

**I** *Respect and disrespect are topics that researchers and theorists have neglected, yet they are of great interest to the public and professionals in family and school settings. They are also ideal topics for both cross-cultural and mainstream developmental studies.*

## Research and Theory on Respect and Disrespect: Catching Up with the Public and Practitioners

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Respect has been called “the single most powerful ingredient in nourishing relationships and creating a just society” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000, p. 13), and yet it has been the target of very little systematic research. Parents, educators, researchers, children, and adolescents in many societies all note with alarm a growing problem of disrespect and a decline in respect for self and others. Is this disturbing trend a universal problem? To answer this question, we must study the cultural origins of respect and disrespect. How and when do respect and disrespect develop in childhood or adolescence? The answer to this question will help scientists, practitioners, and the general public understand why disrespect becomes a problem and how we can foster respect in young people.

We believe that respectful children and adolescents tend to become respectful, civil, and tolerant adults. Conversely, we assume that the origins of incivility, disrespect, intolerance, and other problems of adults are formed in childhood and adolescence. For example, lacking respect for parents or authorities, a young child may not be receptive to what one can learn at home or at school. Brought up to disrespect other people based on social status or race, a child may become prejudiced. With a lack of respect for

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This volume is dedicated with respect and gratitude to the memory of our mentor and friend, Irving Sigel.

oneself, an adolescent may develop a negative self-concept and lack respect for others. Growing up with disrespect for older people, a young adult may be unable to keep a job in the work world that requires understanding the authority of others. Respect and disrespect indeed have relevance across the entire life span, for instance, in respect for the elderly and respect for the dignity of the dying.

Respect may indeed be the glue that binds people together and holds together one's self-concept. If respect is akin to "positive regard" (Rogers, 1961), it is the belief that enables one to value other people, institutions, and traditions. And disrespect may be the agent that dissolves relationships and fosters hostility and cynicism. All of the preceding suggests to us that respect is essential in a civil society and crucial to positive human relations. Disrespect, although we will suggest later that it is not the opposite of respect, may be one reason for incivility and polarization between individuals and between groups.

Each chapter author in this volume shares a common interest in respect and disrespect as important developmental phenomena. Each also shares the view that we cannot understand development without studying the various layers of context (of which culture is only one layer) within which development takes place. This volume presents groundbreaking research on respect and disrespect in a variety of populations (American, Puerto Rican, Turkish, German, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Filipino, Thai, Japanese, and Chinese), on a variety of age groups (children, adolescents, adults), and in school, family, community, and societal contexts, as studied by specialists in the fields of psychology, family studies, sociology, and teacher education.

The chapter authors regard respect at times as an antecedent, correlate, and consequence of development. The research groups consider respect as, alternatively, a meaning system, an outcome of parent-child communication in the acculturation process, and a mediator of social competence in peer groups. In addition, this volume considers the development of disrespect, a phenomenon that has never been directly studied in previous psychological research. The chapters address four sets of questions to advance our understanding of respect and disrespect:

1. *Definition.* What are respect and disrespect? We know that these words are important to people everywhere. But as scientists, we want to know how are they related to or different from (as antecedents, outcomes, or correlates) other relevant psychological constructs, such as morality, prosocial behavior, altruism, obedience, and liking for others. Are respect and disrespect polar opposites of each other, or are they independent or dichotomous constructs? Is it possible to define these concepts in a way that generalizes across cultural groups or is appropriate for different research methodologies? We must clarify our terminology if we are to build a body of knowledge relevant to scholars across fields, including the social sciences, humanities, and applied disciplines such as nursing and educational studies.

2. *Measurement.* How should we measure respect and disrespect? Researchers with different approaches have thus far used various measures, alternatively, to emphasize behavioral, cognitive, or attitudinal manifestations of respect and disrespect. Diversity of measurement is appropriate for studying phenomena that are important across disciplines, but at some point, we must be able to compare the findings of different research groups.

3. *Context.* Are respectful and disrespectful behavior, thinking, and traits situation specific, do they depend on the giver or recipient of the respect or disrespect, and what affective variables have an interface with person and situation variables? In the course of their development, do respect and disrespect take different form or function in family versus school contexts, depending on the recipient of one's behavior or attitude? It is important to study whether respectfulness is a general personality trait or whether training to respect at home, for example, may not generalize to children's attitudes and behavior at school. Analysis of contextual factors will help to better understand which settings are most appropriate for interventions to promote respect.

