

# The folk concept of respect

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Wendelin Reich ([wendelin.reich@soc.uu.se](mailto:wendelin.reich@soc.uu.se))

*Uppsala University, Department of Sociology*

*University of Cambridge, Department of Sociology*

Werner Schirmer ([werner.schirmer@soc.uu.se](mailto:werner.schirmer@soc.uu.se))

*Uppsala University, Department of Sociology*

Linda Hamann ([linda.hamann@soc.uu.se](mailto:linda.hamann@soc.uu.se))

*Uppsala University, Department of Sociology*

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## Abstract

Social theorists view respect as an important property of positive social relations, but their definitions of the term are often vague and controversial. The following study is a part of a larger project that aims to develop a detailed, analytically useful conception of respect by systematically investigating how people in everyday life interpret the term. Three studies involving cumulatively  $n=870$  participants in Sweden and Southern Germany investigated the 'folk concept of respect'. Study 1 shows that people dissociate respect from consideration insofar as the former applies chiefly to forms of behavior which treat the other as an agent, as opposed to a (valuable) object. Study 2 demonstrates that such treatment must itself be active or agential, thus dissociating respect from tolerance. Study 3 shows that people are sensitive to the legitimacy of the other's claim to respect, which means that they are unwilling to associate disrespect with situations in which a person's non-legitimate claims to agential treatment have been violated. Taken together, the three studies confirm a tight connection between the folk concept of respect and the social scientific notion of agency.

Social science needs theoretical concepts, and many of the ones it uses are adaptations of 'folk concepts' – words and expressions found in everyday language, employed in people's attempts to make sense of their social experiences. But concepts are rarely understood consensually by a population of users, be it scientific or non-scientific. Tensions may also exist between scientific and ordinary uses. Scholars often redefine everyday terms with the intent of making them analytically sharper or connecting them to a specific theory. All too frequently, they then move on to apply their new mintings without explaining that they have restamped old coins, and that users of the old currency might not recognize the new one.

Omissions of this kind have hampered social scientific progress in more than one situation. The case of the concept of 'equality' may serve as an illustration because a recent study of its twisted semantic career (Harris 2006) shows just how problematic a mismatch between academic and folk concepts can be. Harris argues that researchers of (marital, racial etc.) inequality often rely on folk ideas associated with this word in order to collect survey data. He demonstrates that the data are then reinterpreted in order to test hypotheses that rely on academic constructions of inequality which a majority of research subjects might not necessarily endorse (see also Reich and Michailakis 2005b). A long range of other social scientific concepts – class, prejudice, the self, culture, recognition, diversity, among others – has been subject to fierce scholarly debate, and partly so because academic notions do not always resonate with people's (including other researchers') everyday intuitions.

The present article is part of a larger research project on the concept of *respect*, a project that aspires to promote the term within the sociological and social psychological mainstream and demonstrate its utility for empirical research. In recent years, the notion of respect has experienced a remarkable public revitalization (de Cremer and Mulder 2007; Wolf 2008), spearheading governmental and local campaigns in the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands and other countries. Perhaps due to the increasing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of national populations, respect has come to

be seen as a least common denominator of 'good' social relations. It is also an attractive theoretical term for social scientific analysis, as it appears to describe a very basic type of relationship between individuals (Margalit 1996; Sennett 2003; Honneth 2007).

However, just *what* this relationship amounts to continues to be an issue of fundamental scholarly debate (Sennett 2003: 49) – and, unfortunately, not the kind of debate to which most scientific concepts are regularly subjected anyway, but the kind in which researchers often do not agree on what they disagree (Dillon 2007), or overlook that their theoretical conceptions are incompatible. In the empirical literature, different authors may prioritize different aspects in their operationalizations of respect, such as: equality / mutuality (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1999; McDowell 2007: 284), belonging (de Cremer and Tyler 2005), admiration (Parse 2006), self-esteem (Huo and Molina 2006) or caring / supportiveness (Hendrick and Hendrick 2006). Yet, to our minds, no common core of necessary aspects can be distilled from a survey of the existing literature – other than the vague idea that respect refers to interpersonal conduct which is somehow 'positive'.

The broad scope of the project in which we are involved meant that we felt forced to proceed along a different, more systematic route. Rather than creating yet another aprioristic definition of respect, or, on the opposite side, taking the everyday intuitions of our informants at face value (cf. Frei and Shaver 2002; Langdon 2007), we decided to develop and test a number of hypotheses about the folk concept of respect. In this paper, we report on three studies in which we used rating experiments to better understand what an average person means when he or she says that 'X respects Y' or that 'X behaved disrespectfully towards Y'.

## **Overview of the studies**

In this section, we explain our methodological approach as well as our choice of informants. The notion of 'folk concept' has been used in a small number of previous experimental investigations (see especially Malle and Knobe 1997; Knobe 2006). What distinguishes folk from academic concepts is

not so much their degree of clarity or elaboration, but the fact that the former must be understood as population averages. Both folk and academic concepts are therefore, in a strict sense, social scientific constructs, with one being a statistical, the other a definitional abstraction.

The first step in our investigation of the folk concept of respect was to conduct a prestudy based on field interviews in public settings. These allowed us to generate hypotheses which were then tested in three controlled, experimental studies. Similar to Malle and Knobe, our experiments employ a manipulated-story paradigm in which different subjects are presented with different versions of brief stories that describe well-defined social encounters. Subjects are then asked to rate the degree of respectfulness / disrespectfulness of the focal behavior. However, Studies 1 and 2 also introduce a methodological refinement. A specific problem associated with all concepts, whether folk or academic, is that they are inherently relational. Linguists have known at least since Saussure (1915) that words are arbitrary signifiers, characterizable only in virtue of their position in the 'semantic network' (to use modern terminology) that links up all words in a language. We therefore used a dissociation approach in Studies 1 and 2 (explained below) through which we tested whether, and how, subjects could distinguish respect from two close semantic relatives: consideration and tolerance.

