Rise of Resilience in UK Social Policy

The genesis of resilience within UK social policymaking can be found in recurrent, longer-term shifts towards active citizenship that have characterised public service and welfare reforms over the last two decades. Between 1997 and 2010, these measures sought to re-vision and re-design welfare state structures to foster an 'enabling' environment that encouraged, and at times, compelled citizens to assume personal responsibility through active participation in the paid labour market and broader civil society (Edmiston, 2018).

Underlying New Labour's policy programme was an ostensible commitment to address socio-material disadvantage by (re-) equipping citizens with the competencies and orientations deemed necessary to engage with the shifting uncertainties and opportunities of socio-economic life. This entailed a liberalisation of welfare governance that encouraged, and at times compelled, people to cultivate and deploy their 'autotelic self' in contemporary conditions of social insecurity. Within this 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).

New Labour principally focused on framing this entropy of late capitalism as the manifestation of ‘possibilities’ - individuals could succeed and overcome, if only they had the support, capacity and inclination to do so. As Wright (2016a) notes though, such attempts to (re-) insert individual agency into the welfare dialectic are regularly 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, 2016a: 237).

This reveals a fundamental paradox within resilience as a feature of the active citizenship agenda: that it is understood as a necessary resource and disposition to adapt to or overcome socio-material insecurity. However, the capacity to be resilient – that is, absorb shocks and transform challenges into opportunities by surmounting adversity – requires at least some degree of financial and ontological security through which to manage and overcome risk. In spite of such shortcomings, the productive potential of entropy has continued to focus heavily on the ‘active welfare subject as a project in the making’ and how citizens might feature more significantly in anti-poverty strategies through individual activation and reorientation (Wright, 2016a: 238).

Alongside an on-going trend towards active citizenship, recent administrative and discursive shifts signal a departure from previous approaches to tackling socio-material insecurity, in which ‘resilience’ has become a strategic priority, especially since 2010. Academic and political consideration of resilience spans homelessness and housing

policy (Smith, 2010; Scott and Gkartzios, 2014), youth transitions, education and employability (Bull and Allen, 2018), fuel poverty (Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015), area deprivation (Batty and Cole, 2010), health and disability (DWP, 2016), social and community cohesion (Marsden, 2017) and aging (Resnick *et al.*, 2010). However, the goal and potential of resilience has perhaps been most influential in policy measures introduced to tackle poverty, 'welfare dependency' and worklessness (DWP, 2012; DWP 2017).

In an attempt to move beyond state-based resource intervention on the one hand and market-centred strategies to tackle socio-material insecurity on the other, former Prime Minister David Cameron proposed an alternative approach to 'transform the life chances of the poorest' (Cameron, 2016: n.p.). Such an approach places individual agency at the centre of poverty reduction with a view to 'developing character and resilience' so that people are better able to help themselves through periods of adversity and hardship (Cameron, 2016: n.p.). This approach has continued under Theresa May's leadership of the current Conservative government which is underpinned by an expectation that one's socio-economic security should principally 'depend on you and your hard work' (May, 2017). Here, the need to 'build resilience' is not only characterised as a solution to overcoming or coping with precarious conditions; it is also presented as a way to deal with some of the ostensive problems associated with socio-material disadvantage: urban disorder, social 'irresponsibility' and poor motivation (Duncan Smith, 2015; DWP, 2017). Throughout policy documentation and political discourse, these 'social problems' are interchangeably presented as both the causes *and* effects of socio-economic deprivation and worklessness. As a result, an increasing amount of policy attention is being given to the role and '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). This is typical of the established trend towards valorising and promoting entrepreneurial subjects who are economically self-sufficient and

individually responsible for their own wellbeing (Wright, 2016a). However, there have been three noteworthy shifts that suggest something distinctive about the rise of resilience in UK social policy.