4. *Culture.* What aspects of respect and disrespect vary between or within cultures, and which have cross-cultural generality? Do they have the same or different meaning to people in various subcultures or language groups? Examination of respect and disrespect in several cultural and ethnic groups may reveal both cultural specificity and universality.

## Background

The authors of three of the chapters took part in a 2005 symposium, "Respect and Valuing of Others," at the Atlanta convention of the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD). The symposium's discussant (García Coll, 2005) referred to this set of papers as "first-generation" research and cautioned that we must distinguish between respect and disrespect and other behavior of people who also happen to be respectful or disrespectful. Another characteristic of the SRCD symposium papers was that they all were based on ongoing programmatic research. In contrast, a review of previous readings on the topic of respect (prior to the work of the chapter authors) consisted usually of one paper by each respective author (for example, Dillon, 1992; Lightfoot, 2000; and Yelsma and Yelsma, 1998).

Conducting our own research at several public schools, we realized that while respect and disrespect attract little attention from developmental scientists, practitioners and the general public value the attention of researchers. These professionals face the dilemma of how to handle a decline of respect and growth of disrespect on a daily basis. We scholars need to catch up with what parents, teachers, children, and adolescents know already: respect and disrespect are fundamentally important aspects of the experiences of children and adolescents.

The 2005 SRCD symposium discussant also remarked that respect seemed more important outside mainstream American culture, but is this

true? Is respect less central to the values of middle-class American culture than elsewhere? Is it accidental that most recent research on this topic has emphasized a sociocultural viewpoint? There is no reason that first-generation research must begin in the United States. As has been pointed out by indigenous psychology (Kim, 2001), the study of non-Western cultures can reveal or redefine independent or dependent variables previously unnoticed in Western research.

### **An Agenda for Research on Respect and Disrespect**

We propose the following thematic and methodological priorities to researchers who continue to pioneer in this new topic area.

**Applied Research.** We who conduct research on the sociocultural origins of respect and disrespect need to study the work of intervention specialists. We believe that developmental studies should promote human welfare (Miller, 1969), and the subject matter of this volume is well suited to such a goal. School teachers and school administrators may appreciate our attention to the issues of respect and disrespect out of their frustration in the face of everyday disrespect. But some of us researchers operate unaware of the contributions of practitioners. In the published literature, there are already several programs that foster respect and combat disrespect in school settings. These applied programs (see Aronson, 2001; Borba, 2001; Lickona, 2004; Watson, 2003) were devised by experts in the social sciences and classroom research with an awareness of developmental issues. Respect is typically one of several outcomes fostered by their interventions. For instance, Lickona (2004) refers to respect as one of the “Fourth and Fifth Rs” along with responsibility, and Borba (2001) calls respect one of seven “essential virtues” that form the basis of morality. These authors in turn would benefit from the sociocultural perspectives of this volume’s chapter authors.

**Self-Respect.** An important construct that is not considered in this volume is self-respect, a concept that requires attention in relation to self-esteem and interpersonal respect. This volume’s chapter authors instead have focused on interpersonal respect. Nevertheless, this does not negate recognition that the intrapersonal respect is an important developmental outcome, correlate, and antecedent. As Borba (2001, p. 120) wrote about American school children, “Decrease in self-respect leads them to act disrespectfully toward others as well as themselves. . . .” Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) indicated that individuals with inflated high self-esteem may react to threats with violence or aggression. In such a case, high self-esteem leads to disrespectful acts. Such a controversy shows the need for additional research on the connections between self-respect, self-esteem, respect for others, and esteem of others.

**Disrespect.** Most of this volume is concerned with respect, whereas disrespect is usually a footnote or a secondary concern, sometimes noted only because we as editors asked the writers to “say something” about disrespect. But if we look at real-world concerns, what arouses the passions of

teachers, parents, school administrators, professors, and students in daily life may be more about disrespect than respect. We therefore give disrespect equal emphasis in our own research and hope that future research will accord disrespect the attention it deserves. Our data suggest that to children, disrespect may not simply be the absence of respect. We are, for example, interested in connections between the concepts of respect and prosocial behavior, and between disrespect and aggression.

**Respect and Disrespect as Distinct and Multifaceted.** Respect and disrespect have affective components, and one reason that we typically study these concepts separately is that people tend to think of them as opposites. Respect is usually viewed as desirable and positive, whereas disrespect often is viewed as negative and undesirable. But under some circumstances, a bully may gain respect among peers by harming others or gain self-respect because of his or her dominant status (Baumeister, Smart, and Boden, 1996). In such settings, respect is self-enhancing yet socially undesirable. In such instances respect is not an example of “positive psychology.” In addition, it is possible to respect a person’s public behavior and disrespect the same person’s private behavior. Future research on contextual influences may help us better understand the complex interplay among the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of respect and disrespect.

