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From Tolerance to Respect in Inter-Ethnic Contexts

Werner Schirmer, Linda Weidenstedt and Wendelin Reich

When advocates of multiculturalism promote democratic values, they often call for tolerance and respect. The pairwise usage of these concepts wrongly presumes a similar, if not the same, positively connoted meaning. This article depicts an important difference between respect and tolerance, not only in terms of semantics but also regarding the concepts' impact on social interactions. Being tolerated often means to be 'put up with' or to be grudgingly ignored. Multicultural approaches that are based on tolerance, then, may send misleading signals, as they implicitly state that members of ethnic and racial minorities are actually not welcome. We argue that respect conveys a more suitable message for successful multicultural policy programmes. Drawing on a sociological theory of respect that connects respect with the agency of the target person, we show that respect means treating people as autonomous agents whose will and interests are taken seriously and who are not looked down on.

Keywords: *Respect; Tolerance; Agency; Sociology; Multiculturalism*

Introduction

In most political and academic contexts, tolerance is considered as something positive. It is seen as a cornerstone of modern pluralist democracies that is necessary for the maintenance of good relations between people of different ethnicities, cultures and religions. For Reardon, tolerance is 'the very core of social responsibility in a pluralist society' (1997: 28). Wood and Sonleitner (1996: 15) consider tolerance as a 'worthy goal' to be pursued by the racial desegregation of schools and neighbourhoods.

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Soen (2002) calls ethnic tolerance a democratic principle and mentions it in the same breath as equality—another highly positively connoted concept. Anti-racist movements frame tolerance as one of the three important values (next to equality and solidarity) that need to be promoted to reinforce democracy in times of growing success for right-wing populist parties (Detant 2005). Abramovich observes that the ‘need for tolerance among peoples of different faiths has become more urgent’ in the ‘post-September 11 cultural landscape’ (Abramovich 2005: 295) and, as ‘UNESCO’ s Director-General [Federico Mayor Zaragoza] indicates, tolerance is integral and essential to the realization of human rights and the achievement of peace’ (Reardon 1997: 14). Garreta Bochaca speaks of tolerance as a ‘positive intercultural attitude’ (2006: 268).

The modern political understanding of tolerance has its roots in the experiences of the religious wars in Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and had substantial impact on liberal thought as it ‘allows for the peaceful coexistence of individuals and groups that hold different views and practice different ways of life within the same society’ (Pasamonik 2004: 206).

Tolerance can be perceived as a huge step forward from wars, ethnic cleansing, genocide, slavery and the physically less violent alternatives of pursuit, repression or expulsion. The main achievement of tolerance was, and still is, the regulation of the tolerator’s behaviour toward the tolerated.

However, the widespread habit of praising tolerance is met with reservation by some authors. Brown complains, for example, that ‘tolerance is uncritically promoted across a wide range of venues and for a wide range of purposes’ (Brown 2008: 2). And, while admitting that tolerance is ‘an attractive idea in the philosophy and policy of liberalism’, Pasamonik observes that it ‘may lose much of its charm when applied in a specified context. It may be neither a positive value nor a universal or primordial one, even in a liberal society’ (Pasamonik 2004: 206).

As we show in this article, a closer look at the etymological meaning(s) of tolerance and its political implications reveals much-less-positive properties and connotations than the frequent promotion of the concept might suggest. We argue that the notion of tolerance may send misleading signals, as it has a negative connotation of ‘putting up with’ something one actually dislikes. As pointed out by Scanlon, tolerance does not suffice as a remedy against ethnic or racial prejudice (Scanlon 2006: 187). Multicultural approaches built on tolerance contribute to and maintain a power imbalance between those who tolerate, for example state authorities, and those who ‘have to be’ tolerated, for example ethnic minorities.