Firstly, the broader structural conditions that frame socio-material insecurity are increasingly presented and understood as a permanent fixture that negatively affects the outcomes and opportunities of precarious citizens. During the early years of the coalition government, temporary conditions of frugality, privation and sacrifice were presented as an 'unavoidably tough' but necessary measure for economic recovery, restoration of decent employment and remuneration, and an improvement in living standards at the aggregate level (Cameron, 2010: n.p.). None of this has happened, yet. As a result, there is an emerging expectation and requirement for citizens (particularly those on a low-income) to cope and even thrive under *enduring* conditions of financial hardship and social uncertainty. This includes a variety of strategies for 'creating stronger and more resilient communities' and supporting people to help themselves 'get back on their feet' (Cabinet Office, 2015). For example, initiatives such as 'Community Right to Build' and 'Community Right to Challenge' have encouraged communities to take ownership of and respnsibility for the planning and development of facilities within their area under the auspices of the Localism Act 2011. Along similar lines, a Community Resilience Framework has been launched by the Department for Communities and Local Government to encourage citizens to plan and adapt to social change and environmental disasters more resiliently. Most recently, this is discernible in Theresa May's vision for a 'shared society' in which local communities and citizens are encouraged to provide for their own welfare in order to 'plan and adapt to long term social and environment changes to ensure their future prosperity and resilience' (DCLG, 2016).

This relates to the second shift in welfare governance that seeks to foster resilience by enhancing the psychological capacity of 'vulnerable' citizens to tolerate and endure under

conditions of adversity. To improve the 'life chances' of those afflicted by, *inter alia*, drug and alcohol dependency, homelessness, unemployment, poor educational attainment and poverty, a series of flagship initiatives have been introduced that offer intensive psychological training of individuals to encourage 'character education' and coping techniques associated with attention, emotional control and 'mental toughness' (Cabinet Office, 2016; The Centre for Social Justice, 2016). This is intended to help individuals 'overcome practical and psychological barriers and build motivation, confidence and resilience' (DfE, 2012). At the centre of the interventions funded is a desire to equip 'vulnerable' people with the psychological capacity 'to work hard and respond resiliently to failure and adversity' (Cameron, 2016: n.p.; DCLG, 2016). For example, the Department for Work and Pensions and Cabinet Office have funded a number of programmes delivering 'mental toughness' training to young people 'at risk' of not being in education, employment or training (Bridges Ventures, 2016). These experimental projects have been used to curate 'a clear evidence base of what works' to share and embed lessons from such approaches across public service reform and design (Cabinet Office, 2016: 1).

Finally, these developments have been accompanied by increasingly punitive and paternalistic forms of welfare conditionality that have been presented in political and policy discourse as tools to motivate low-income groups to transition into paid employment and lift themselves out of poverty (Wiggan, 2012). Activation techniques alongside social security cuts, freezes and withdrawal have all been justified as necessary to encourage personal responsibility and financial resilience (Duncan Smith, 2012, Fletcher and Wright, 2017). This has placed greater financial penalties and expectations on households already experiencing socio-material insecurity, which has, in turn, disproportionately impacted on minority ethnic groups, women and disabled people (Edmiston, 2018). During the New Labour years, public service reforms sought to re-vision welfare provision to create an *enabling* environment fostering behaviours and

orientations through contingent generosity for those deemed 'deserving' of state assistance. However, the pursuit of active citizenship alongside resilience in the contemporary context is characterised much more by welfare *withdrawal* as opposed to *re-visioning* for low-income citizens.

Taken together, these three shifts in UK welfare politics represent a concerted effort to instigate a change in the civic subjectivity of social citizens during times of financial hardship and social uncertainty. This is characterised by a shifting preoccupation with the 'gritty citizen subject' in UK social policymaking. The idealised character of the 'gritty citizen' is someone equipped with the necessary attributes, resilience and mental toughness to safeguard their own well being and security during endemic conditions of insecurity. According to this emerging logic of gritty citizenship, it is no longer enough to work hard, abide by the law and pay taxes - citizens are increasingly expected to exhibit and deploy 'the secret ingredients for a good life character, delayed gratification, grit, resilience' to take charge of their own lives, households and well-being (Cameron, 2016: n.p.). Whilst this is seen as one of the key strategies for 'helping people get on', it is also understood and pursued as a necessary expectation that citizens thrive in and through a life of socio-material insecurity.

