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Theorising Respect and Disrespect by and About Children and Young People: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Respect is a foundational moral and social value, yet its conceptualisation by and about children and young people remains underexplored. This systematic qualitative literature review examines how respect and disrespect are theorised, defined or conceptualised in relation to children and young people, and the extent to which their perspectives are represented in schools, higher education, care and community settings. Guided by PRISMA protocols, 10 databases were searched, yielding 814 records; 26 peer-reviewed articles met the inclusion criteria. Five overarching themes emerged: (1) *Recognition and moral worth*, emphasising respect as a universal entitlement and basis for rights; (2) *Relational and reciprocal dynamics*, highlighting mutuality, dialogue and authentic engagement; (3) *Respect as a behavioural, emotional and cultural construct*, shaped by norms, authority and gendered expectations; (4) *Educational and developmental value*, positioning respect as a teachable moral and epistemic virtue; and (5) *Social justice, inclusion and power*, critiquing top-down, punitive respect agendas that alienate young people. Across contexts, respect was most often conceptualised as relational and care-oriented, expressed through attentiveness, fairness and recognition of individuality. Disrespect, conversely, was linked to misrecognition, exclusion and structural inequalities. Future research should recognise young people as capable of contributing to theoretical and practical understandings of moral principles such as respect.

1 | Introduction

Though respect is a central and powerful value in human relations and moral philosophy, and commonly used in everyday language, it resists simple definitions or reduction to a single concept. As Dillon (1992) observed, respect encompasses affective, conative and cognitive dimensions. It involves an attitude, a valuing, a mode of behaviour that includes apprehending, recognising, appraising, perceiving and relating to others. How individuals express respect or disrespect towards themselves or others can profoundly impact the quality of their lives, including their claims to identity, self-respect and esteem, as well as their

interpersonal relations and social and political engagements (Dillon 2007; Honneth 1992). Given its significance for human flourishing and moral development, philosophers have devoted considerable attention to understanding the nature of respect and the moral, social and societal injuries that result from failures to recognise the worth and dignity of others.

There is a rich philosophical and empirical literature on respect, some of which will be discussed in this review. Largely absent from the literature is how children and young people theorise, conceive, construct, or experience respect in their lives. Instead, children and young people are admonished to show respect to

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their parents, elders, adults in authority, such as teachers, care workers and police, marking respect as deference, submission and compliance; to have respect for resources, norms and social codes, rules and traditions, marking respect as protection and deference; or to treat others with respect, in which case, the emphasis is on human dignity (Goodman 2009). The absence of children and young people's conceptions and theorisations of respect may be due to a long tradition of viewing them as lacking rationality, reasoning ability and accurate perception by philosophers such as Aristotle (2004), Kant (1797) and Rousseau (1762): children are governed by emotion, not reason and lack moral agency.

This qualitative systematic review examines the extent to which children and young people are involved in theorising or conceptualising respect. Following PRISMA (Page et al. 2020) guidelines, we searched 10 databases and identified 26 articles for review. In this review, *theorising* refers to a broad, explanatory account of a phenomenon (e.g., Rawls' *Theory of Justice* [1972]), while *conception* refers to an interpretation or development of a concept (e.g., justice as fairness, procedural justice, or utilitarian justice). In the case of respect, this includes the Kantian theory of respect, as well as conceptions such as recognition respect (Darwall 1977; Honneth 1992) and relational respect (Gilligan 1990).

This review is the first to examine how children and young people contribute to theorising respect and disrespect. The aim is not only to enrich philosophical and empirical debates on respect, but also to challenge entrenched assumptions that children and young people lack the capacity to deliberate on, theorise and conceptualise foundational values such as respect. Such assumptions are misplaced and risk perpetuating unjust and exclusionary practices.

2 | Theorising Respect

Dillon (2007, 2022) identifies three areas of philosophical inquiry. The first is conceptual: what is respect? Is it, for example, a feeling, a duty, or a moral phenomenon? Does it involve beliefs, motives, or emotions? The second area is normative: why does respect matter, and to whom is it owed? The third interest is practical: how can respect be applied to moral questions, ethical dilemmas and everyday lives?