We suggest that multicultural approaches would profit from focusing on respect, instead. In contrast to tolerance, the notion of ‘respect’ appears not only to have more positive associations (see De Cremer and Mulder 2007; Sennett 2004); respect is also a more adequate way in which to address the target groups. Yet with respect being another rather unclear concept, it is necessary to gain clarity as to a definition. Our argument draws upon a sociological theory of respect, as developed by Reich and Schirmer (2009), which links the normative concept of respect to the sociological

concept of agency. Simply put, while tolerating a person with minority background means at best to ignore her or grudgingly accept her presence, respecting her means to treat her as a person endowed with agency that 'makes a difference'. We illustrate the practical implications of this sociological approach to respect with our own data from three corpora.¹

Limits of Tolerance

Tolerance has different meanings in different languages, historic and cultural traditions and political ideologies (Brown 2008: 3; Reardon 1997: 32) and even within different contexts. Reardon sees no problem when observing that 'despite these nuances of meaning, [...] there is a common recognition that tolerance is a necessity both of civil society and for the very survival of humanity' (1997: 32). Yet most of the languages Reardon refers to share a common Latin origin for the word tolerance. In Latin, *tolerare* means 'suffering', 'bearing', and 'putting up with' (Ebach 2004: 15). These words indicate a 'deprecating attitude' toward the object of toleration which is something/someone that is not (wholly) approved of (Carey 2000: 45). For Fitzgerald, tolerance 'carries echoes of at best grudging acceptance, and at worst ill-disguised hostility' (2000: 13), and Oberdiek (2001: 38) speaks of tolerance as a 'grudging virtue': 'We tolerate what we disapprove, what we wish were otherwise, what we think distasteful, disgusting, or morally deplorable'. Brown notes that the Oxford English Dictionary offers three ways of defining tolerance: as 'enduring', 'licensing' and 'indulging' (2008: 26). All these connotations of tolerance imply that we actually do not like, appreciate or accept the presence of the object of tolerance in our environment (Van Quaquebeke *et al.* 2007: 188), be it people, their habits and cultural characteristics or their opinions.

Because tolerators take risks at high stakes (Scanlon 2006: 192) when tolerating someone/something they actually disapprove of, they tend to regard themselves as morally superior—not only towards the intolerant, who act out their feelings of disapproval, but also towards the very object of tolerance. By tolerating, they draw a line between the norm and the deviant that is in need of tolerance. After all, if the tolerated were not deviant from a normative order, they would not need to be tolerated in the first place, as Brown points out:

Tolerance is generally conferred by those who do not require it on those who do; it arises within and codifies a normative order in which those who deviate from rather than conform to the norms are eligible for tolerance. [...] When the heterosexual tolerates the homosexual, when Christians tolerate Muslims in the West, not only do the first terms *not* require tolerance but their standing as that which confers tolerance establishes their superiority over that which is said to require tolerance (2008: 186; emphasis in original).

Western liberal democracies adorn themselves with being tolerant towards minorities of all kinds (see Zizek 2008), but—whatever the (good) intention behind it—tolerance

communicatively contributes to the structural hierarchical order between ‘majority/normative/tolerator and minority/deviant/tolerated’ (Lewis 2005: 540). Only the powerful ethnic majority has ‘the right to establish the threshold of tolerance—that is, to decide what behaviour or attitude will be tolerated and who the “other” is toward whom tolerance will be practiced’ (Mirchandani and Tastsoglou 2000: 58). Hage pointed out that ‘[t]olerance reproduces the unequal distribution of governmental belonging within the nation’ because the tolerators ‘have greater spatial power within the nation than others’ (Hage 2001: 246, 248 emphasis removed). Multicultural discourses essentially build on a ‘unidirectional’ understanding of tolerance that ‘is premised on a majority–minority model whereby the majority group tolerates the minority’, as Mirchandani and Tastsoglou (2000: 56) diagnose. Accordingly, they argue that toleration, ‘celebrated as a core feature of the Canadian national identity’, entrenches an ‘opposition between a national “self”, and groups or individuals constructed as “other”’ (2000: 49). As Lewis points out, ‘one significant social figure articulating this space of tolerance, governance and representation is that of “the immigrant”’ (2005: 540). The ‘immigrant’ is often represented as a problematic and deviant figure connected to low education, poverty and crime (see Trondman 2006). To be barely tolerated can be emotionally uncomfortable, as Oberdiek emphasises:

The barely tolerated must be constantly alert to the moods and policy swings of the barely tolerant, for they know that they avoid serious trouble only at their sufferance. This is why the tolerated often have a finer sense of the psychology of the barely tolerant than the barely tolerant do of themselves. It is an essential survival skill (2001: 29).