The remainder of this article examines how the paradox of resilience, as a governing agenda, is negotiated by low-income citizens subjected to its disciplinary gaze. We do so by drawing on data from two studies of everyday life on a low income to demonstrate how the fetishized ideal of resilience is reified in the experiences of low-income citizens, and in particular, their interactions with welfare institutions, services and reforms. First though, the methodological details of these two studies and their use in this article are outlined below.

Methods

This article draws on two cross-national studies exploring everyday experiences of socio-material insecurity during times of significant economic restructuring and welfare recalibration (Edmiston, 2018 - Study 1; Dagdeviren and Donoghue, 2018 - Study 2[ii]). For the purposes of this article, only interviews undertaken with those experiencing financial hardship in the UK are drawn upon and included here. All qualitative interviews (41) were undertaken between 2013 and 2016 across four diverse urban (East London, Leeds) and rural (Pembrokeshire and Cornwall) settings in the UK. Across both studies, research participants were interviewed about their social and financial circumstances, their everyday experiences of life on a low income and their interactions with welfare institutions, practitioners and support. This included discussion about the nature of social assistance they received, how this was changing over time and what bearing this had on their livelihoods and households.

Whilst research participants were not explicitly asked about resilience as a governing agenda, subject matter covered throughout interviews concerned factors, changes and behaviours that either contributed towards or detracted from their capacity to 'bounce back' from socio-material shocks. As such, qualitative data is drawn upon here to critically examine some of the practices and (constrained) possibilities for resilience amongst low-income citizens within the context of measures seeking, but not always succeeding, to support the construction of 'gritty citizens'. For both studies, participants were principally interviewed about their material circumstance rather than their 'social identity' characteristics. As a result, the analysis undertaken for this paper does not explicitly examine the ways in which gender, 'race' and ethnicity, or disability dynamics affect how low-income citizens negotiate resilience as a governing agenda. However, it is important to note that women, minority ethnic groups, and disabled people were all over-represented amongst the low-income participants interviewed for both studies relative to

the general population. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this paper, further work is needed to examine the significance of this to better understand how factors such as gender, 'race' and ethnicity, and disability feature in and shape the exercise of resilience amongst low-income citizens.

Sound ethical practice and standards underpinned the research process of both studies to protect the anonymity, confidentiality and welfare of research participants. In light of the potentially sensitive nature of issues arising through the course of interviews with those experiencing socio-material hardship, we paid particular attention to the varying contexts and power dynamics of data generation, our own subject position throughout and the prospective costs/benefits of participation for interviewees.

To varying degrees, a mixture of leafleting, gatekeeper organisations and snowballing techniques were used to recruit research participants across both studies (Dagdeviren and Donoghue, 2018; Edmiston, 2018). Where gatekeepers were used to recruit participants (primarily in Study 2), care was taken to ensure participants understood their participation was voluntary and that their data was both confidential and anonymous. All interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant. Where participants found certain subjects difficult to discuss, they were offered the opportunity to pause, postpone or stop the interview. Participants were reassured that all questions asked were elective. Whilst some interviewees found elements of the interview personally challenging to discuss, all of those interviewed expressed a desire to have their say (Study 1) or tell their side of the story (Study 2) on socio-material hardship and the factors giving rise to such conditions. In this regard, interviews were treated and embraced as an opportunity of empowerment and advocacy for participants. This was facilitated throughout the interview process where participants were given the time and space to discuss what was important to them in relation to certain topics. Following the end of each interview, research participants were signposted to advocacy and/or citizens

advice organisations and services if they were not already in touch with these. All participants were offered a "Thank You" shopping voucher for their time and contribution.