The complexity and value of respect are evident in the diverse ways in which it has been conceptualised in philosophy and other fields. Respect has been understood variously as:

- a value, a moral duty or a right (e.g., Kant 1797; Hammett and Staeheli 2011);
- an attitude or disposition (e.g., Darwall 1977; Dillon 2022);
- a social practice enacted through a specific pattern of behaviours, such as showing respect (e.g., Sennett 2003);
- relational, a feeling or affect, such as feeling respect and feeling respected (e.g., Downie and Telfer 1969; Darwall 1977; Malti et al. 2020);
- a cognitive orientation, taking account of the perspectives of others (Rawls 1971);

- a disposition to consider the wants, desires, commands or activities of others (e.g., Gauthier 1963); and
- object-generated (a beautiful object of art), obstacle-generated (overcoming adversity) or institutions (the office of the Prime Minister) (e.g., Feinberg 1970; Hudson 1980)

Kant, widely regarded as the preeminent and most influential thinker on respect in the Western philosophical tradition, was the first philosopher to place respect for persons at the centre of moral theory and to assert it as a sovereign moral principle. This is most clearly expressed in the formulation of the Categorical Imperative: 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end' (Kant 1797, 4:429). Kant claims that all persons (except children and women) are worthy of respect because they have rational and autonomous 'wills.' That is, they are capable of choosing, deliberating and acting according to moral principles, rather than on mere impulse or inclination. Closely tied to the claim of respect for persons is Kant's conception of dignity, which he describes as intrinsic, incomparable and irreplaceable: as a fundamental aspect of being human, no-one has more dignity than another: '... as an end in himself he possesses a *dignity* by which he exacts *respect* for himself from all other beings in the world (*MM*, 6: 434–435). This means that there are constraints on how we treat others; we must always treat persons as the supremely valuable persons that they are, an imperative that forbids cruel, degrading, debasing, demeaning or humiliating behaviours. Kant's conception of respect and dignity has been so influential that it underpins human rights and moral equality.

Dillon's (1992, 2007) philosophical work has also influenced contemporary articulations of respect. Drawing on Kant's account of respect for persons, Dillon (2007) explores what it means to accord persons respect. Since the promotion of autonomy and agency are prominent aspects of Kant's moral theory, any action that undermines a person's freedom to choose, decide, take responsibility, pursue meaningful goals or make informed decisions fails to meet the standard of respect. Respect thus categorically prohibits actions such as lying, bribery, threats, discrimination and coercion, as these violate others' autonomy and rational agency. Respect requires that we engage with others as rational, moral agents, taking their reasons, experiences and perspectives seriously, to uphold their dignity and protect their fundamental rights.

In Dillon's (1992) conceptual analysis, perception is at the core of respect. Synonymous with 'regard' and 'consideration' (p. 108), object-generated respect demands our careful attention; we perceive the object as worthy of repeated attention, eliciting our esteem or admiration. Respect also entails a behavioural dimension, where we treat the object or person in ways deemed appropriate, through praise, worship, compliance, or obedience (p. 109). Dillon borrows from Hudson's (1980, 70) varieties of respect, which she labels as (a) *obstacle respect*; (b) *directive respect* (terms of an agreement, following rules); (c) *institutional respect*; (d) *care respect*; and (e) *evaluative respect*, which involves comparative appraisal of a person's merits. Care respect (d) is Dillon's own conception. The following schema represents Dillon's (1992,

111) descriptions—*varieties* of respect (Di), Hudson's (1980, 70) four types of respect (H) and Darwall's (1977, 38–39) two kinds of respect (Da):

- a. a mountain climber's respect for the elements and a tennis player's respect for her opponent's strong backhand (Di); *obstacle respect (H)*; *Recognition respect (Da)*—*how to act*;
- b. respecting the terms of an agreement and respecting a person's rights (Di); *directive respect (H)*; *Recognition respect—how to act (Da)*;
- c. showing respect for a judge by rising when she enters the courtroom and treating a nation's flag with respect (Di); *institutional respect (H)*; *Recognition respect—how to act (Di)*;
- d. an environmentalist's profound respect for nature and an art lover's deep respect for the Mona Lisa (Di); *evaluative respect (Ha)*; care respect (Di); *Recognition respect—allows persons to develop agency, and respect each other's rights (Da)*;
- e. having a great deal of respect for a colleague, either as a person or as a scholar (Di); *evaluative respect—meriting or deserving respect (Hb)*; *Appraisal respect—traits that manifest in excellence in persons which merit or deserve respect (Da)*.