As this is the first experimental investigation into the folk concept of respect – to be followed by further studies and experiments – we chose to prioritize ecological validity over analytical detail. All informants were recruited by us in public, urban settings, and although we did not strive to make our samples representative, we generally made sure to collect responses from a cross-section of the population in terms of age, gender and ethnic background. On the downside, this meant that each informant could only be presented with a maximum of two stories, thus limiting the amount of content variation which we could include in the studies.

Different cultures and subcultures have different definitions of what constitutes respectful or disrespectful behavior. Nonetheless, from our prestudy interviews (which involved natives as well as

immigrants), we learned that Non-Western cultures, too, may view respect as a vital ingredient for acceptable social behavior. We do not currently have the resources to conduct a truly global study, but in order to cover at least some of the international variation in folk conceptions of respect, we decided to carry out all experiments in two different European regions. We chose *Sweden* and *Southern Germany* because previous research has demonstrated that their two cultures differ strongly in ways that are likely to be relevant to the issue of respect. For example, Hofstede's (2001) well-known comparison of 80 countries along five cultural dimensions reveals a clear difference between Sweden and Germany on the dimension of "Masculinity vs. femininity". On average, Swedes responded much less favorably to concepts implying "Male assertiveness" (career, money etc.) than to concepts implying "Female nurturance" (social relationships, helping others etc.), making them the most "feminine" nation ( $M=5$  on a scale from 1-100) in Hofstede's sample. Germans, in contrast, tended to prefer concepts implying "Male assertiveness" over "Female nurturance" ( $M=66$ ), making them one of the most "masculine" nations in Europe.

The cultural difference between Sweden and Germany has also been confirmed by the World Values Survey (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Using more sophisticated and reliable methods than Hofstede (for a critical review, see McSweeney 2002), the World Values Survey's *Cultural Map of the World* reveals that Sweden scores very high on secular-rational values, while Western Germany clearly remains more traditional (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Furthermore, the results show that twice as many West Germans than Swedes consider high respect for authority as "good" (Item E018 from the 1999 survey, available at [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). These quantitative findings are supported by Whitman's (2000) qualitative analysis of Germany's culture of honor, civility and respect. Whitman shows through ethnographic observations as well as hermeneutic analyses of German legal documents that the national culture appreciates social hierarchies and enforces civility and deference in public conduct through remarkably intrusive measures. Though not mentioned in the cited studies, we add that the southern, predominantly catholic part of Germany is consistently regarded to be the most conservative and traditional of the country.

For these reasons, we considered Sweden and Southern Germany to be sufficiently distinct to cover a meaningful fraction of the global cultural variability in conceptions of respect – at least for the purposes of this first inquiry. Because we are searching for universal rather than culturally relative features, we reasoned that any commonalities we would find between Sweden and Germany *despite* their cultural differences would have a better chance of representing such universal features. All in all, more than 870 subjects participated in the three experimental studies, with an essentially even (48% / 52%) split between Swedish and German participants.

## Prestudy

In 51 field interviews, which we carried out in a medium-sized Swedish city, we asked participants (natives as well as persons with immigrant backgrounds) a small number ( $M=5$ ) of questions concerning respect-related issues. The purpose of this unrepresentative study was to uncover patterns in people's responses that would allow us to generate testable hypotheses about core aspects of the folk concept of respect. However, we did not expect answers to produce an altogether coherent picture which would render further experimental investigation unnecessary. Questions fell into two categories. In the first category, we asked respondents directly about the meanings they associate with the concept of respect per se. Answers to the questions within this category consisted mostly of generalities and did not allow us to see any clear patterns. (Two relatively typical examples would be: "Respect is to be able to live together" [IV 6]; "Respect is to value what other people think" [IV 27].) Secondly, we also asked about concrete, prototypical social situations which people associate with 'respect' (compare Buttner 2004: 322). Answers in this category produced very interesting and useful results, of which we mention the following two.

1. The four most common *types* of respectful behavior mentioned by our respondents were: Listening to others (29%); not interfering / avoiding confrontations with others (29%); being kind to others (24%); helping others (16%). Interestingly, the first, the second and the last

involve treating the *respectee* as an *agent*, as opposed to a (however valuable) object. Listening to somebody means dealing with him or her as somebody who can 'make a difference' to oneself, and both avoiding interference and helping mean treating him or her as somebody who has an independent, autonomous plan of action. In addition, the first, the third and the last type also require the *respector* to behave like an agent, as opposed to a passive bystander or non-agent.

2. Whereas 20% of the respondents described prototype situations that had a clearly *egalitarian* dimension (e.g., everyday behavior among fellow-citizens), a surprising 33% mentioned situations that involved a clear *status differential* (e.g., boss vs. subordinate, state officials vs. clients, teachers vs. students). Thus, respect as a folk concept might be neither intrinsically egalitarian nor intrinsically hierarchical. In some way or another, people appear to be able to see a person's entitlement to respect as a situational variable.

These considerations led us to generate the following, relatively general formulations of three hypotheses that could then be specified further and tested in Studies 1-3 below.

*Hypothesis 1.* The folk concept of respect applies primarily to social situations in which the focal person treats the target person *like an agent* who is able to make a difference to (an impact on) the focal person.

*Hypothesis 2.* The folk concept of respect applies primarily to social situations in which the focal person relates to the target person in a way that is *itself agential*, as opposed to merely passive or observing.

*Hypothesis 3.* The folk concept of respect applies primarily to social situations in which the target person has a *legitimate, locally determined claim* to being treated like an agent by the focal person.