There are some noteworthy differences in the demographic profile of those interviewed across both studies. First, Study 1 interviewed participants only if they were unemployed, living in deprived areas and living below the relative poverty line whereas Study 2 interviewed participants if they self-identified as 'suffering hardship'. Whilst many of those in Study 2 were living below the relative poverty line or at greater risk of falling in and out of financial hardship (due to their employment situation, income, debt, or mental and physical health), this was not necessarily the case. Second, many of those interviewed in Study 2 were employed compared to all of those being unemployed in Study 1. Third, those interviewed in Study 2 were from multiple urban and rural settings, whereas those from Study 1 were all from one urban setting. In light of these differences, it is likely that those interviewed across both studies were subject to differing degrees and conditions of socio-material insecurity, had different experiences of resilience, and differing access to the resources necessary for resilience.

These differences present a number of opportunities for critical consideration. Particularly, in terms of exploring how differing extents of hardship and engagement with welfare state institutions affect the practices and possibilities of resilience, and its potential as a governing agenda to overcome socio-material insecurity. Throughout the analysis undertaken due consideration has been given to the commonality and heterogeneity of experience for those interviewed across both studies and where differences are discernible these are discussed.

Everyday Resilience: Contradictions, Barriers and Possibilities

Within liberal welfare settlements, the lives of those experiencing socio-material insecurity are increasingly mediated through appeals to build and exercise resilience. The experiences, outcomes and opportunities of those affected are rarely considered to reflect what lessons this might offer about the logic and limits of resilience and its role in low-income welfare governance. We now explore how resilience as a governing agenda is practiced, experienced and negotiated by those subjected to its disciplinary gaze. In particular, we explore the various sites, varieties and strategies of resilience that low-income citizens engage with and what this means for their ability to become 'gritty citizens'.

Building Resilience to What?

Resilience as a governing agenda demands recognition from citizens of the uncertainties and insecurities that characterise contemporary life - of the erosion of certain guarantees afforded through the social rights of citizenship to at least a 'modicum of economic welfare and security' (Marshall, 1950: 28). As a result, questions concerning the potential of resilience have tended to focus on how people respond to and overcome adversity, rather than the institutional conditions that give rise to it. According to such logics of resilience, the role of national actors, policies and institutions is rendered either inconsequential or ineffectual in addressing social uncertainty and financial hardship. This underscores the (de-) politicising capacity of resilience where low-income citizens 'must accept that the nation will be fundamentally insecure by design' (Evans and Reid, 2015) and are expected to adapt to, rather than resist or affect, changes in citizenship structures that affect their well-being (Gregory, 2014).

Across both studies, participants exhibited strategies that were 'responsive' and 'resourceful' to the socio-material insecurities that afflicted their everyday lives. Rather than abstractly conceive of or adapt to the conditions they experienced, low-income

citizens readily identified factors, events and actions that compromised their well-being. Those interviewed attributed financial hardship to a range of barriers, changes and life circumstances. Comprised within explanations of economic hardship, many attributed responsibility to public services and institutions that they felt had actively restricted the generosity or terms of welfare entitlement in recent years. The most prominent example of this across both datasets was found in participants' narratives of struggling in response to, but also against policy decisions. In these instances, many low-income citizens were actively involved in a defence of their social rights that demonstrated their resilience *in spite of* welfare state intervention:

> *I had the backing of the doctors and I was going back and forward to the hospital, but the [assessors] seemed to disregard everything.* (Jillian, S2).