Hudson (1980, 74) explains obstacle respect as practical 'barriers or blocks in the path of agents' which must be overcome. Directive respect is a 'guide to action', a possible 'course of action such that an addressee's response can be judged in accordance with or contrary to it.' These include 'requests, commands, rules, advice, obligation-claims and rights-claims' (p. 71). Institutional respect is owed to social institutions, officials, offices, positions, titles, or practices that represent the institution (p. 74). The objects in evaluative respect are persons or their characteristics, which may or may not deserve respect, depending on the degree of respect-worthiness against some standard of excellence, and about which we can give reasons for respecting, or not, a person's skills, qualities or actions. Evaluative respect can instantiate respect for the person as a person (sovereign moral duty)(Ha), or evaluative respect, which entails a comparative appraisal of a person's character (Hb). One may respect someone as a person while having no respect for their dishonesty.

The first four varieties (a–d) do not involve appraising an object (Dillon 1992, 111). One can respect the office of the president without appraising the president as fit for office. In contrast, evaluative respect (e) involves appraising a person's qualities, such as their honesty, work ethic, or integrity. Dillon aligns these varieties with Darwall's (1977) influential distinction between *appraisal respect*, which concerns the comparative evaluation of a person's traits and achievements, and *recognition respect*, which acknowledges the moral status of persons, principles or institutions. Generally, when we accord recognition respect, we constrain our actions to avoid harm (Darwall 1977).

Care respect is an important instantiation in Dillon's account because good care means valuing and attending to persons in their 'concrete particularity' (p. 115) in which we recognise our 'connectedness and interdependence and distinctness' (p.

116), promote others' wellbeing, and support them in the realisation of their ends (goals): we respect the person for who they are, which grounds their intrinsic moral worth. The difference between care respect and Kantian respect is that the former is grounded in particularity and individuality, 'me-ness' (p. 119), while the latter is abstract and universal.

According to Honneth (1992, 188), individual integrity is fundamentally dependent on the approval of others, a consequence of the inherently intersubjective nature of human relations. Honneth classifies three forms of disrespect in his Theory of Recognition, each corresponding to a violation of one of the three spheres of recognition: love, rights and solidarity. These forms, namely physical maltreatment, the denial of legal rights, and social devaluation, constitute constraints on freedom, sources of blatant or subtle harm, and impair 'self-understanding acquired through intersubjective means' (p. 192), jeopardising (p. 192) both social and self-esteem. In contrast, mutual recognition is not only protective but also constitutive of autonomy, body-related self-confidence and community membership, in which all individuals have equal rights.

While Honneth's Theory of Recognition and the typologies and distinctions of respect discussed above are rooted in philosophical traditions, sociological approaches examine how respect is enacted, denied and experienced within everyday contexts and structures. Sennett (2003), for example, explores the lived experience of respect and dignity under conditions of inequality. He argues that respect is not simply a matter of politeness or abstract recognition of dignity, but a performative act: 'treating others with respect doesn't just happen, even with the best will in the world; to convey respect means finding the words and gestures which make it felt and convincing' (Sennett 2003, 208). Like Honneth, Sennett recognises that disrespect wounds: 'no insult is offered another person, but neither is recognition extended; he or she is not seen as a full human being whose presence matters' (p. 3).

2.1 | Children's Entitlement to Respect

Although respect is regarded as a foundational, non-contingent value in human relations, there is disagreement on whether children are entitled to respect (Goodman 2009). Much of the contemporary literature addressing respect in childhood draws upon psychological frameworks, particularly those concerned with prosocial behaviour and social competence (Malti et al. 2020). Piaget (1932) suggested that respect in early childhood is predominantly unilateral, rooted in obedience and fear of punishment. In this heteronomous stage of moral development, children direct respect towards authority figures with higher social status. During this stage, respect is closely tethered to compliance and deference. As children enter middle childhood and begin to form peer relationships, they come to understand that rules are socially constructed and negotiable. This shift marks the emergence of mutual respect, grounded in principles of fairness and reciprocity and reflects the transition towards autonomous moral reasoning and reciprocal respect. In Piagetian theory, agency-respect involves recognising that others have distinct perspectives.

TABLE 1 | Search strategy.

