

# Rethinking Respectability: Returning to Value and Ideology?

All my life I've wanted to say 'look I'm as good as you', well now I think this house says it. It says 'I've made it, I'm respectable and you can't put me down'.

(Yvonne, 1992)

# Context

- Began with my mother and the fear that was instilled in me about respectability.
- Formally started in 1981 as PhD on how state cuts to welfare were enabled by training women out of the labour market for free care (a critique of Thatcherism as it began to take effect).
- Was 3 year ethnography that I returned to over a period of 1 1 yrs (sig for investments/subjectivity over time)
- Significance of historical legacies e.g. Boar War, Schools for Mothers.
- Interested in how people made history but not in the conditions of **their** own choosing: conditions of possibility
- Began as feminist critique of ideology (Althusser).
- It became a study of how people live an ever-present sense of injustice based on feeling continually judged.
- Formations recently haunted me as I researched 'reality television'

# Becoming Respectable

- Showed how white working-class women were **symbolically positioned without value**, through historical repetition and across space.
- How their cultural dispositions were inscribed and **read on their body as pathology**.
- How as a result they felt **mis-recognised and diminished**.
- How as a result they **limited their movement through social space**.
- How they **dis-identified** with the category working-class.
- How they re-worked this misrecognition and devaluation **by claiming respectability**. (NB: they did not want to be MC - just wanted value).

# Becoming Respectable continued...

- Respectability was a defensive and positive performance: aesthetic, dispositional, relational, affective.
- How they were trapped by investments in the **paradox of caring**- to care for (labour) to care about (emotions).
- Morality was absolutely central to the formation of class and gender, intimately lived as judgment and value.
- How class is lived at the **dispositional** and **intimate** level on a daily basis of judgment, practice and affect.
- How trad/feminist understandings of femininity did not fit them.
- Femininity was **performative BUT also consciously performed** when necessary.

# Use and Critique of Bourdieu

- Using economic metaphors, Bourdieu maintains that the different type of capitals (cultural, social, economic and symbolic) to which we have access as we grow up congeal in the body, generating dispositions, which he calls '*habitus*'.
- The ability to *accumulate* different capitals in *volume* and *composition* over time enables some bodies to move around social space with *ease, entitlement and value*, or to become fixed in positions and attributed with pathology.
- For Bourdieu only high culture offers cultural value/capital
- In a challenge to Bourdieu I argued that femininity could be seen as a form of cultural capital (a resource that could be put to use).
- Bourdieu would make a *structural homology* between people's positions and dispositions on the basis of class, yet when we add gender, sexuality, race and nation into the composition, we find a series of ***disruptions, dispersals*** and ***ambivalence*** rather than repetitions and habits.
- Bourdieu is a theorist of social reproduction and power, less able to understand the powerless and especially ambiguity. (see all feminist critiques in Adkins and Skeggs 2004)

# Doing (not being) Gender

- Formations shows how gender or sexuality is not an object or property of identity of the person.
- It is a dynamic practice, something we *do*, we repeat, we try on, are ambivalent about, always doing and becoming
- The women of formations displayed their distance from classed standards of femininity through explicit performances NOT just performativity.
- Historically femininity was not a possibility because working class women lived very different economic conditions and were always positioned as working/sexual.
- WC women always represented as 'excess', as the constitutive limit to respectable gender.
- But also enjoyed the excess
- Gender was analysed as a resource - to which one does or does not have access, that can or cannot be deployed and put into practice in a variety of different ways to realize value. (GLQ)

# Mis-Recognition/Anti-identity

- The processes of **resourcing subjectivity** has become particularly significant in the current political climate when in the West the politics of recognition (Nancy Fraser and Charles Taylor) shapes who can make a claim on the state.
- **Identity** is still the idiom by which many groups establish their public credibility. This process is nearly always informed by the **possibilities for visibility**; that is, one has to have an identity which is visibly recognisable as having **value, and respectability** (see Mariam Fraser 1999 TCS).
- Does not work as a politics for those who are constantly misrecognised
- Excludes those who cannot perform propriety (e.g. Lovell, our project SPV)
- How then do they live with value in conditions of devaluation?



# Continuing Themes: Performing (no) Value on RTV

- RTV: a key mechanism for revealing the moral economy as written on women's bodies
- Recruited to display need for transformation (historical standards)
- As entertainment women are expected to *perform* their value
- Have to *reveal* their bodies, intimacies and relationships
- Be *subject to evaluation* - from experts and the audience
- For the programmes to make economic value (create sensation (audience figures-advertising-profit; commodification of intimacy) the TV participants have to reveal their lack of value and need for transformation

# Continuing Themes: Bad Persons

- Misrecognition by TV participants and our audience reactions: uncomprehending why immoral/bad
- Ideological standards challenged - aesthetically, relationally, labour
- Reveals strong sense of injustice she was lived daily through judgment
- Challenge to those with authority to judge
- Classed relations recognised through misrecognition, standards, judgment, authority
- Moral economy defended /reversed (esp. motherhood) and a different respectability proposed
- **This was based on a different orientation to time and space through investment (historical limitation/present/others rather than accrual-entitled future/self)**
- Value struggles and claims for value were established through different terms (not recognised by theorists)

# Respectability as Ideology as Investment in Value

- Respectability is still significant analytically as long as people are living through the scrutiny and judgment of classed others, where the dialogic classed and gender gaze produces an understanding of one's lack of value.
- In the UK respectability is even more pressing as a political issue, as attempts are made in media and political rhetoric to designate a feral underclass and separate the rough from the respectable (and divide the working class), and make injustice a psychological problem.
- Respectability is an ideological practice that sustains class inequality and injustice - lived at the level of intimate subjectivity through responsibility.
- Respectability is one of the key ways in which women, in particular, are incited to invest in ambivalence.
- Ambivalence key to reproduction of power (PC/Q/not B)
- Respectability reveals the affective power of judgment and humiliation, where energy is put into defence.
- Refusal to be respectable challenge (LtL)? but not possible via motherhood.

# Conclusion Ambivalence: Ideological Class/Gender Value Struggle

- Huge amounts of time, energy and effort are put into **defending against devaluation**.
- By constantly performing defensive respectability they therefore **inadvertently authorize** the judgments of others.
- This begins through inheritance at birth - investments in value established by **conditions of possibility** (egg judgment, misrecognition, precarity)
- **INVESTMENT** key to ideology - **not** representation/interpellation (e.g. gender- Berlant's cruel optimism)
- Their claims for value only recognised **locally** (although motherhood site of challenge BUT also responsibility)
- But values of suffering, endurance valorized.
- But through logic establish ideological struggle: full-time motherhood v working-poor (state challenge- class struggle)

However, we do see very a very different ontology and relationality re time/space ('person value' in *Sociological Review* vol 59, 3, 2011; 'value struggles' fc in BJS)