In seeking to safeguard the resources they needed for themselves and their family, a number of individuals engaged in confrontational acts with front-line public servants. Very often, this caused heightened socio-material insecurity and frustration:

> *You've gone down to sign on, and sometimes, depending on who you get, they can be hard on you. You might end up in an argument with them, and then they can just suspend your money like that, for how many bloody months. So I depend on my family and friends, for food and stuff like that.* (Liam, S1)

> *I thought, what the fuck is this all about, it's ridiculous, really demoralising and it makes you feel antagonistic towards the people as well, it's like screw you. So now it's like my whole approach now is like I've given what you want and I'm just going to be on your back and I want*

> *what I'm due, you know, I paid into the system for 35 years, I want what's mine.* (Darren, S2)

Here Liam and Darren engage in symbolic acts of resilience. They (re-) assert their agency and express the frustration they feel at needing to do so to welfare bureaucrats they believe should be facilitating their ability to get by and 'bounce back'. Especially significant was the amount of time and effort those interviewed had to expend to: undertake administration involved in securing welfare assistance; fulfil the conditions of entitlement; and 'survive on' the, often insufficient, financial and non-financial support received. For example, Barry remarked that looking for work was itself a 'full time job'. From the quote below, it is clear how this undermined his sense of autonomy and 'ontological security':

> *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)

As previously discussed, intensified forms of welfare conditionality and withdrawal have been introduced with a view to supporting the construction of 'gritty citizens'. However in many cases, contrary to empowering low-income citizens, these measures have undermined the autonomy, freedom and agency of individuals through the imposition of, enduring conditions of financial hardship and social uncertainty. Thus many ultimately employed resilience strategies to cope with punitive forms of welfare governance, rather

than accrue resources from it. For those worst affected by such measures, the most effective strategies for overcoming socio-material insecurity were considered to be (temporary) withdrawal from the social security system:

> *I told him to "Fuck Off" really, and I told him, "What do you think I'm going to do?" It might be something like three months at a time, like, what do you think I'm going to do? Not eat? Do you really, truly think I'm not going to eat? I just told him, "Fuck off" and I walked out.* (Amber, S1)

Actions such as these demonstrate how resilience can be manifest through an assertion or reclamation of autonomy; a highly personal practice that nurtures a sense of control, but does little to ameliorate the exogenous factors afflicting a citizen's socio-material situation. For those unable or unwilling to comply with the conditions and restrictions placed upon them, some felt their only option was to subvert or withdraw from the system. In certain respects, this demonstrates a high degree of resilience – at least to the policies governing low-income citizens.

In this context, the resilient citizen is one who is socio-economically independent of the state. Those who are not are in a 'resilience deficit', which has attached to it an assumption of behavioural maladies that need to be rectified through the moral-political economy of the UK welfare state (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2016). These assumptions construct the problem of the welfare claimant and also imply the solution: the creation of 'gritty citizens', able to withstand multiple pressures without falling into the trap of so-called 'welfare dependency'. Doing so risks the imposition of regulatory measures that discipline deviance from the idealised citizen-worker and promote behavioural change (Edmiston, 2018).

Evans and Reid (2015: 156) argue that a particularly nihilistic feature of resilience is that it demands citizens to become 'active participants in our own de-politicisation'. However, a significant number of participants across both studies felt the adverse financial conditions under which they operated were directly instigated through welfare politics and policies. In this instance, the welfare state was not regarded as something that enabled people to become resilient against external social, economic or environmental factors. To the contrary, welfare politics was something under which low-income citizens felt they needed to be resilient *against*.

Gritty Citizenship: Resilience, Welfare and Insecurity

Within activation and employment policy, low-income social security and poverty alleviation strategies, resilience tends to be reified in ways that conceptualise low-income individuals as failing to live up to a 'gritty citizen' ideal if they respond to socio-material insecurity by accessing or relying on state support or intervention. In this way, the pursuit of resilience in policy discourse and intervention tends to conceptualise individuals as abstracted subjects, divorced from the context and relations that link them to fellow citizens. This dislocation obscures questions of power, accountability, and broadened co-operation between political subjects. With this in mind, the interface between individual and collective resilience is now considered.