Database	Search string
Social Science Citation Index	Respect* OR disrespect* (Author Keywords) AND theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin* (Abstract) AND child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager* (Abstract)
Scopus	(KEY (respect* OR disrespect*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)) AND NOT TITLE-ABS-KEY (childbirth) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, 'ar'))
PsychInfo (1806-present)	(respect* or disrespect*).id. and (child* or adolescen* or youth or young people or teenager*).ab. and (theor* or conceptuali* or defin*).ab.
IBBS	subject(respect* OR disrespect*) AND abstract(theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND abstract(child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)
Social Policy and Practice	(respect* or disrespect*).mp. [mp = abstract, title, publication type, heading word, accession number] AND (child* or adolescen* or youth or young people or teenager*).mp. AND (theor* or conceptuali* or defin*).ab.
Social Services Abstracts	subject(respect* OR disrespect*) AND abstract(theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND abstract(child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)
Sociological Abstracts	subject(respect* OR disrespect*) AND abstract(theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND abstract(child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts	subject(respect* OR disrespect*) AND abstract(theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND abstract(child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)
British Education Index	KW (respect* OR disrespect*) AND AB (theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND (child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)
ERIC	KW (respect* OR disrespect*) AND AB (theor* OR conceptuali* OR defin*) AND (child* OR adolescen* OR youth OR young people OR teenager*)

Research conducted in schools has often conceptualised respect as a 'prosocial behaviour' (e.g., Audley and Jović 2020) that should be instilled in young people (Hammett and Staeheli 2011). Maysel and Scharf (2011) argue that the most effective ways to foster respect in children and young people are to: (1) model it in everyday life; (2) discourage disrespectful behaviour towards oneself or others, and intervene when observing disrespectful behaviour; (3) promote children's self-respect; and (4) have clear discussions about the value of respect and convey clear expectations for behaviours coherent with respect, views that can be found in the findings of this review.

3 | Systematic Review Method

The following question framed this systematic review:

How is respect and disrespect conceptualised, defined, or theorised by children and young people, or in relation to children and young people?

3.1 | Search Strategy

We developed a search strategy was developed to identify peer-reviewed literature (see Table 1). An electronic literature search was conducted in May 2024 and February 2025 in 10 databases: Social Citation Index, Scopus, PsychInfo and ProQuest (May

2024); Social Policy and Practice; Social Services Abstracts; Sociological Abstracts; Worldwide Political Science Abstracts; British Education Index; and ERIC. These databases were selected due to the range of journals they cover in the social sciences, specifically education, social work, social policy and practice. Scopus is included because it is the largest bibliographic and citation database in the world. The searches combined the following keywords, previously discussed and selected by the authors: respect*, disrespect*, theor*, conceptuali*, defin*, child*, adolescen*, youth, young people and teenager. Titles and abstracts were reviewed using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The databases were checked again in October 2025. No new articles were found.

3.2 | Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following inclusion criteria were used: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, in English, German or Spanish (the languages in which the authors are fluent) to ensure scholarly credibility, methodological rigour and reliability of evidence, as well as strong philosophical argument; and (2) the concept of respect and/or disrespect is conceptualised, defined or theorised by children and young people, and/or is conceptualised, defined or theorised in relation to/about children and young people. This criterion was important because it is both the focus of the review and establishes what is known about how this concept is theorised. The definition of 'young people' or 'youth'