**Theory Building.** In addition to these concerns, researchers in this area must be concerned with theoretical issues. We need more research on the processes and origins of the development of respect and disrespect. There is no consensus on a theoretical foundation for research on respect and disrespect, although some writers cite Piaget’s work (1932, 1977). The chapters in this volume all focus on cultural issues, but they have various theoretical approaches. Some (Chapter Two) begin with a clearly stated set of respectful dimensions, while others (Chapters Four and Five) conduct research with the goal of showing how definitions themselves compare among cultural groups. Each of these research teams has explored respect as an important issue in the cultures where they did their research. This volume brings their work together on paper, but another challenge ahead is to foster communication among researchers on theoretical and methodological issues.

**Future Research on Respect and Disrespect.** Finally, we hope to see more research on respect and disrespect across a wider range of subcultures. Psychological behavior, thought, and emotion in every society and subculture are affected by cultural influences, whether one is in the minority or majority. It is most important that the future study of respect and disrespect should not be a topic reserved for researchers interested in cultural influences.

## Introduction to the Chapters

Chapter Two, by Robin Harwood, Alev Yalcinkaya, Banu Citlak, and Birgit Leyendecker, extends Harwood’s pioneering work on “proper demeanor” (Harwood, Miller, and Lucca Irizarry, 1995) to two immigrant populations.

They show that dimensions of respect first observed in Latino American culture (“proper interpersonal behavior,” respect that is “lived publicly in relation to a larger community,” and respect in family relations) are relevant to other populations and are also a useful mirror on respect across generations and between immigrant and host culture values. It is impressive that these researchers make compelling interpretations about development across generations, societies, and minority and majority cultures, all in one study.

Chapter Three, by Carl Bankston and Danielle Hidalgo, is a cultural, historical, and sociological analysis of American immigrant and refugee populations from five Southeast Asian cultures. They reveal both similarities and differences in the impact of culture-of-origin concepts of respect on cross-generational acculturation processes in school and family settings. Bankston and Hidalgo show that immigrant versus refugee status and the socioeconomic strata in which acculturation takes place are critical variables that mediate between respect and the adaptation and school achievement of children and adolescents. They report on several additional manifestations of respect (hierarchy-related status, filial piety, and physical expressions) not emphasized in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Four, Shuji Sugie and we show that the meaning and function of respect in a culture can change historically. The Japanese data are concerned chiefly with respect for teachers, parents, and the emperor of Japan. As in the previous two chapters, language in Japan is both a reflection of respect and a means of socialization of respect for others. Although Japanese culture shares its historical, religious, and ethical heritage with Chinese, Korean, and other Asian cultures, this chapter demonstrates how far Japan has diverged from its traditions in recent years. This dramatic social change is already changing the development of Japanese children and adolescents in this century with regard to respect and disrespect.

Chapter Five by Robert Cohen and his collaborators relates the development of respect to important phenomena studied in mainstream developmental psychology: peer relations and social competence. Their programmatic research shows that peer respect predicts peer relations in both the United States and China and that it appears to mediate the effects of peer liking. They also show that respect may be more of a core consideration for Chinese than American children. These authors emphasize the importance of culture for the definition, organization, and expression of respect for children’s peer relations.

Our own Chapter Six is an exploration of what respect and disrespect mean in the context of changing American society. Like Sugie, we assert that respect and disrespect mean something different now than they did in past generations. More specifically, observations of children illustrate that even American data are cultural data. We propose that the trajectory of the development of respect may differ in timing from the developmental path of disrespect. This chapter suggests that we look at the two concepts separately and also look for their developmental roots in early childhood.

Finally, Chapter Seven by Jin Li provides a summary and commentary about how the other chapters described what respect may entail, how it may function, and how it may emerge in children. She suggests that the diverse populations and methods represented in this volume are a strong point. Li relates the findings of several chapters to her own research on “ought-respect” (universal) and “affect-respect” (context-specific) and concludes that there is a need for further conceptualization and cross-cultural research on this new research topic.

This volume is relevant to the interests and research of scholars in family studies, education, nursing, and cultural area studies and developmental scientists interested in moral development, conceptual development, social and personality development, cross-cultural and intracultural comparisons, educational issues, and parent-child relationships in childhood and adolescence. We most definitely believe that this volume is a foretelling of good things to come.

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