As demonstrated below, the capacity for resilience amongst low-income citizens was highly contingent on the intersubjective status of their socio-material insecurity. Whether and how wider social networks of support were drawn upon often determined the extent to which individuals were able to manage with and overcome financial hardship. The sustained and cyclical nature of deprivation for many of those interviewed presented challenges for how (long) communities, families and friends could feature in sustaining and building resilience in the face of asymmetric welfare cuts and conditionality.

Despite assertions of 'tailored support' through individualised, albeit restricted, welfare interventions, participants' experiences show this rarely materialised. Rather, experiences and feelings of immediate and longer-term insecurity increased. For example, Madeline was dealing with multiple mental and physical health problems alongside eviction. She was too unwell to work, and was challenging a decision to end her entitlement to ESA. As a result, she was struggling to make ends meet and had to resort to unsustainable financial coping strategies:

> *… the reddest letters are the angriest ones, try and get rid of them, then try and play catch-up on rent because that tends to be the only money there is to take anything out of.* [Sighs] *Cope. Go back to bed, um, try to list something on Gumtree or eBay, so I've sold pretty much all my furniture.* (Madeline, S2)

Madeline was forced to use short-term strategies to survive, meaning she was trapped living day to day. This was especially damaging for her considering that addressing her mental and physical health problems is necessarily a long-term task. Yet, at the same time Madeline *was* managing to survive, albeit on her own and incurring significant cost on her health as well as finances. Although the picture is of someone with significant personal strength to *survive* (rather than *thrive*), this is characterised much more by strategies of need privation as opposed to resilience building. These strategies - which *can* be characterised as forms of resilience - actually compromised the long-term financial, logistical and emotional sustainability of life on a low-income for many and made it harder to move beyond socio-material insecurity for others:

> *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)

> *… cut back on water, I don't use the cooker anymore, I don't use the heating, and I only use one light bulb, and I didn't use as much electricity, like for example, you know, I used to hoover the floor every day but I wouldn't do that now* (Kimberly, S2)

Implicit emphasis in resilience is placed on preparing for an unknown future; something which is significantly inhibited by the immediacy of surviving financial crises. Being trapped in short-termism, and the significant restriction in agency it brings, was common throughout both datasets.

In circumstances where low-income citizens relied on relatives, friends or community members in a similar pecuniary position to bridge financial deficits, risk and hardship were often being delayed or displaced amongst households in a cycle that staggered pay dates and bill dates. These forms of help functioned as a bridging strategy to overcome short-term difficulties. However, for those with limited familial and social networks that principally extended to those who were similarly afflicted by area or economic deprivation, these kinds of measures had a time-limited effect on their capacity to build and deploy resilience in managing their day-to-day lives.

> *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)

Dave went on to detail how he was making difficult decisions between 'eating or heating' and managing his own financial hardships and the consequent cycle of debt he had to negotiate.

Being ‘gritty’ in these instances appears to entail the ability to survive in the face of absent, or inadequate, help and financial resources. In all these examples, the context is that of individuals trying to survive, either on their own or with the help of other individuals. Whilst developing and drawing on support within one’s communal, familial or social network is commonly regarded as a feature of resilience, this can only lead to sustainable forms of resilience if the network’s membership has enough resources at its disposal to absorb, displace or manage risk collectively. This was a particular challenge for those interviewed in Study 1 who were all at the more acute end of socio-material insecurity (i.e. unemployed, living in most deprived areas of the country below the relative poverty line). Given the recurrent nature of deprivation and asymmetric, localised effects of welfare austerity, the endemic conditions of insecurity felt amongst these families, friends and communal networks of support, severely undermined their capacity for sustainable forms of resilience. Indeed, the current climate of welfare austerity contributes towards ‘a pervasive sense and experience of chronic crisis which diminishes people’s capacity or inclination to plan for potential future emergencies’ (Wright, 2016b: 160).