## Study 1: 'Respect is not the same as consideration'

According to recent sociological and social psychological theories, the attribution of agency to the persons one interacts with is a fundamental component of social life (Luhmann 1995: chapter 4; Barnes 2000; Fuchs 2001). Normally, however, this attribution is a tacit process, hence not observable to one's interactants. This changes when a person's interactional conduct reveals that he or she regards the others *as* agents and counts on their competencies or their ability to make an impact on him-/herself. Our first hypothesis states that interactional revelations of this kind are a key ingredient of the folk concept of respect. To be sure, a connection between respect and agency has cropped up in previous studies, although not in a systematic and explicitly stated or investigated manner. To single out just one example, Sennett (2003) holds that the state can only respect its citizens to the extent that it grants them personal autonomy (see also Jacobs 1995: 140; Hill 2000: 116; Jackson, Esses, and Burris 2001: 49; Bird 2004: 213; McDowell 2007: 277; van Quaquebeke, Henrich, and Eckloff 2007: 187).

As mentioned in the Overview above, concepts are always defined relationally through their links to other concepts. We therefore operationalized Hypothesis 1 by contrasting respect to a closely related construct: consideration. Both connote positive treatment of another being, but we hypothesized that respect is a more selective (i.e., less inclusive) term than consideration insofar as it stipulates a reference to the agency of the target person.

*Hypothesis 1 (operationalized version).* People are able to dissociate *respect* and *consideration* in virtue of the degree to which the focal person treats the target person *like an agent* who is able to make a difference to (an impact on) the focal person. This degree is required to be 'high' for the observation of respect but not for the observation of consideration.

## ***Method***

The overall logic of the experiments in Study 1 followed a within-subjects dissociation design. All participants in all conditions were asked to rate the presented materials in terms of both 'respect' and 'consideration'. We reasoned that this design would require participants to think consciously about how they understand respect, thus making it impossible to resort to a general (and, to us, uninformative) evaluation as to whether the presented materials are simply 'OK' or 'not OK'. In such a design, participants' differences in their within-subject ratings for 'respect' and 'consideration' are normally distributed. The *null hypothesis* states that the distribution will have  $M=0$ . Thus, the null hypothesis cannot be refuted by simply showing that participants differentiate between respect and consideration, but only by showing that they do so systematically (i.e.,  $M \neq 0$  at a sufficiently high level of significance).

### *Participants and procedure*

Ca. 357 participants were recruited in public settings (libraries, cafeterias, university buildings etc.) in a medium-sized Swedish city and a large Southern German city. No compensation was offered. Participants were given a brief and standardized explanation of the project's aim to study respect. After being randomly and covertly assigned to either baseline or stimulus condition, participants were handed a page with instructions for their participation as well as a form containing two stories. Each story was followed by two questions where participants could rate the degree of consideration and the degree of respectfulness of the focal behavior within the story on 9-point Likert-style scales. Afterwards, participants were asked a small set of questions about basic demographics.

### *Materials*

The following two stories were used in this study in order to evoke two different situations that could be rated in terms of both consideration and respectfulness. In both stories, a focal group (Story 1.1) or focal person (Story 1.2) does something positive to a target person. However, we manipulated *the degree of agency accorded to the target person by the focal person(s) while they carry out their*

*action* (baseline: high; stimulus: low). As in previous uses of the manipulated-story paradigm (Malle and Knobe 1997; Knobe 2003), stories were designed carefully in such a way as to allow the manipulation to occur through minimal changes in the wording. The stories were verified by native speakers of Swedish and German.

#### Story 1.1, 'Dinner'

Pete and Carl are colleagues who meet occasionally for dinner at the Plaza. Sometimes they are joined by Walt. One day, Carl contacts Pete and tells him that the three of them should have dinner. But Pete suddenly remembers that Walt's ex-wife recently took a job at the Plaza. He worries that Walt hasn't gotten over the divorce yet and might be afraid to bump into his ex-wife. Perhaps they should choose another restaurant, so that Walt is willing to join them? Eventually Pete and Carl decide [Baseline: to ask] [Stimulus: not to ask] Walt if they should pick another restaurant. [Baseline: After consulting] [Stimulus: Without consulting] Walt, they decide that the three of them will go to the Riz instead.

#### Story 1.2, 'Blindness'

Francis is blind and needs his cane in order to move around safely. One day he walks into an electronics retail store in order to buy a coffee machine. He asks the clerk where he can find the section of the store that has kitchen equipment. The clerk explains that this section may be a bit tricky to find and offers to Francis to guide him there. [Baseline: After Francis accepts] [Stimulus: Before Francis can accept] the offer, the clerk takes his hand in order to guide him.

### Results

Only those responses were included in the analysis in which both consideration and respect were rated. From these, we constructed two new within-subject difference variables, that is, one for the baseline ( $Cons_b - Resp_b$ ) and one for the stimulus conditions ( $Cons_s - Resp_s$ ). The variances of the difference variables are defined and the variables are normally distributed. We thus calculated their *metadifference*, the difference of the means of the difference variables, as  $MetaD_{Cons/Resp} = \overline{Cons_b - Resp_b} - \overline{Cons_s - Resp_s}$ . Finally, we tested (using Student's t-test under the conservative assumption of unequal variances) whether each of the metadifferences was significant.

	Sweden: Story 1.1	Southern Germany: Story 1.1	Sweden: Story 1.2	Southern Germany: Story 1.2
Effect of stimulus on 'Perceived consideration'	-0.867**†	-0.491	-1.654**†	-1.104**†
Effect of stimulus on 'Perceived respect'	-2.933**	-2.669**	-3.642**	-2.464**
Metadifference <sup>1</sup> ( <i>P. consideration</i> – <i>P. respect</i> )	2.067**	2.178**	1.988**	1.359**

