



## Contesting Respect: Mutual Respect, Positive Futures and the Cultural Intermediary

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## Contesting Respect: Mutual respect, Positive Futures and the cultural intermediary

### Conceptualising respect and the anti-social behaviour agenda

In recent years the terminology of respect has become somewhat ubiquitous and has virtually taken on the status of a commodity form. Gangsta rappers seek out the veneer of authenticity through demands for 'it', political parties embrace it as a title with electoral appeal, whilst social commentators and policy makers lament its absence amongst certain constituencies of young people. Indeed the Government has recently sought to start a debate focused on the fostering and renewal of a 'culture of respect'. Initial contributions to this debate suggest the predominance of a perspective whereby respect is identified as something which is lacking, lost, or withheld, particularly by those young people associated with 'anti-social behaviour'. The Prime Minister commenting that:

'People are rightly fed-up with street corner and shopping centre thugs, yobbish behaviour - sometimes from children as young as 10 or 11 whose parents should be looking after them - Friday and Saturday night binge-drinking which makes our town centres no-go areas for respectable citizens, of the low-level graffiti, vandalism and disorder that is the work of a very small minority that makes the law-abiding majority afraid and angry. (Michael Friday, 'PM attacks yob culture and pledges to help bring back respect', *the Guardian*, May 13, 2005

Yet whilst the Government's 'Respect Action Plan' suggests that 'Respect is an expression of something that people intuitively understand', something which 'almost everyone of any age and from any community understands...and thinks is right', to us the notion of respect seems a difficult one to grasp. This is not because we don't each have an idea of what it means to us, but because it seems related to and contingent on so many other qualities.

Whilst undoubtedly tapping into a rich seam of popular sentiment, the Prime Minister's initial interpretation potentially fails to recognise that an 'absence' of respect can be identified and experienced from many different sightlines and social positions. In the most basic of terms, where there is an apparent 'lack' of respect shown towards innocent neighbours, teachers, firefighters, police officers etc., for some it is these *custodians* of 'respectable' society that are seen to deny young people dignity and in turn their 'disrespectful' behaviour might be seen as a means of *gaining* respect amongst peers.

Collison (1996) makes the point that young men are searching for '*cool respect*' through deviant behaviour in the face of the decline of more traditional work or family roles, using *cool* as a tool to improve their reputation and 'be someone'. In the book *In Search of Respect* Phillippe Bourgois (2003) seeks to document the

range of survival strategies of those at the extreme end of processes of social marginalisation, the crack dealers of *El Barrio*, in New York's East Harlem. In his view, drugs and violence are seen merely as symptoms, or symbols of deeper changes in the culture of contemporary America. The actions of the young drug dealers he encountered are, for Bourgois, nothing more or less than an alternative forum for an autonomous personal dignity denied them by mainstream culture. In this sense the drug dealers are portrayed as but one end of the continuum with the ordinary - neither passive victims nor glamorous gangsters - they are vulnerable active human beings, shaping their own future. That they 'choose' to do so outside of the framework of the 'mainstream' economy is regarded as an outcome of structural changes in the economy which deny such groups access to employment in 'honourable' productive work, closing off avenues to the 'respect' which previously underpinned social relations. In this context, it is the drug economy, which provides the only 'respectable' alternative to the ameliorating effects of employment in the 'entry level' service sector with its limitless demand for fast food outlet attendants and office cleaners. As one of his informants put it:

You can't be allowing people to push you around, then people think you're a punk and shit like that... And that's the whole point: making people think you're cool so that no one bothers you... And there's a way of not having really big fights or nothing, but having the rep - Like "That dude's cool; don't mess with him" - without having to hit nobody... And then there's the other way of just total violence'.  
(Bourgois, 1995:24)

In this sense in Connor's terms, 'Cool, at its most basic, is a way of living and surviving in an inhospitable environment, a rational reaction to an irrational situation, a way of fitting in while standing out, of gaining respect while instilling fear' (2003). Yet within the populist rhetoric there is an implicit *distinction* between those who are 'respectable' and those who are not, and within this frame it is those who are *not*, young people 'sometimes as young as 10 or 11', who are now expected to show 'respect' to those who *are*. In many ways this outlook is consistent with the predominant focus of the plethora of social interventions associated with the 'social inclusion agenda', with their emphasis on social capital and communitarian ideals, which encourage 'us' (policy makers, University lecturers, community development initiatives) to determine what is appropriate for 'them' (the poor), despite the rhetoric of community led initiatives.