Living in pluralist democratic nations that—according to their self-descriptions—are committed to human rights, equality of opportunities and social inclusion, people with diverging ethnic and cultural backgrounds are likely to expect more than mere tolerance. Although tolerance might be a required minimum of social interaction, stagnancy on that level involves a life without dignity, as a young Palestinian woman living in Sweden expresses:

If I’m in town and go into a store, then I’m a *svartskalle* [literally black head, a derogatory slang term in Swedish encompassing all non-Swedes or immigrants/minorities of colour]. I can’t help it. I’m just a *svartskalle*. They stare at you till you leave. They think you’ve stolen clothes or something. [...] Here you live without any dignity. Having food and not freezing to death aren’t enough. You want to live like a human being. You want to live with a sense of dignity (Trondman 2006: 441).

This young woman gets reminded of her ‘otherness’ on an everyday basis. People might not attack her, shout derogatory terms at her or commit other overtly racist actions, but they let her feel that she is not Swedish. While she would like to live a normal life, this becomes impossible when she is merely tolerated. Not only do

people want to be more than tolerated, they would not want to be in need of tolerance in the first place. To be tolerated means to be inferior, powerless and deviant. Tolerance is no more than 'a way to manage the presence of the undesirable, the tasteless, the faulty—even the revolting, repugnant, or vile'. In that sense, it is no solution to difficulties in multi-ethnic encounters but 'only a strategy for coping' (Brown 2008: 25). Consequently, tolerance 'poses a little challenge to the (racist) status quo', as Mirchandani and Tastsoglou put it (2000: 49). As tolerance obviously is not enough (see also Van Quaquebeke *et al.* 2007: 185), critics of tolerance suggest a 'move beyond tolerance and toleration to respect and positive appreciation of deep differences, to recognise and celebrate difference' (Oberdiek 2001: 5).

Respect Rather Than Tolerance

Certainly, difference and diversity do not force people to embrace other cultural habits and opposing opinions while abandoning one's own (see van Leeuwen 2008). Given the many violent ethnic conflicts in various parts of the world, tolerance is often already a big step. Sometimes, mutual tolerance might be as good as it can get. That becomes especially crucial when different values conflict with each other—e.g. gender equality and expression of religious identity.² After all, disagreement is ubiquitous in social life, and not only among people with different backgrounds. Neither does it need to lead to negative prejudice nor have to break out into open conflict. Scanlon suggests that prevailing disagreements between co-existing groups should better be contained '*within a framework of mutual respect*' (Scanlon 2006: 193; emphasis added). While historically rather a symbol for social order (see Whitman 2000), respect received its political significance for ethnic and racial relations through the social struggles of African Americans, as well as through women's and homosexual movements. Nowadays, respect is seen as a 'salient and important relational ingredient in social interactions' (De Cremer and Tyler 2005: 133) that 'structures our lives in very meaningful ways' (Middleton 2004: 236). Shwalb and Shwalb (2006: 2) call it 'the glue that binds people together' and De Cremer and Mulder (2007: 443) speak of respect as 'a moral building stone or even gatekeeper for a moral and humanitarian community'. These quotations emphasise the unifying and community-building perceptions of respect, marking a big contrast to the notion of tolerance which, as we have seen, rather divides majorities and minorities into a hierarchical relation of insiders and outsiders.³

Although a key ingredient of any social relation, respect becomes the most significant for marginalised individuals, individuals of lower status and individuals with habits and practices deviating from societal norms. Often, they are shown implicitly or explicitly that their presence is tolerated but not appreciated, that they were not asked to be there and now have to be 'coped with'. Respect becomes an issue for these individuals for the reason that they are deprived of it (Buttny and Williams 2000: 122; Leary *et al.* 2005). A young immigrant in Sweden of Turkish

background complains about the dismissive attitude of Swedish majority individuals he encounters:

They look down at one, as if they were the best people in the world and we were crap. They don't have any respect for us immigrants, you know. They don't even show respect to our parents who are older than they are and know more about life than those damn ***** (from Kamali 1999: 74; our translation from Swedish).