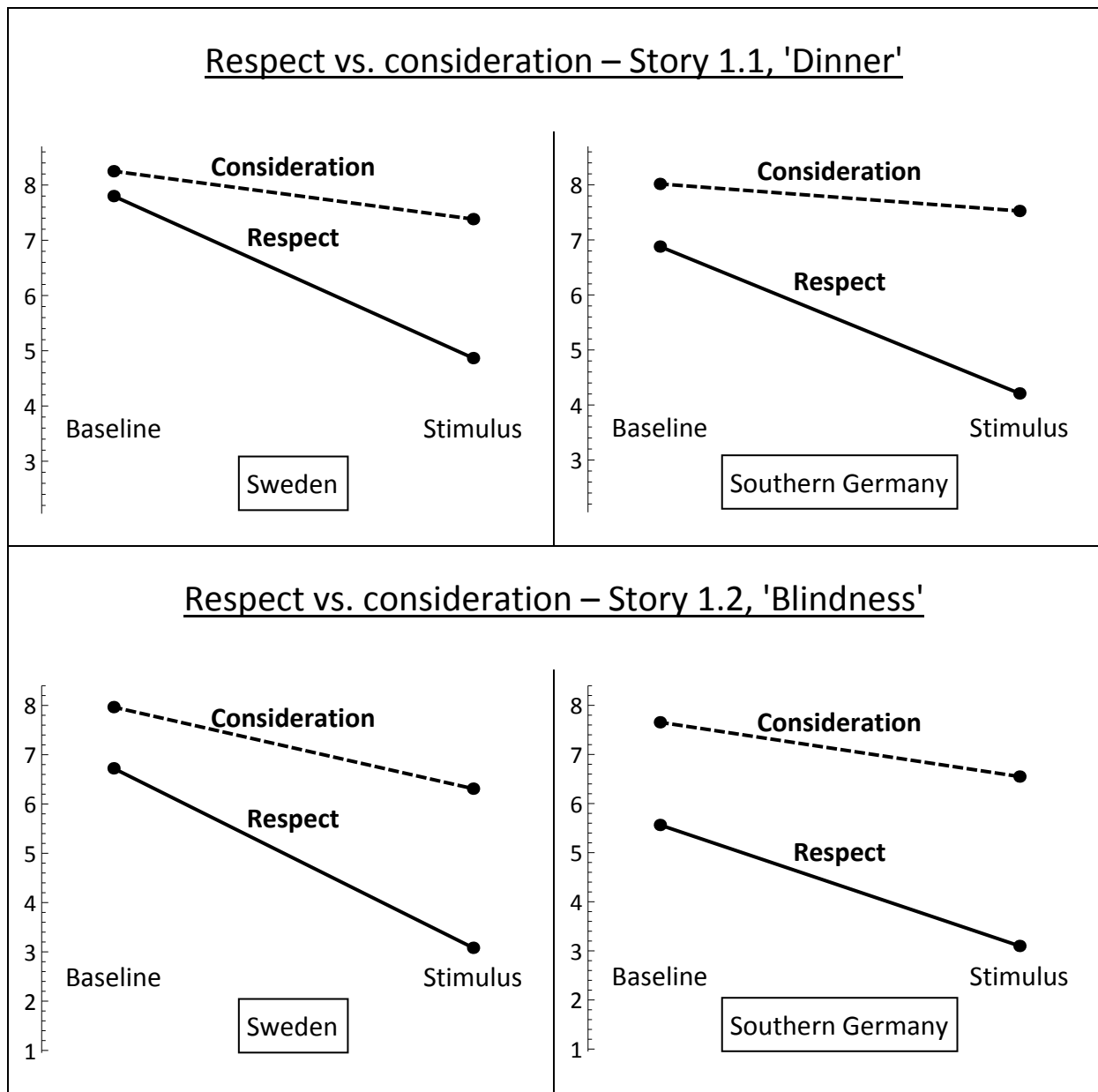
$n \cong 357$  participants

\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 1: Main results from Study 1.** Predicted effects of the story-manipulation on 'Perceived respect' were confirmed, as were the predicted metadifferences in the effects on 'Perceived consideration – Perceived respect'. The manipulation also had some extraneous (but, under Hypothesis 1, irrelevant) effects on 'Perceived consideration' per se (marked with †).

Table 1 summarizes our main findings. The stimulus in Story 1.1 shifted the mean values for 'Perceived consideration' from  $M=8.25$  ( $SD=1.35$ ) to  $M=7.38$  ( $SD=1.62$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=8.02$  ( $SD=1.53$ ) to  $M=7.53$  ( $SD=1.28$ ) in Southern Germany. In Story 1.2, mean values for 'Perceived consideration' changed from  $M=7.97$  ( $SD=1.27$ ) to  $M=6.31$  ( $SD=2.16$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=7.66$  ( $SD=1.42$ ) to  $M=6.56$  ( $SD=2.06$ ) in Southern Germany. The respective shifts for 'Perceived respect' were substantially larger in both stories. In Story 1.1, they decreased from  $M=7.80$  ( $SD=1.48$ ) down to  $M=4.87$  ( $SD=2.52$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=6.88$  ( $SD=2.22$ ) down to  $M=4.21$  ( $SD=2.47$ ) in Southern Germany, whereas in Story 1.2, the change went from  $M=6.72$  ( $SD=2.08$ ) to  $M=3.08$  ( $SD=1.69$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=5.56$  ( $SD=2.21$ ) to  $M=3.10$  ( $SD=1.94$ ) in Southern Germany. All four *metadifferences* between these shifts were substantial (see Table 1) and highly significant. Study 1 therefore confirmed our hypothesis that a selective reduction in the degree of agency accorded to a target person by the focal person would be primarily interpreted as disrespectful. A graphical summary of the results is given in Figure 1.

<sup>1</sup> Inspection of the table shows that the metadifferences can also be obtained by subtracting the second row from the first. This holds because the difference between the means of two same-scale random variables is equal to the mean of the corresponding difference variable ( $\bar{X} - \bar{Y} = \overline{X - Y}$ ). However, variances for the test statistics can only be obtained directly from the difference variables.



**Figure 1. Results from Study 1.** In all four cases, the story-manipulation resulted in a significantly larger effect on 'Perceived respect' than on 'Perceived consideration' (see Table 1).

### Discussion

The selective reduction in perceived respectfulness but not consideration that we achieved in the stimulus conditions constitutes a first confirmation of the dissociability of the two concepts with regard to the focal person's acknowledgement of the agency of the target person.