As such Richard Sennett's recent conceptualisation of respect (2003), which is informed by a compelling critique of the lack of respect for those who are forced to abide by or are dependent upon bureaucratic welfare organisations, is perhaps more illuminating. For Sennett (2003:20) makes a useful link between the notions of 'cool' and 'respect' by suggesting that in current times gaining respect has become a matter of being accepted by *others* as 'cool'. As such Sennett presents a case for the performativity or stylistic presentation of 'respect' in a world characterised by fleeting social relationships and pervaded by inequality. From

this perspective 'gaining' respect becomes a matter of composing the appropriate kind of 'performance' which can be deployed as a resource in order to engage those very young people who are defined as 'anti-social'.

### **Positive Futures, 'becoming inside' and the gendering of sporting respectability**

In this light we have found his work useful in the context of our research relating to the Home Office funded social inclusion programme, Positive Futures. Whilst at first sight Positive Futures might be regarded as an activity based youth programme utilising sport as an attractive means of engaging young people, it is the use of these activities as a basis for encouraging wider social development that is more significant. For as Sennett has written:

'the development of any talent involves an element of craft, of doing something well for its own sake, and it is this craft element which provides the individual with an inner sense of self-respect. It's not so much a matter of getting ahead as becoming inside.' (Sennett, 2003)

In line with this perspective, for Positive Futures the 'craft' of sport is seen as a device with which to achieve whereby it is precisely the 'building of *mutual* respect' that has been identified as the key to providing the 'cultural 'gateways' to alternative lifestyles' which might ultimately moderate the kinds of behaviour that are such a source of public concern.

The respect that is central to the rhetoric of Positive Futures is the sort of respect that involves a *meeting* of minds such that the establishment of 'respect' becomes an integral part of the relationship that the staff have with the young people they are working with, and as such has practical aspects, as well as being played out in attitude and behaviour. While the notion of respect is an intangible dynamic between staff and young people, it is also part of a known and reciprocal agreement. Across all our case studies, we have found that relationships which demonstrate mutual respect mainly involve members of staff that do not prescribe, or solely prescribe, strict guidelines to the participants on what is expected of them. Staff with a very prescriptive way of dealing with behaviour struggle to establish mutually beneficial relationships with young people. Those who make continual demands of the participants to observe guidelines or adhere to codes of conduct are often treated in a more distanced way and can damage the relationships that projects are trying to build.

They have got to have respect for the staff or it's never going to work but likewise the staff have got to have respect for the young people, it's a two way thing. We had a session on Tuesday [and] the member of staff had no respect for the kids and it was just chaos...[she was] a climbing instructor at the climbing place [and] was very negative

towards the kids, didn't want to be there and the kids pick up on it straight away...She has probably taken them back about three steps.

However, the research, itself underpinned by a 'respectful' Participatory Action Research approach, has unearthed that it is, perhaps, in terms of engagement with young *females*, that the generation of mutual respect is most lacking at projects. Whilst the *percentage* of young women participating has risen, these figures mask the quality of engagement that some females have with projects. Some projects utilise the Youth Justice Board 'Core 50' approach, identifying the 50 most 'at risk' young people in a neighbourhood aged 13–16. These lists tend to be male dominated meaning that projects basing work around them are building bias into provision, reducing the potential for projects to engage with girls and young women.