Here, again, this man notices that the Swedish majority do not treat him as an equal but as an inferior. The same goes for his parents who, according to him, deserve respect because they have achieved more than many other people and have gathered a stock of valuable experience in life that young Swedish people are lacking. In line with this young man's account, Buttny and Williams' analysis of focus groups with American college students discussing a documentary on racism showed that the issue of respect became important for ethnic/racial groups suffering a lower social status, namely African-Americans and Latinos. In contrast, none of the White respondents seemed to set a greater store by it, presumably because the latter can take respectful treatment for granted (Buttny and Williams 2000: 111, 121) whereas the former have to fight for respect on most occasions. In one of our field interviews conducted in Sweden (Corpus B #FI U 3), an elderly couple who emigrated from Chile confirmed the experience of having to fight for respect:

- Woman:* At work you have to push more than 100 per cent in order to be recognised, that you are an educated person and that you can accomplish your job. Here, you have to assert yourself all the time, here you have to work more than others do to prove yourself.
- Man:* That is true especially in the labour market, especially for us who come from other countries, so it's all the time to show what we can do, all the time. That is quite strenuous and exhausting.

Many immigrants have this experience of never really being good enough. Like these two Chileans, they feel that they have to perform more than natives in order to be taken seriously as fully fledged and competent co-workers and, again, they go through these experiences although (or, rather, *because*) they are tolerated. For well-integrated people the line between tolerance and respect might be thin or not exist at all. For underprivileged minorities, however, it matters. In one of our focus groups on tolerance and respect in ethnic relations which we conducted in Sweden (Corpus A #Tol 6), participants emphasised the shortcomings of the former in light of the latter:

- Lina:* To tolerate, well, I would interpret that as saying 'OK, I put up with you'.
- Malin:* Yes.
- Erik:* Exactly.
- Lina:* [imitating disdain] Yeah thanks.
- Moderator:* Tolerance is not that good then?

- Samira:* Respect is more positively charged, while tolerance is more negatively charged. If you respect somebody, you show that you have good will. Tolerating somebody then is for ...
- Lina:* ... I put up ...
- Samira:* Exactly. I believe that respect is more positively charged.
- Lina:* But respect could also be a little more, that I say 'You're good', while tolerating is more like saying 'It is me who is good, I put up with you'.
- Samira:* Exactly, you raise yourself.
- Lina:* And respect means that she's good and to tolerate is more like saying that I'm so strong so I put up with you.

The participants of this and other focus groups are aware of the rather negative meanings of 'tolerance' and 'to tolerate'. They criticise the aspect of inequality inherent in tolerance, the presumed inferiority of the tolerated and their attributed negative characteristics which stand in clear difference to 'respect'.

Not very helpful in that specific regard are well-meant academic and educational attempts to promote tolerance and define it by using it interchangeably with—among others—the concept of respect. Using respect and tolerance as synonyms confuses rather than enlightens, as the following three examples show: 'Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human' (from the UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance from 1995, quoted in Reardon 1997: 132), 'Tolerance—i.e. respect for diversity—is often viewed as a distinctive feature of modern Western societies' (Corneo and Olivier 2009: 691) and 'The concept of tolerance implies respect for different identities, values and lifestyles, along racial-ethnic, religious, class, gender, sexuality and ability lines' (Bryan and Vavrus 2005: 185). All these definitions of tolerance are problematic because they use respect as the *definiens* which rather blurs the differences.⁴ In the following sections, we argue that respect has properties that go beyond those of tolerance and that, therefore, multicultural approaches become more powerful when conveying respect instead.

Respect in the Literature

While respect has drawn increasing attention in sociological, social-psychological and philosophical research in recent years (De Cremer 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot 1999; Middleton 2004; Miller 2001; Sennett 2004), it has only played a minor role in the field of ethnic and racial research thus far. However, there are some exceptions worth mentioning, such as the anthology on respect in intercultural contexts edited by Shwalb and Shwalb (2006), Bailey's (2000) interactional analyses of perceived disrespect in intercultural encounters between Korean-Americans and African-Americans, and Buttny and Williams' (2000) analysis of the discursive uses of respect in interracial contacts. Furthermore, a recurring topic is respect at the intersection of race/ethnicity and masculinity, as shown in the ethnographic studies by Anderson (1999) and Bourgois (2003) of gang life in the inner city,

Duneier's (1992) study on African-American communities of respect and Noble's (2007) study on second-generation Arab and Muslim immigrants in Australia.

Although many authors have followed or anticipated Sennett's suggestion to define more clearly what respect is (Sennett 2004: 49), there is very little consensus on 'what deserves respect and how respect should be demonstrated in practice' (Jones 2002). Not surprisingly, the literature offers different types, kinds, dimensions and themes of respect.