From a theoretical point of view, these results suggest that people define the act of respecting a person, at least in part, *as* an acknowledgement of the agency of the person. In a sense, showing respect *means* showing someone that his or her actions can make a difference. The positive,

prosocial intent of the act is not enough, for otherwise, it should not be possible to be considerate without being respectful. We also note that this result may shed light on ongoing philosophical debates on the problem of paternalism (which has puzzled researchers because it concerns behavior that is usually disapproved of, despite its positive intent, see Margalit 1996; Grill 2007) as well as related controversies over the "paradox of empowerment" (which states that attempts at creating empowerment can be effectively disempowering if the empowerer does not promote the independence of the target; Botchway 2001).

## **Study 2: 'Respect is not the same as tolerance'**

We believe that the idea of a connection between respect and the agency of the respectee resonates well with philosophical reflections on the concept, including Sennett's deliberations on personal autonomy (Sennett 2003) and Hill's Kantian analysis of the respectee as a moral agent (Hill 2000). However, a more subtle issue concerns whether the focal person – the respecter – also has to assume the role of a true agent in order to be regarded as respectful. Here, the mentioned results from our prestudy constitute a mixed bag, as one of the four most frequently named prototype situations (that is, non-interference) does not seem to make such a demand, even while the other three do so. Study 2 therefore addresses the question of whether respect / disrespect is something that must be actively conveyed or, alternatively, is more typically associated with refraining (passively) from doing something undesirable / desirable onto the other.

Using once more a relational approach, we operationalized Hypothesis 2 by contrasting respect to a second close relative: tolerance (Habermas 2002; van Quaquebeke, Henrich, and Eckloff 2007). Specifically, we conjectured that people can distinguish the two because the first, but not the second, requires active submission to the other as a social agent. As in the case of respect vs. consideration, respect would thus be a more selective term than tolerance.

*Hypothesis 2 (operationalized version).* People are able to dissociate *respect* and *tolerance* in virtue of the degree to which the focal person treats the target person in a way that is *itself agential*. This degree is required to be 'high' for the observation of respect but not for the observation of tolerance. Whereas tolerance is, therefore, interpreted as a feature of the *generalized (passive) attitude* of the focal person vis-à-vis the target person, respect is interpreted as a feature of the focal person's *actions*.

## **Method**

All experiments within Study 2 followed the overall dissociation design which we described in the Method-section of Study 1.

### *Participants and procedure*

Recruitment of ca. 320 Swedish and Southern German participants was carried out as in Study 1. Participants were handed a page with instructions and a form containing two stories. Each story was followed by two questions where they could rate the degree of tolerance and the degree of respectfulness of the focal behavior on 9-point scales.

### *Materials*

The following two stories were used in Study 2. In both stories, a target person is, initially, passively put up with by a powerful focal entity (Story 2.1) or person (Story 2.2), and then requests positive treatment by the focal entity / person. The latter then either grants (baseline) or declines (stimulus) the request. Design and verification of the stories followed the procedure mentioned under Study 1.

#### Story 2.1, 'Ethnicity'

The republic of Woodland is culturally and politically dominated by the Slarbs, who constitute more than 60% of the population. Even the official language of Woodland is Slarbian. Kanians are the largest minority, forming 32% of the population. The Central Association of Kanians has been involved in a long and ongoing

#### Story 2.2, 'Meeting'

Justin is an apprentice at an insurance company and eager to gain experience during his apprenticeship. His adviser, Rebecca, has been given (reluctant) permission by the department chief to let Justin participate in an important meeting in which normally only higher-ranking employees participate. In the conference room,

struggle for increased political influence and cultural recognition of Kanians. As a symbol of such recognition, the Central Association now demands that the government of Woodland establish an official Kanian holiday. The government [Baseline: **accepts**] [Stimulus: **rejects**] the demand by stating that Kanians are full citizens of Woodland and therefore [Baseline: **entitled to celebrate their own holidays.**] [Stimulus: **obliged to celebrate the existing official holidays.**]

Rebecca introduces Justin to the other participants as an apprentice. The department chief musters Justin for a brief moment, then he welcomes everyone and starts the meeting. Later Justin wants to join the discussion and raises his hand. The department chief says that he [Baseline: **believes**] [Stimulus: **does not believe**] that Justin, as an apprentice, may have something interesting to contribute to the discussion, and he [Baseline: **lets**] [Stimulus: **does not let**] Justin make his remark.

## Results

Only those responses were included in the analysis in which both tolerance and respect were rated.

Like in Study 1, we constructed two new within-subject difference variables from the ratings: one for the baseline ( $Tol_b - Resp_b$ ) and one for the stimulus conditions ( $Tol_s - Resp_s$ ). We calculated their metadifference as  $MetaD_{Tol/Resp} = \overline{Tol_b - Resp_b} - \overline{Tol_s - Resp_s}$ .

	Sweden: Story 2.1	Southern Germany: Story 2.1	Sweden: Story 2.2	Southern Germany: Story 2.2
Effect of stimulus on 'Perceived tolerance'	0.261	-0.360	-1.630**†	-0.713*†
Effect of stimulus on 'Perceived respect'	-1.638**	-3.643**	-3.940**	-4.181**
Metadifference (P. tolerance – P. respect')	1.899**	3.283**	2.310**	3.468**