This highlights the current contradiction of resilience as a governing agenda and how this plays out amongst individuals and communities expected to exhibit some form of ‘gritty citizenship’. In order to be resilient in ways that enable citizens to adapt to or overcome socio-material risk, some degree of financial or ontological security is necessary. Rather than supporting this, UK welfare interventions appear increasingly inclined towards undermining the capacity for low-income citizens to develop and deploy the resources necessary to manage socio-material security.

Resilience as a way of being?

Within welfare policy and political discourse, the idealised concept of resilience is often presented as 'a way of being': responding positively to the social and economic world around us in a manner that facilitates individual flourishing and collective progression. From citizens, this demands a high level of expectation, a capacity to enact and effect change dynamically, and a sustained consciousness of one's socio-material location as a motivation for perseverance. Whilst existing evidence suggests that people experiencing financial insecurity do act in resilient ways, this tends to be 'absorbative' and 'adaptive' rather than 'transformative' (Dagdeviren and Donoghue, 2018). Across both studies, low-income citizens demonstrated a tendency towards low expectations, constrained adaptability and regular attempts to distract oneself from their financial situation where possible:

> *It's just slowed down progress, kept me from growing, expanding… It just stops me from being who I want to be. (Jackie, S1)*

> *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)

Ashley exhibits the burnout that can accompany the constant need to remain resilient in the face of perpetual crisis. This logistical short-termism was typical of many low-income citizens interviewed across both studies who felt their primary concerns centred on fulfilling immediate needs rather than improving their social horizon or location. This normalisation of socio-material insecurity meant that citizens were often compelled to access residual citizenship rights through a highly controlled and restrictive welfare system. In many cases, this actually served to undermine 'the capacity of an individual to respond positively to a setback or shock' (Hickman, 2017: 1).

Rather than facilitating resilience, recent reforms to low-income social security, anti-poverty and activation policy appear to be damaging citizens' resilience to socio-economic shocks by restricting their autonomy and agency through parallel measures towards welfare paternalism and economic efficiency. Contrary to (re-) prioritising the agency of low-income citizens into poverty alleviation strategies, increasing degrees of welfare conditionality have been found to be highly disempowering. Generalised anxieties concerning day-to-day challenges on a low-income preoccupy the concerns and future horizons of those affected:

> *It's getting very close to rent day and you're thinking [sharp intake of breath] do I have a word with her [the landlady] and say rent might be a couple of days late or do I, oh shit, phone goes, "yeah, yeah, I'll do that, yeah, not a problem, can you pay tomorrow", brilliant…* (Derek, S2)

> *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)

In many ways, this typifies the UK government's idealised gritty citizen: someone who does what they must to make ends meet and manages through adversity, without relying significantly, if at all, on outside support. Here, the expectations placed upon people to be and become resilient no matter the odds seem increasingly difficult to reconcile with the material reality of the limited opportunities and resources of low-income citizens, and the diminishing welfare assistance and support they receive. Examining the experiences of low-income citizens and how they negotiate the existing welfare landscape exposes a problematic conflation between 'resilience' and 'survival' within popular understandings of what counts as 'successful' resilience.

Within popular and political discourse, notions of resilience tend to normalise struggle, insecurity and deprivation as an inevitable, and even laudable, feature of life for low-income citizens. For those with caring responsibilities and/or reliant on external assistance, the recurrent nature of socio-material adversity alongside (the threat of) welfare withdrawal has undermined their capacity for resilience. Rather than exercising their agency and 'resilience' in ways that centre on progression, low-income citizens tended to assume 'absorbative' and 'adaptive' strategies centred on survival (Donoghue and Dagdeviren, 2018). This was particularly the case for those interviewed in Study 1 who, as discussed, faced greater social and financial vulnerability:

> *A while ago I had some debts that I had to pay so it was very difficult because I was surviving on £170 a fortnight… and it's very emotionally stressful, it causes a lot of stress... I was just surviving...* (Liam, S1)