The argument has been made, in wider contexts, that gender boundaries are collapsing in terms of everyday behaviour (McRobbie, 1993); however, the type of activities provided across our case study projects does not fully reflect this shift. At one project, for example, although nominally offered as a mixed activity, very few females participate in the 'traditionally male' sport of football, and other team and solo sports are almost exclusively male preserves. Even when activities are designed specifically to attract females, there is confusion about what might best engage them. When a female only residential was being planned, there was a debate amongst staff as to what activities would be offered. Some staff, citing the young women's negative reactions to football, suggested sessions such as yoga and stress management, but a senior worker was keen to engage them in the usual residential fare of scrambling and abseiling. Whilst some may applaud this stance, making available to females what is offered to males, PF is about engaging young people in pursuits which *they* see as worthwhile. To not consider 'softer' activities, in the light of conversations with participants about their preferences, is to force them to engage with the male norm of lusty outdoor pursuits, whilst to enforce a soft menu of activities based on stereotyping, rather than consultation, runs contra to the spirit of the programme and is unlikely to engage and retain young women.

We have observed at projects 'obstruction to female participation...inherent in organisational structures, general stereotypes and in the attitudes of...colleagues and supervisors.' (Nieva and Gutek in Borman and Gesterkamp, 1982:4). Some worker's positions on what constitutes 'appropriate' female behaviour has manifested itself in threats to cancel female only sessions because of misbehaviour tolerated at male sessions. Another practitioner does not work with girls, claiming that he is 'too shy' and finds their general behaviour 'too much' to handle.

More encouraging provision is offered by another project, which runs 'Spiced up Sport' a package aimed at females aged 14-16 who are excluded/at risk of exclusion, or who have issues with drugs and/or alcohol use and sexual health.

The programme, which runs for 6-8 weeks, can be delivered at schools and youth centres or at other venues, if this is considered more likely to engage the young women. Prospective participants are invited to a 4 hour taster session and can commit after that. The programme is sold to them as a chance to 'have fun, pamper yourself, enjoy learning to be fit, healthy and feel great about who you are.' Working to convince participants that exercise need not be a chore, it begins with a yoga session and other 'physical' activities include boxercise and street dance. Keen to address issues of concern about image, nutrition, self esteem, peer pressure and substance use, cookery features in the programme, and other sessions focus on beauty therapy and make overs alongside anger management and dealing with conflict. The final session of the programme offers these young women, whose lives are often chaotic, 'a day of ultimate relaxation' at a health spa, as a reward for good attendance. The programme acknowledges issues of relevance to these young women and offers a variety of activities which are not based around 'traditional' sport, but which take a holistic approach to helping them discuss issues and develop coping mechanisms. In addition to Spiced up Sport activities, group members continue to affiliate within PF via a link with PAYP.

Elsewhere a project used to offer a street dance session, something the females attending regard as 'urban' and 'cool,' taking ownership of the sessions, choreographing routines and forming a strong bond with the instructor. They 'respect' her because she 'tells it like it is,' and did not engage with the same activity as positively when another instructor took the session. However, as the project no longer provides this activity, this access to a 'craft', some young women have disengaged from the project. In contrast, a session at another project offers more disciplined and traditional variants of music such as conventional rock and roll and songs from musicals. This session is strongly driven, in terms of its 'curriculum' and staff attitudes, by traditional ideas of femininity and female appropriate behaviour. The young women are part of this project because their behaviour had been defined by agencies as problematic. Alongside a viewing of them as vulnerable runs a strong 'disciplinary' element, based around the desire to create 'nice girls' and address this problematic behaviour.

Here, Foote's article (2003) on Tonya Harding, the working class American never fully embraced by the genteel world of figure skating, is of value. Girls at these sessions are frequently encouraged not to swear, to comport themselves femininely, not to dress in boyish or provocative manners by staff who, whilst expressing sympathy with their often chaotic and challenging lives, feel the girls need to 'learn the occulted ways of the clan of the middle class', (ibid.4) or at least the 'respectable' working class, clans with which they have affinity. Their behaviour, their dress, their manner of speaking is deemed *by practitioners* as not 'classy'. Workers, here are revealing their own dispositions and evaluatory mechanisms, their own anxieties about values, choice, agency and personhood (ibid:15-16). These sessions are an example of how behaviour and activities are

not respectfully negotiated, rather, participants are 'physically inhibited, confined, positioned and objectified' (Real, 1999:139) by the project. Whilst there is sympathy for the chaotic lifestyles that are tied up with the young people's vulnerability, there is little respect for the ways in which that chaos is coped with. The focus here is not on how remarkably modest and mundane the aspirations of these young women are, or how their coping mechanisms allow them to live in a world far removed from that of some practitioners; the aim of the project is to achieve change, nominally negotiated with the young people, but within a framework which is not of their lived world.