$n \cong 320$  participants

\*p < 0.05

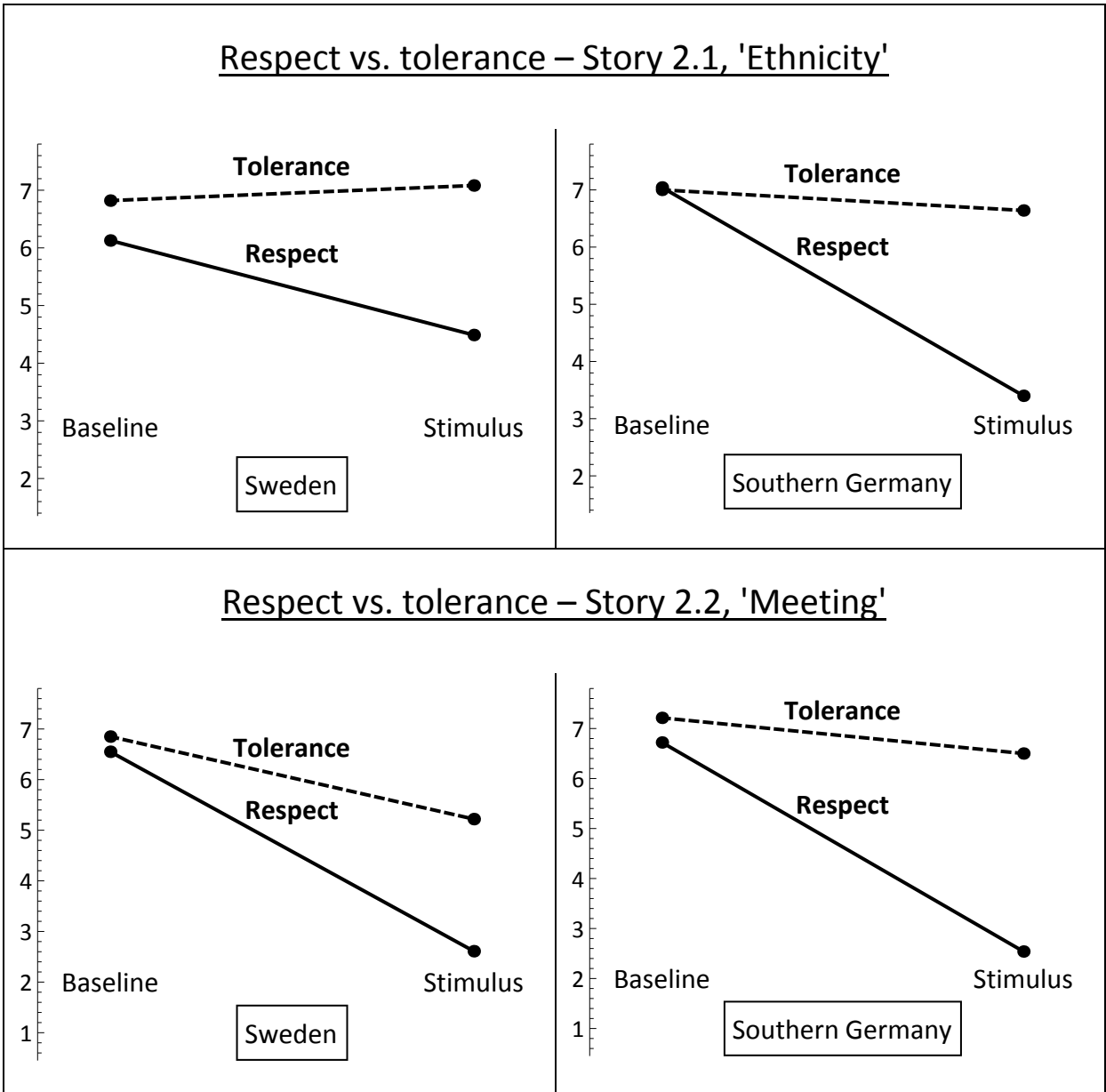
\*\*p < 0.01

**Table 2: Main results from Study 2.** Predicted effects of the story-manipulation on 'Perceived respect' were confirmed, as were the predicted metadifferences in the effects on 'Perceived tolerance – Perceived respect'. The manipulation also had some extraneous (but, under Hypothesis 2, irrelevant) effects on 'Perceived tolerance' per se (marked with †).

Findings are summarized in Table 2. The stimulus in Story 2.1 altered the mean values for 'Perceived tolerance' from  $M=6.82$  ( $SD=2.22$ ) to  $M=7.08$  ( $SD=1.68$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=7.00$  ( $SD=1.94$ ) to  $M=6.64$  ( $SD=1.69$ ) in Southern Germany. In Story 2.2, mean values for 'Perceived tolerance' went from  $M=6.85$  ( $SD=2.37$ ) to  $M=5.22$  ( $SD=2.89$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=7.21$  ( $SD=1.87$ ) to  $M=6.50$  ( $SD=1.78$ ) in Southern Germany. Again, the shifts for 'Perceived respect' were substantially larger. In



Story 2.1, they reduced average values from  $M=6.13$  ( $SD=2.19$ ) to  $M=4.49$  ( $SD=2.45$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=7.04$  ( $SD=2.18$ ) to  $M=3.40$  ( $SD=1.67$ ) in Southern Germany. In Story 2.2, the change went from  $M=6.55$  ( $SD=2.33$ ) to  $M=2.61$  ( $SD=1.97$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=6.72$  ( $SD=2.32$ ) to  $M=2.54$  ( $SD=1.34$ ) in Southern Germany. The four metadifferences between these shifts were once again highly significant (see Table 2). Study 2 therefore confirmed our hypothesis that an active role of the focal entity / person in the creation of a disadvantage for the target person would primarily be interpreted as disrespectful. A graphical summary of the results is given in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. Results from Study 2.** In all four cases, the story-manipulation resulted in a significantly larger effect on 'Perceived respect' than on 'Perceived tolerance' (see Table 2).

## *Discussion*

The relationship between respect, tolerance and the agency of the focal person is a complex one. Within the methodological limitations of the manipulated story-paradigm, our results may be helpful in further disentangling this intricate relationship. Specifically, they suggest that people understand respect as something that a focal person must normally 'do' and not just 'have'. This explanation does not contradict the logic of everyday semantic constructions like 'having (no) respect for someone', as these may simply be interpretive *generalizations* of one or more actions which have been observed between focal and target person. We therefore believe that our results challenge methodological operationalizations of respect as an attitude (e.g., Jackson, Esses, and Burriss 2001: 48; Frei and Shaver 2002: 125; Liebling and Arnold 2004: 212; van Quaquebeke, Henrich, and Eckloff 2007: 186), for attitudes are psychological states which are, by definition, not necessarily acted upon (Eagly and Chaiken 1993; Reich and Michailakis 2005a).