While Darwall (1995), Butler and Drake (2007) and Middleton (2004) each distinguish between different *kinds of respect* (appraisal vs. recognition in Darwall, respect-as-esteem and respect-as-consideration in Butler and Drake, and status respect, merit respect and human respect in Middleton), Lawrence-Lightfoot (1999) classifies *six qualities of respect* (empowerment, healing, dialogue, curiosity, self-respect and attention). Frei and Shaver (2002) and Langdon (2007) build upon Lawrence-Lightfoot's work when empirically deriving four *themes of respect*: social power, social rules, caring, and equality and accepting differences. Langdon contributes a fifth theme: 'personal attributes' (2007: 470, 480).

Whereas such conceptualisations of respect tend to be too comprehensive, others tend to be too selective when focusing on neighbouring concepts such as status (Tyler and Blader 2002), esteem (Laschinger 2004; Smith and Tyler 1997) or evaluation (Fuller *et al.* 2006). Yet others use operationalisations that depart from very different starting points regarding the nature of respect. For example, Branscombe *et al.* (2002), Ellemers *et al.* (2004) and Spears *et al.* (2005) operationalise their measure of respect on the basis of *liking* whereas the dissimilarity of respect and liking has been reflected quite extensively in the literature (Buttny and Williams 2000; Fiske *et al.* 1999; Jones 2002; Tannen 2001).⁵ Some authors define respect as a *moral experience* (Honneth 2007) or an *attitude* (Frei and Shaver 2002; Liebling and Arnold 2005; Van Quaquebeke *et al.* 2007), while others de-emphasise this aspect and direct the focus on the *relational, behavioural or social aspects* of respect instead (Bailey 2000; Buttny and Williams 2000; Harré 1993; Jones 2002). Colwell (2007) points out that attitudes need to be distinguished from behaviour. His study showed that people might have disrespectful attitudes but they can still behave respectfully (civility) and *vice versa* (perfunctory distance).

Respect and Agency

This rather blurry state on the landscape of respect theory is certainly due to the complexity and multidimensionality of the phenomenon of respect itself. Against that background, we want to introduce a sociological conceptualisation of respect developed by Reich and Schirmer (2009) which sheds light on a dimension of it that hitherto has not been theorised. Drawing on the work of Goffman (1983) and Luhmann (1995), Reich and Schirmer take into account the difference between mental states (such as emotions, perceptions and attitudes) and social events (such as behaviour, actions, communication). They concentrate on the social aspects of

respect and propose a theory of the 'act of showing respect or disrespect' (2009: 4). Their main theoretical contribution is to link respect to the respected person's ascribed *agency*.⁶ A person's behaviour directed towards another person is respectful when *he treats her as an agent who makes a difference to him*.⁷ Showing respect to a person means that the agency of the respectee becomes relevant. The respecifier submits to the agency of the respectee, that is, according to the specific difference she makes to him. The submission of the respecifier's behaviour for the respectee's sake implies an increase of her agency and a limitation of his. In other words, agency in social interactions is distributed in a zero-sum manner. To take one example that was frequently mentioned in research studies, in an ordered interaction only one person can speak at a time; the other has to listen (or at least be quiet). When one person is speaking, the respectful conversation partner would let her speak until she has finished (her agency +) while he keeps silent (his agency -). Cutting her off would be disrespectful, as this implies asserting his agency at her cost. A teacher who grants his students some influence on the shape of the lessons gives them creative elbowroom at his expense but treats them respectfully as agents whose wishes and interests matter for the course of the class (see the example by Fuller 2004). It is important to stress that the respecifier's submission is only temporary, only valid in the concrete situation, and does not have determining implications for other situations. With the focus on concrete actions, nothing is said about subsequent reactions, expectations of reciprocity etc. We return to this point later in this section.