There is evidence that if more robust activities were offered, some young women would engage with them. Boxing has been introduced at one of the projects and when asked if they preferred horse riding, another activity offered, or boxing, these young women chose the latter. There are, perhaps, a number of factors at play in this choice. The middle class image of equestrianism may not be appealing to young women who lack both the social and economic capital to engage in it. The repetitive nature of trekking may not fire the imagination of some participants. In terms of explaining an engagement with boxing, a physically demanding sport, traditionally populated by males, the young women's embracing of it may be linked to an increase in female participation in traditionally male sports, such as football and rugby. Media coverage of female boxers, such as Britain's Jane Crouch, and the release of the Oscar winning 'Million Dollar Baby' about a working class female boxer in the US, have helped to make female boxing more visible, although visible does not always equate to 'acceptable' in the case of female participation in sports historically perceived as male preserves. Here the young women who participate are challenging both the general decline in youth participation in sport *and* the assumptions about what sports are 'respectable' for females. It could be argued that boxing, a hyper masculine sport, populated at amateur and professional levels by working class males and historically seen as a mode of 'disciplining' such males, is being adopted by some young women as a way of demonstrating their toughness in an often challenging urban setting.

Within the projects, there are opportunities for females to become inside. However, what it seems is not common at projects is the consistent provision of activities which respond to the locally expressed needs of female participants, delivered by workers with whom participants feel they have a bond. During lunch at a project, when they had filled in feedback forms, we asked some of the young women what they *really* thought about a drugs education session that had just been delivered. Natasha said 'I asked the Scottish one if she'd ever taken drugs and she said she hadn't. How can she tell us about drugs when she knows jack shit?' demonstrating the value participants place on a shared position with workers.

Ingham and Hardy cite Gruneau's contention that sports are:

'far from innocent...represent a powerful affirmation of the legitimacy of existing social conditions and thereby tend to reinforce these conditions' (1984:86)

and the picture of PF in relation to females presented here is one which seems to reflect inequalities, the lack of respect, with which females must contend in wider contexts. PF for many females is not an arena of negotiation, but one in which they are restricted and encouraged to comport themselves against a standard of behaviour defined not by the cadences of their lives and the values of their localities, but by agencies who have identified their neighbourhoods and their own behaviour as problematic. Whilst there are members of staff who attempt to bridge this gap, PF is not consistently engaging, retaining and providing female participants with the opportunities for 'becoming inside' that their male counterparts are able to draw upon.

### **Positive Futures, respect and the cultural intermediary**

The mobilisation of respect as a social policy vehicle then places a considerable burden upon front-line delivery staff to 'read' the social contexts in which they are operating. However, our work suggests that the establishment of mutual respect does not come from a lowering of standards or immersion into the crowd. Rather there is a requirement on the part of the community sports worker to offer something more, to stand *out* from the crowd; to be inspirational without breaking with the world that is being engaged. In Sennett's terms locating a *cool* distance is a vital ingredient in the engagement process whereby respect is regarded as a performance of acceptance which is negotiated and played out by knowing just how close one needs to get in order to both respect and gain the respect of the other. The ideal 'cool distance' cannot be guaranteed in advance, but it needs to be neither too far, nor too close, so as not to worry the other and also not to lose the potential benefits of what a good relationship with the other can offer' (Blackshaw & Long 2005).

For one of the project workers we have worked with it is vital to draw on the mutuality of respect which in a living and ongoing relationship thrives on two way consolidation and display. So whilst he can be 'one of the lads' and 'mess around', he does so in appropriate circumstances and in the context of a wider familial or paternal role of care and ultimate position of authority.