## **Study 3: 'Respect can only be targeted at currently legitimate agential claims'**

Responses in our prestudy-interviews indicated that people associate respect with both egalitarian and hierarchical situations. This result is interesting insofar as there are a number of theorists who argue for an intrinsic connection between respect and equality or mutuality (e.g., Jacobs 1995: 129; Lawrence-Lightfoot 1999; Middleton 2004: 236; McDowell 2007: 284). In their view, respect is always an acknowledgement of the other as a human being who is entitled to the same basic rights as oneself. Instead of going into the philosophical intricacies of concepts such as 'basic rights' or 'human being', we note that empirical studies of respect, especially intercultural investigations, are usually much more cautious than the mentioned theorists. They note that many non-Western cultures furnish their members with highly refined rule-systems for the respectful treatment of persons of higher status (Buttny and Williams 2000; Bankston and Hildago 2006: 30).

We therefore hypothesize that people do not simply associate respect with equality, but that they use (cultural, structural, universal etc.) rules which define *who* is entitled to being treated as an agent by *whom*, in *which ways*, and under *what circumstances*. If we are right, the folk concept of respect thus includes a tacit parameter which defines whether the target person has an agency-related claim (or agential claim) over the focal person which is *legitimate* in the current social context.

*Hypothesis 3 (operationalized version)*. People associate *respect* primarily with social situations in which the target person has a *legitimate claim* (as determined by the *current* state of the interaction within the material, cultural and structural context of the social situation) to being treated *like an agent* by the focal person.

## **Method**

It was not necessary to use a dissociation design for Study 3, which meant that we could use the standard design template for rating experiments instead.

### *Participants and procedure*

We recruited ca. 195 Swedish and Southern German participants as in Study 1. They were assigned randomly to either baseline or stimulus condition and were handed a page with instructions and a form containing two stories that described potentially problematic behavior. Participants could then rate the degree of disrespectfulness of the focal behavior on 9-point scales.

### *Materials*

The two stories we used for Study 3 both describe situations where the focal interactant defies an agential claim of a co-interactant. We varied whether the focal interactant defies a claim which is currently illegitimate (baseline condition; 'illegitimate' was operationalized conservatively as 'not unambiguously legitimate') or currently legitimate (stimulus condition). This was achieved by varying the person status of the target: ambiguous disability vs. acknowledged (socially ratified) disability

(Story 3.1) and non-prioritized vs. prioritized (socially ratified) interaction partner (Story 3.2).

Verification of the stories followed the procedure of Study 1.

### Story 3.1, 'Bus ride'

Mrs. Miller has been working as a cashier for 20 years. One day she takes the bus home after a long and hard day of work, and she is pleasantly surprised at getting the last free seat. At the next stop [Baseline: a young man who is obese] [Stimulus: a young man with crutches] gets in, walks up to Mrs. Miller's seat and asks her to let him have her place. But Mrs. Miller remains seated. The man then says, "This is disrespectful of you."

Question: Do you agree with the young man?

### Story 3.2, 'Telephone'

Pamela and Stephanie, who are friends, are sitting together and having a conversation. Pamela talks about a brawl she had with her boss. Then Stephanie receives a text message on her mobile phone. She interrupts Pamela and says, "It's from [Baseline: my sick mother] [Stimulus: an acquaintance]." She reads the message and begins typing a response. Then Pamela says in an angry manner, "I wasn't finished yet! I find such behavior disrespectful!"

Question: Do you agree with Pamela?

## Results

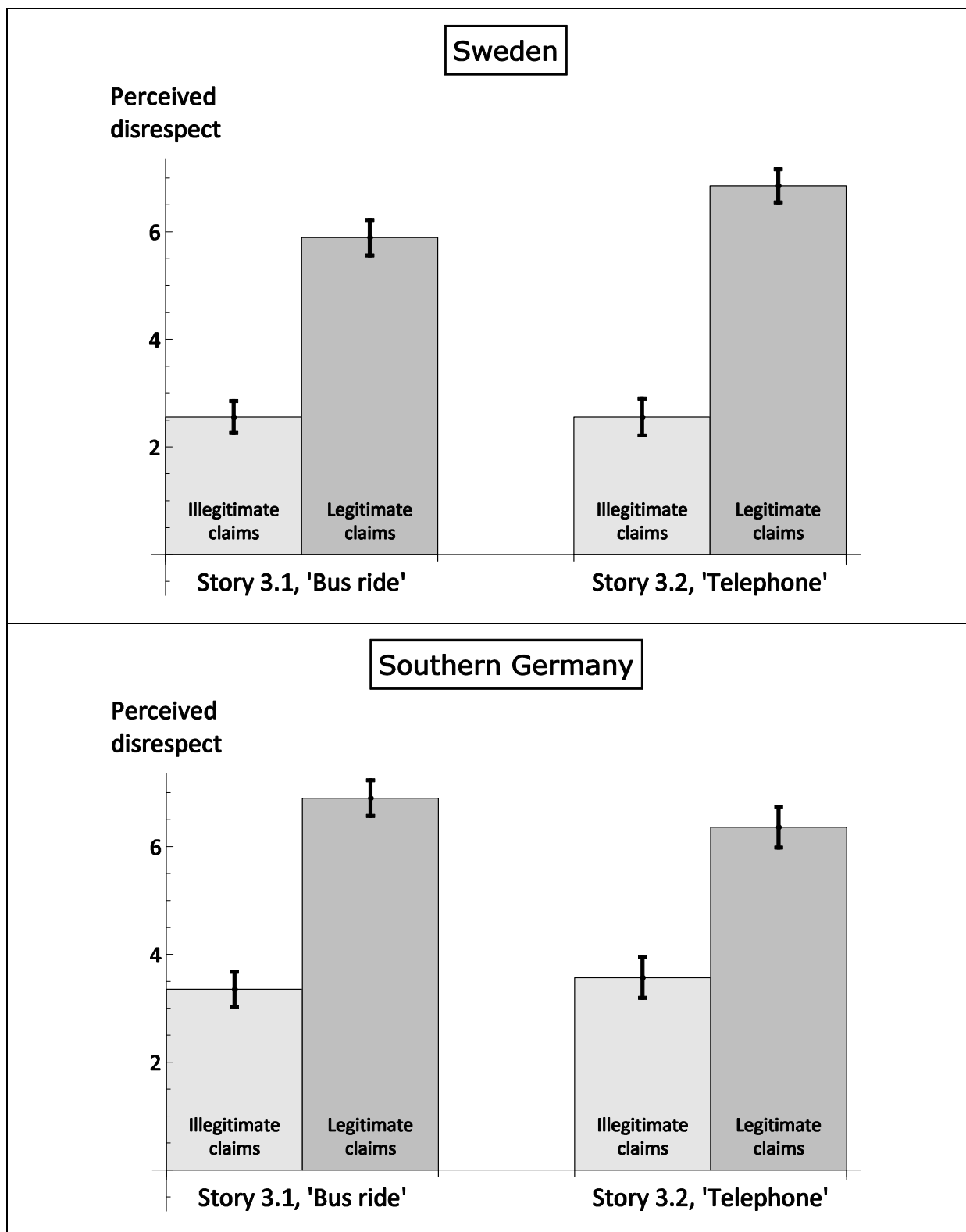
	<b>Sweden: Story 3.1</b>	<b>Southern Germany: Story 3.1</b>	<b>Sweden: Story 3.2</b>	<b>Southern Germany: Story 3.2</b>
<b>Effect of stimulus on 'Perceived disrespect'</b>	3.333**	3.547**	4.298**	2.791**