While Reich and Schirmer's theoretical decision of connecting respect with agency was not reflected in the four (five, respectively) 'themes' found by Frei and Shaver and by Langdon, it is supported by empirical approaches that ask more specifically for *situations of (dis)respectful treatments* (for example Buttner 2004; Jones 2002; Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff 2009). In these studies, respondents were asked to describe concrete personally experienced situations and behaviours that they connected to respect. Jones' study of individual and focus-group interviews put forward that the 'key to "respect" was being listened to, being given time and having your experiences, ideas and views taken seriously and valued' (Jones 2002: 348). Respect was defined as 'being able to talk without being laughed at'; 'having space to get your point across'; 'being valued, shown understanding and consideration' (2002: 349). Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff (2009) examined respectful leadership and found, among others, the following definitions: 'trusts my ability to independently and self-reliantly perform well'; 'expresses criticism in an objective and constructive way'; 'recognises me as a full-fledged counterpart'; 'shows a genuine interest in my opinions and assessments'; 'provides me with any information that is relevant to me'; and 'takes me and my work seriously' (Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff 2009: 349). In her study on respectful teaching, Buttner found that students connected respect to being asked for their opinions, having their responses taken into account in making decisions, and their concerns listened to (Buttner 2004: 324). Even this array of solutions to the puzzle of what respect is might seem untidy at first sight but, equipped with Reich and Schirmer's (2009) theory of respect, one can see

that there is a common denominator in all the accounts given by the respondents—the *respectee's agency*.

In order to catch the respectee's expectation to be treated as an agent, Reich and Schirmer suggest the term *agential claim* (2009: 11). This concept is more precise than agency since it does justice to the fact that people can be agents in several, distinct regards. For example, they can claim agential freedom over their physical integrity, that is, the claim not to be touched or approached against their will. The same is true for their emotional state (insult) or their social integrity (loss of face). Respect and agential claims are both interactional phenomena (Reich and Schirmer 2009). Respect is shown (or denied) by communicative acts that take place in interactions. As communicative acts, (dis)respectful behaviour is embedded in a web of preceding and anticipated communicative events, structured by a set of mutually shared expectations that differ from situation to situation. An educational interaction differs strongly from religious, romantic or legal interactions with regard to role relations, agential claims and expectations. Consequently, whether a concrete behaviour is considered (dis)respectful in a concrete interaction system depends on the social context in which it takes place, the definition of the situation and the idiosyncratic properties of the participating individuals. One and the same behaviour can be regarded as respectful in one situation (or by one person) while disrespectful in (by) another depending on whether an agential claim of the respectee was submitted to or defied. For example, it counts as disrespectful to push away a passerby because it violates the passerby's claim to have agency over her body and physical integrity. However, the very same act could be considered more acceptable if it was by a paramedic rushing to the scene of an accident. In this emergency situation, the pedestrian's claim has lower importance than the doctor's, rendering the act less disrespectful.

People can raise many claims to be treated as agents over their body, feelings and social aspects of the situations they find themselves in, but it is another question whether these claims are socially expectable and considered justified. Certain behaviour is only considered disrespectful if it violates an agential claim of the respectee that is seen as *legitimate* in the *current* situation. Cultural norms and role expectations (especially within organisations) set the most important frames for legitimacy. Hence, Reich and Schirmer's (2009) conception of respectful behaviour is specified as the submission to *currently legitimate agential claims* of the respectee. Disrespect is then defined as the defiance of the respectee's currently legitimate agential claims.

Applications of the Theory: Respect in Ethnic Relations

If we recall the implications of tolerance with its aversive and disempowering components, a striking qualitative difference between respecting someone and tolerating someone can be observed. Therefore, the following paragraphs will demonstrate how the negative aspects of merely tolerating people in ethnic relations

can be overcome by respectful behaviour. The selected examples serve for illustrative purposes only and do not claim to make statements beyond that. Using the terminology of the preceding section, respecting ethnic minorities implies submission to their currently legitimate agential claims; defying them means, accordingly, to act disrespectfully. We present two instances of disrespectful behaviour from our own data to illustrate what defiance of one's currently legitimate agential claims means. The first excerpt is from an interview with Charmaine, an African-American college student from Southern California (Corpus C, interview #OC14). She described an incident of racism on campus that shows the critical difference between tolerance and respect.

[P]eople were making noise, and calling names and remarks when we all [African-American students] were just in there, just watching a movie, and we heard people, like, just talking smack about us. It was white people basically. And the housing community didn't do anything. They just said 'Oh just keep your doors closed'. They didn't send an email, saying that whoever is doing that needs to stop, they are covering up so much stuff like that. Even the [community house for] Hispanic people, they had the same complaint and they still wouldn't do anything about it. So stuff like that makes me wonder [...] they still have the aspect of the White race is mainly superior, you don't wanna say, it doesn't wanna be in the air, but being there, that's kind of their morals.