'Yeah, I think a lot of them have a lot of respect for me, I don't know why, a lot of them show a lot of respect for me, they value my opinions on things, and they will sort of 'okay, because it's you we'll do it like this,' I'm like 'okay, go on then, as long as it works I'm fine with it.' I think that helps, I think they have that relationship with me, because I mess around, sometimes when they're training, I will join in, and I'll be like messing around, I'll pull their shirt, and I'll foul or something like that, 'but ref, it wasn't me, it wasn't me,' and they'll



mess around with me, and a lot of them I see on the estate a lot. If there's trouble, they'll come and see me and be like 'look, these boys are starting on me,' and I'll come over and say 'look, what's wrong with you? Leave them alone.' And I think they have respect for it. When a couple of them were getting into a bit of trouble and that, I was the first one in there breaking it up and they were like 'wow, look, he's ready to step in for us,' and I was like 'yeah, of course I'm going to step in for you lot.' So to me they're like, I would say they're like my kids, but they're almost as old as me, but I do feel responsibility for them, and I think they show respect for it, for me I put in the effort.'

There is though no such thing as an archetype 'community sports coach'. Rather projects employ a disparate array of staff with distinct skills and backgrounds who can nevertheless be related to a series of Weberian 'ideal types' embodying certain character positions such as the 'boss', 'buddy', 'teacher', 'joker', 'cool dude', 'geezer' and 'expert' (see Crabbe, 2005). Whilst workers may play to or utilise different aspects of these characters or even occupy a number of positions simultaneously depending on the group they are working with, each of the projects is characterised by their employment of staff from a variety of working backgrounds. However, what seems to be emerging is a stronger identification amongst participants with members of staff who are of their area than those who are not. Although the local rootedness of staff is not the only factor at work here, those staff who have a deep knowledge of the history of their areas, who have or had a similar social background to participants, that is those who have similar 'cultural capital', seem able to make stronger connections with the young people and command more 'respect'.

This point relates to the late Pierre Bourdieu's (1962) argument that all humans inherit dispositions to act in certain ways. In this sense they possess an inherited concept of society or *habitus*, which they then modify, according to their own specific local conditions and experiences. For Bourdieu then, the ability to absorb appropriate actions is the key for individuals to be at ease with themselves and others. Equally the cultures of individuals and groups are seen as the tokens by which they make 'distinctions' in order to position themselves and establish group identities (1984). The usefulness of these concepts here relates to the point that the ability of Positive Futures workers to engage with participants is connected to their own biographies and embodied selves and the degree to which they are acknowledged and valued in these locales. One project worker elucidated the point:

"So, you know, streetwise is where I'm from, you know, from ... which is local, you know, I lived in Jamaica for some time, that helps with the young people that I come into contact with that are from Jamaica and don't have, you know, don't have a clue where to start when they come here, so that has helped me to relate to them a lot. And just general kids, I can relate to them all the time, because, you know, I

understand where they're coming from and what's going down and what's not and what's in and what's out and you know. Yeah, we can always chat like normal and they don't feel like they have to be different around me they can be themselves and I can be myself around them as well. And that's how you gain a lot of respect. I think my background definitely helps, it always does. That is what I always take them back to, I show them where I'm coming from and they're like 'wow.' Well, I can do this too."

Those staff who share some of the life experiences of those they are working with, having been brought up in deprived neighbourhoods and not initially flourished in a formal educational setting, have shown the greatest commitment to giving the young people who attend activities a second chance. They seem to understand the local culture, the values in the community and how young people from the area are perceived. Avoiding authoritarianism they draw on common ground and respect as notions of mutual currency, with the hope that this leads onto feelings of trust and therefore opens up the possibility of further interaction.

In this sense, at their most effective Positive Futures projects straddle two increasingly different worlds and act as interpreter for each. They perform the role of a 'cultural intermediary', providing gateways between what are often seen as alien and mutually intimidating worlds. This concept has elsewhere been most readily applied following Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Mike Featherstone's (1991) use of the term as a way of understanding the emergence of a 'new middle class' which has helped to collapse some of the old distinctions between 'popular' and 'high' culture. However, in the context of this research the term is used in relation to a quite different cultural axis and focus on the potential for projects to help generate a class of professionals who are able to collapse the barriers between the socially 'excluded' and the 'included'.