For those affected by welfare withdrawal and economic restructuring, resilience appears more centred on survival rather than risk assessment, a state of preparedness and resource sharing between individuals. In this respect, 'gritty' citizens are expected to have an inexhaustible supply of 'mental toughness', resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit – but with minimal resources and assistance (traditionally provided by the state in welfare capitalism) needed to support these traits. In this sense, resilience as a governing agenda cannot be seen as providing a way out of socio-material insecurity, but rather a perpetuator and legitimiser of it. There is a clear disconnect between expectations imposed upon those facing hardship and the material reality in which they must live. These expectations form part of the moral-political economy of UK welfare that justifies an ever increasing shifting of social and economic risk from the state to the individual (Montgomerie and Tepe-Belfrage, 2016).

Conclusions

This article has explored how everyday experiences of resilience are almost diametrically opposed to their construction and pursuit in activation and employment policies, reforms to low-income working-age social security and poverty alleviation strategies in UK social policy. Contrary to its claim to empowerment, low-income citizens are being further responsibilised by the resilience agenda and *disempowered* by the social security system upon which they, to varying degrees, rely. Resilience, then, cannot be understood as a progressive logic within current discourses and formations of welfare governance, but rather one that entrenches and legitimises regressive reforms through a positive veneer of agency, determination and 'beating the odds' in an era of perpetual crisis.

The 'gritty' citizenship of resilience promises individuals the wherewithal to empower themselves and lift themselves out of hardship and precarity. Simultaneously, it promises a smaller, more economically efficient state. In reality, the latter is pursued at the expense of the former whilst also increasing the surveillance, sanctioning and regulation of citizens reliant on low-income social security. As noted by Brown et al., (2017: 501), parallels can be drawn here between the governance of vulnerability and agendas to cultivate resilience amongst 'problem' populations. In both cases, these concepts are invoked to justify social controls directed at the outcomes and behaviours of certain social groups. There are variety of ways in which both of these 'rationales in policy and practice might be gendered, raced, classed and ableist' in highly exclusionary and disempowering ways (Brown et al., 2017: 500). Unfortunately, it has not been possible to consider how this shapes the lived realities and (constrained) possibilities for resilience amongst low-income citizens here. In this respect, further work is needed to establish how gender, class, race and disability dynamics structure resilience amidst socio-material insecurity.

Overall, resilience is principally understood as such when it involves socio-economic independence from the state, and is accompanied by a set of disciplinary and regulatory techniques that seek to cultivate required characteristics of entrepreneurship, industriousness, guile and positive attitude (Evans and Reid, 2015). However, for those facing hardship and insecurity, these characteristics often can only be developed with adequate support from the state to help citizens activate and mobilise 'latent social, cultural, or economic resources' (Boost and Meier, 2016: 372). This underlines a current paradox within resilience as a governing agenda – that to be resilient requires some degree of material and ontological security through which to manage and overcome adversity. In this case, just when social policies are intended to serve their most basic function of fulfilling human need, they appear to demand the most from, and provide the least for, those worst affected by socio-material insecurity.

Thus, there is an inevitable limitation to the utility of resilience in seeking to address and manage socio-material insecurity – at least through its present policy interpretation. Measures within UK social policy cannot reasonably hope or expect that low-income citizens become more resilient, when the very presence and condition of socio-material insecurity undermines individual and collective capacity for resilience. This raises a number of agendas for policymakers, practitioners and academics in re-thinking through effective measures to foster resilience. The productive potential of resilience - that extends well beyond strategies for survival – can only be realised through some measure of financial and ontological security guaranteed to low-income citizens. This is a necessary pre-condition to expectation or anticipation for resilience. In light of this, the ideologically sanctioned interpretation of resilience that currently focuses on entrepreneurial subjects requires re-thinking to consider the communal and collective potential of the concept and how it might sit alongside attempts to tackle vulnerability (Wright, forthcoming). It is likely that more conventional formations of welfare

citizenship and collective association have something to offer here, at least in seeking to manage and move beyond the entropy that characterises the present period.

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