Like other ethnic and racial groups, African-Americans and Latino-Americans have their own community houses on the campus area. But being communities of minority status, they suffer once in a while from other groups—white students in this case—making racist-motivated trouble. That itself is already a defiance of legitimate agential claims, such as the claim to be left in peace and the claim of not being treated disparagingly due to ethnic or racial belonging. However, this excerpt is of special interest because it shows that another actor—the housing community—also defied an important legitimate agential claim of the African-American students. When being exposed to racist harassment in such a situation, it is certainly justified of them to expect help from the authority in charge. But the housing community's failure to initiate measures against the troublemakers and the suggestion that the students simply close the doors show that the object of the protest is not taken seriously as a problem. This reaction portrays the African-American students as a weak and ignorable group. It demonstrates that the housing community neither fears that the group will potentially file a complaint with the higher authorities and call for their rights to be respected, nor cares about the group's disappointments. Such behaviour is disrespectful because it makes the African-American students look like non-agents who have no regardable influence, whose feelings and demands do not make any actions by the housing community necessary. The fact that similar incidents had happened before only aggravates the interviewee's suspicion that the well-being and opinions of ethnic and racial minorities do not matter to the housing community. The latter is tolerant (as opposed to intolerant) toward minorities because they are provided with community houses and thus are 'allowed' on campus. But by defying

the minorities' agential claims, the housing community certainly did not show respect. It is important to understand that our respect analysis only focuses on the behaviour of the housing community. Nothing is said about whether the African-American community actually *is* a strong agent, who might, for instance, mobilise other ethnic groups and organise a successful protest to a higher authority, thereby forcing the housing community to a policy change. The housing community's low-agency portrait of the African-Americans might not be shared at all by other observers.

The next excerpt presents a statement by Naima, participant in one of our focus groups (Corpus A #Tol1). She is a 22-year-old student who was born and has lived most of her life in Sweden, and who has a parent with African roots. Preceding this excerpt, Stina, another participant in the group, talked about how disrespectful telling jokes can be when the identities of individuals present are hurt. Naima follows up by reporting a personal experience:

Naima: Exactly like the situation you [Stina] mentioned, where people make jokes or something and then they apologise. I hung out with a bunch of people when some of them were making jokes and (...) used the word 'Negro' in the joke, and then immediately, before seeing how I reacted, say 'Oh sorry, sorry Naima', well yeah. And then I almost feel that I'm hurt more by this, because (...) then I am defined as a 'Negro', because otherwise they wouldn't say 'Oh sorry, don't feel hurt' and then it's getting totally wrong for I would rather have taken it if they used the word 'Negro' in this joke without even thinking about me being there. Then it would have been like they don't mean to say that *I'm* a 'Negro'. But if they turn towards me, anyway, and say 'Sorry', then it's like you are one, 'Sorry that I said it', like, 'I shouldn't think out loud'. That is so difficult when you should ask for forgiveness and ...

Stina: ... Yes, because they only say it because they don't want to hurt you like that.

Naima: Yes, but then it gets so wrong. At the same time I believe that if you, you notice that someone's sad or that someone says 'No you're treating me wrong', then it is the time to apologise but one is like, maybe unconsciously, defining someone like something and by apologising it gets worse.

According to Naima, people's belated awareness of their verbal mistake and their communicated regret directed at her make things even worse. The very act of the apology reveals that other people have racist attitudes. Apologising for the *faux pas* of using an outdated and derogatory term for people of colour not only renders Naima's skin colour communicatively relevant, but also makes her a 'racially marked subject' (Fortier 2005: 573), places her in the out-group and, thereby, imposes an identity of being racially deviant upon her against her will. This is disrespectful because it defies Naima's legitimate agential claim to choosing her (racial) identity on her own, for example the identity of being Swedish or of being an equal member of the group like the others. Although an expression of respect on many other occasions (Liebling and

Arnold 2005; Miller 2001), the apology implies a special treatment of Naima because of her skin colour. Although tolerated, Naima cannot feel fully respected.

Conclusion

Whether tolerance appears as positive or negative depends on the frame of reference. If one delimits it from intolerance (e.g. racism, fundamentalism, chauvinism etc.), tolerance appears as a big step forward towards peaceful co-existence. Sometimes, this might be the most that can be expected. Yet in other situations—specifically in light of immigration realities in the advanced countries of North America, the Asia-Pacific and Europe, where ethnic violence is condemned and racism fought—minorities perceive tolerance as not enough. It makes them feel deviant, unable to transgress the ‘glass ceiling’ of the majority population. For them, being tolerated means to be put up with or, at best, to be grudgingly ignored. Their frame of reference is the opposition of tolerance to respect, not to intolerance.