For our work suggests a distinction between those Positive Futures projects which operate along more conventional lines which merely seek to 'translate' the young peoples ways of living and thinking into 'our' language and the more effective projects which are concerned to *understand* people on their own terms through reference to more personal experience rather than policy led language games. The cultural intermediary then becomes more than just a communicator with the wherewithal to open 'information channels between formerly sealed off areas of culture' (Featherstone, 1991: 10). Rather, they act as both an interpreter and a go-between.

However, for the political and social theorist Antonio Gramsci the role of the cultural intermediary, or what he referred to as the 'new intellectual' is necessarily broader than this if they are to realise the capacity for effecting real social change:

"The mode of being of the [cultural intermediary] can no longer consist of eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and

passions, but in active participation in practical life as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just simple orator." (Gramsci, quoted in Joll, 1977:93)

At the time of writing, whilst imprisoned by Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship, Gramsci was centrally concerned with the issue of realising the revolutionary potential of subordinated workers and was in essence talking of trade union 'shop stewards' in his discussion of the new intellectuals. In a context where work has now become far less central to the processes of contemporary identity formation, social organisation and progressive politics - programmes like Positive Futures might offer the potential for an alternative means of organising and realising the potential of socially marginalised young people by engaging in a similar orientation towards agitation and action.

The difficulty with such an emancipatory vision is that rather than social inequalities being defined through state repression and associated resistance they are increasingly navigated through the market place. Consumers are now, for the most part, seen as bound into the social by seduction – driven by the images of 'perfect', sexy bodies emerging from commercial gyms, the dreams of football superstardom peddled to youngsters at soccer summer camps and the celebrity sports stars adorning the covers of lifestyle magazines. As such rather than emancipation from want, disease, squalor, ignorance and idleness that underpinned the creation of the British Welfare State, the welfare services, and by extension social inclusion programmes, now ultimately reveal the horrors of non-participation in the consumerism of the free market.

In this sense sporting interventions are more popularly *believed* to work because they continue to be seen to provide relief from a criminogenic environment. With the 'scallies', 'chavs' and 'hoodies' residing on Britain's housing estates dismissed as 'the objective of aesthetic, not moral evaluation; as a matter of taste, not responsibility' (Bauman, 1995: 100) a romantic fiction of modernist sporting certainties is reproduced which is associated with the conventional functionalist interpretation of sports as inculcating a sense of self-discipline, routine and personal responsibility (Crabbe, 2000). Now enhanced by the seductive glamour and performativity of the celebrity version, sport represents a metaphor for the positively imbued social values that the 'healthy' *majority* claim as their own and which are wheeled out to the zones of exclusion in an effort to alter the behaviour and consciousness of 'risky' populations.

In this fashion, community sport is more easily recognized as a product of the mainstream rather than a celebration of the cultural achievements of the disadvantaged. It is seen to provide a means of educating the 'flawed' or 'illegitimate' consumers in 'our way of doing things'. It emphasises the legitimate rules of consumer society which have often proven beyond the community youth worker, probation officer and educational welfare officer who lack the cache of social and cultural capital that goes with contemporary sport. What this kind of

social intervention represents for the mainstream then is an extension of the seductive appeal of its own consumer society.

In this sense, despite the best efforts of the Positive Futures programme and individual projects, part of the attraction of these forms of community sports work to the mainstream is their lack of any ideological critique of the consumerism which contributes to the young people's ghettoisation. Indeed the offer of a 'passport' or gateway 'out' is premised upon the mediated appeal of one of the most rabidly commercialised industries on the planet. As such, the funding representatives or agents of those who are 'legitimate' members of consumer society, the socially 'included', are happy to sponsor the endeavours of community sports agencies because of their presumed capacity to 'reach' and 'manage' a constituency of the 'excluded' who, have proven increasingly troublesome for more traditional interventionist agencies.

As the government's respect agenda is rolled out, the challenge will be to ensure that its use of social development vehicles such as sport is informed more by a respect for the otherness of others than it is by the demand for respect for the guardians of iniquitous social formations.

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