$n \cong 195$  participants

\*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 3: Main results from Study 3.** Predicted effects of the story-manipulation on 'Perceived disrespect' were confirmed.

The main results of Study 3 are summarized in Table 3. The stimulus condition in Story 3.1 altered the means for 'Perceived respect' from  $M=2.56$  ( $SD=1.97$ ) up to  $M=5.89$  ( $SD=2.21$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=3.35$  ( $SD=2.33$ ) up to  $M=6.90$  ( $SD=1.91$ ) in Southern Germany. Means for Story 3.2 went from  $M=2.56$  ( $SD=2.28$ ) to  $M=6.85$  ( $SD=2.14$ ) in Sweden and from  $M=3.57$  ( $SD=2.69$ ) to  $M=6.36$  ( $SD=2.68$ ) in Southern Germany. All changes in means were highly significant, thus confirming our hypothesis that the focal person's disregard for a currently legitimate agential claim of the target person would be interpreted as more disrespectful than disregard for a currently illegitimate claim. Results are summarized graphically in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Results from Study 3.** In both stories and both countries, a currently legitimate (vs. illegitimate) agential claim on the side of the disrespectee resulted in a significant increase of 'Perceived disrespect' (see Table 3). Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

## *Discussion*

The large effects on 'Perceived respect' in the stimulus conditions of Study 3 were due to isolated changes in the context of the focal behavior. This suggests that people are highly sensitive to the legitimacy of agential claims which interactants have towards each other. In fact, it indicates that they do not treat respect as a static construct, but as a situationally adaptive variable (Goffman 1964; Seeman 1997). Sociological generalities such as the idea that people 'want to be respected' or 'usually respect each other' thus overlook an important point: the context-sensitive nature of the folk concept of respect. In a sense, each sequence of interactional moves is accompanied by a trail of opportunities for respectful and disrespectful behavior. Respect at one point in the sequence does not necessarily imply respect at another point, and one person's situated and legitimate claim to agential acknowledgement does not necessarily transfer to another person in the same situation, or the same person in another situation.

Turning back to the theoretical discourse on respect, the notion that the folk concept of respect is situationally adaptive could help resolving the aforementioned debate on the relationship between respect and equality / mutuality. There is, indeed, such a relationship – but it is an *empirical* instead of an intrinsic one, and it holds only in contexts in which person A's legitimate agential claims over person B happen to coincide with those of B over A. This means that there is no need to save the idea of mutual respect by differentiating recognition respect and appraisal respect (an influential distinction proposed by Darwall 1977). There are as many 'types' of respects as there are legitimate claims to agential acknowledgement – but behind them lies the unifying idea that persons should be treated as the kinds of agents which the current social setting entitles them to be.

## General discussion

People's daily interactions are replete with normative and practical references to folk concepts. What they know or assume about, say, freedom, intentionality, emotions, justice or respect is therefore consequential. In this paper, we have tried to demonstrate that it can be useful for theoretically interested scholars of respect to investigate the corresponding folk concept systematically and with empirical methods – after all, why would we, as researchers, be interested in topics such as this one if we did not believe that they refer to issues that matter in social life?

The main result of the three studies is that they confirm a tight connection between the folk concept of respect and the notion of agency. People speak of respect (and not just consideration) when an interactant treats a co-interactant like an agent, like someone who is able to 'make a difference' (Study 1). They also require, however, that this treatment amount to active acknowledgement or submission of the agency of the other, as opposed to a passive attitude of mere tolerance (Study 2). In addition, they are sensitive to the situationally varying legitimacy of the co-interactant's agential claims, refusing to see disrespect in behavior that denies the co-interactant a type of agency to which he or she is not entitled (Study 3). These results may be able to nuance or modify previous theoretical studies on respect and its connection to topics like agency, autonomy and freedom. We are also working on a theoretical study that synthesizes the complex relationship between respect and agency into a set of clear and testable definitions which can then be used as heuristic tools in qualitative, interaction-oriented studies of dis-/respectful behavior (Foon 1987).

Finally, we want to point out that while our experiments provide support for Hypotheses 1-3, they remain within the methodological confines of the manipulated story-paradigm. It is now necessary to replicate the experiments with additional stories and to test if similar results can be obtained in non-Western countries. By the same token, we are planning to explore further methodological paradigms in order to achieve independent corroboration – or correction – of Hypotheses 1-3.

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