Multicultural approaches that are based on the concept of tolerance or have the promotion of tolerance on their agenda run the risk of implicitly stating that their target clients, members of ethnic and racial minorities, are actually not welcome. The role of the state is rather ambiguous here. It regulates the potentially problematic behaviour of its majority citizens while, at the same time—being tolerator—establishes (and maintains) a power hierarchy in which the tolerated end up in a subordinate position.⁸ Accordingly, subjects of tolerance are quite critical towards the concept and its practical implications.

The concept of respect, by contrast, has properties that are far more appreciated by its recipients, and it therefore sends a more suitable message from multicultural policy programmes to its recipients. Drawing on a theory of respect by Reich and Schirmer (2009), we have pointed out that a person, when receiving respect, is treated as an autonomous agent whose will and interests are taken seriously and who is not looked down on. This understanding⁹ of respectful behaviour makes it necessary to respond to the respectee’s legitimate agential claims, and, to an appropriate extent, also to submit to them.

Although we share Winant’s scepticism about completely transcending race (Winant 2000: 183), clarifying the two concepts’ meanings and shifting attention from tolerance to respect might be the starting point for less friction within ethnic relations. Multicultural policy approaches can gain from this insight by recognising members of minorities as agents. By replacing tolerance with respect, they refrain from sending signals like ‘You’re actually not welcome’ but, rather, communicate ‘You matter, we regard you as people with interests, beliefs and emotions which have to be taken into account’. The message is powerful (Oberdiek 2001: 20) but is only a first step. The move from tolerance to respect would also require policy changes. In contrast to tolerant policy, respectful policy does not simply decide paternalistically over people’s heads and throw demands at them. It listens and offers elbow-room and influence; in sum, it treats people as agents. Of course, the latter cannot be

without conditions attached. In concrete situations, it would have to be decided individually who can get which possibilities and influence. The latter would depend on which agential claims can be agreed on to be legitimate. The aim of this article was to point out the difference between tolerance and respect. An important task for future research is the examination of causal factors to determine why respect is withheld from certain people, in which situations and by what kinds of people or institution/organisation.

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Notes

- [1] *Corpus A*: 12 video-recorded focus-group discussions on tolerance and respect in ethnic relations, conducted in Sweden in 2009. *Corpus B*: 51 video-recorded in-field interviews on respect in everyday life, conducted in Sweden in 2007. *Corpus C*: 17 audio-recorded in-depth interviews on respect and disrespect in ethnic relations, conducted in Southern California in 2008. Participants were self-identified members of ethnic or racial minorities.
- [2] We thank the anonymous *JEMS* reviewers for pointing out these aspects of tolerance.
- [3] It is important to make clear that not every understanding of respect shares this positive meaning. Especially in the context of inner-city gangs, respect often is connected with fear and intimidation, and sometimes becomes a scarce good that protects from assault (see Anderson 1999; Bourgois 2003). We again thank one of the reviewers for pointing this out.
- [4] Everyday usage of the word 'tolerance' sometimes shares this positive connotation, but it is important to see that this is the perspective of the tolerator. When people describe themselves as tolerant they often do so to make the rather defensive statement that they are not racists, homophobes, religious fundamentalists etc. When, however, somebody is described as tolerated or tolerable, the negative connotation of the etymology shines through.
- [5] While being aware of this distinction, Spears *et al.* (2005) make use of a concept with the name 'liking-based respect', which is difficult to differentiate from 'liking'.
- [6] The term 'ascribed' agency refers to agency that is attributed to people through communication (see Fuchs 2001; Luhmann 1995; Meyer and Jepperson 2000). This can happen relatively independently from their factual agency. In this regard, agency is not a part of the binary pair agency/structure but of agency/*non-agency*.
- [7] For reasons of readability, we refer to the respectful person as 'him' and to the respected person as 'her'. Whereas, in the examples and illustrations, we concentrate mostly on individuals, the theory applies to the same extent to groups and collective actors; see, for example, the second application in the next section.
- [8] Our gratitude to one of the reviewers for this hint.
- [9] As stated earlier, there are other understandings of respect which might come to different conclusions.

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