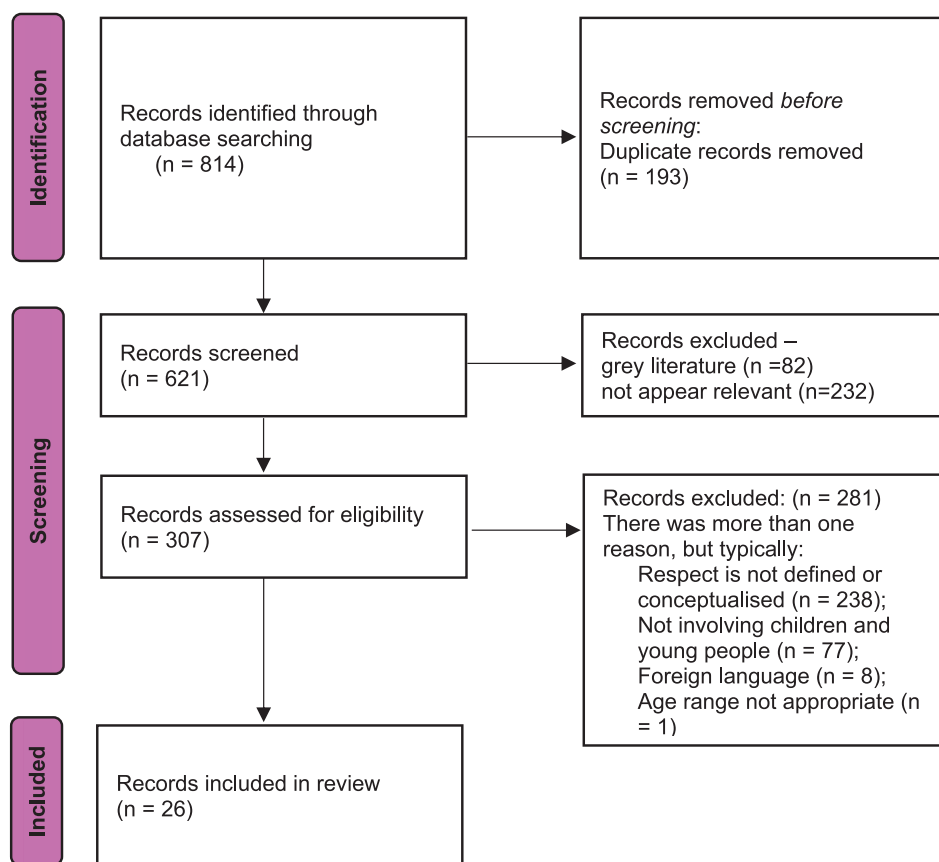


FIGURE 1 | PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al. 2020).

is typically 15–24 years for statistical purposes (UNDESA, n.d.), though this category is flexible and can vary across countries and regions, sometimes extending up to 35 years (UNESCO, n.d.). The papers that met our inclusion criteria ranged in age from 4 to 26. A ‘child’ is defined as a person under the age of 18 (UNCRC 1989). Qualitative, quantitative and philosophical papers were included to maximise the number of papers available for review.

The following exclusion criteria were applied: (1) grey literature, as such sources are generally not peer-reviewed and could compromise research integrity; (2) articles in which children and/or young people are not the focus; and (3) articles where respect is mentioned briefly, casually, and without definition.

3.3 | Selection of Relevant Studies

The authors followed the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) (Page et al. 2020) to ensure transparency. The initial database search identified 814 records. After removing duplicates, 621 articles remained and were screened by the second author for broad relevance. Papers for screening were downloaded to Rayyan. During this initial screening, 232 articles were excluded because they did not relate to children and young people; many focused on respectful childbirth or maternity care. An additional 82 were excluded as they were books, book chapters or dissertations. Two authors independently reviewed 307 possible papers for inclusion. Their level of agreement, as assessed by Cohen’s kappa, was 0.86 ($p < 0.001$),

indicating acceptable agreement (McHugh 2012). In total, 281 articles were excluded, mostly because respect was not defined or conceptualised ($n = 238$), they did not involve children and young people ($n = 77$), were in a language not spoken by the team ($n = 8$) and/or the age range was not appropriate ($n = 1$). The PRISMA flow diagram summarises this process (Figure 1).

3.4 | Data Abstraction

Each article was read in full by the first two authors, who then wrote a summary. These summaries were placed in a matrix, which provided general information about the country, study design, methods, sample, whether respect was conceptualised/defined by the authors, children and young people (CYP) or both, the definition/conceptualisation of respect, the theorist or approach, and any relevant conclusions. We analysed and compared the definitions, descriptions and classifications of respect presented in the articles. This process helped us develop a thematic framework encompassing various conceptualisations and distinctions of respect, informed by well-known theories of respect.

4 | Findings

4.1 | National Contexts

The 26 papers were situated in seven single national contexts: Australia (Graham et al. 2016; Robinson et al. 2021); Ireland (Glynn 2021; McCormack et al. 2025); Norway (Paulsen

and Thomas 2018); Mexico (Méndez 2018); Mozambique (Lenzi et al. 2019), South Africa (Johnson et al. 2018); UK (Jamieson 2005; McCarthy and Walker 2006; Gaskell 2008; Hart 2009; Burns et al. 2017; Ford 2020; Richardson et al. 2021); and the USA (Spencer et al. 2004; Langdon 2007; Huo et al. 2010; Gowen et al. 2014; Audley et al. 2020). See Table 2 for the characteristics of each paper, including institutional contexts, methodologies, age range and conceptions of respect.

4.2 | Institutional Contexts

The majority of papers are situated in education ($n = 13$): primary or elementary schools (Burns et al. 2017; Johnson et al. 2018; Méndez 2018; Audley et al. 2020; Frierson 2021); in secondary or high schools (Gaskell 2008; Hart 2009; Huo et al. 2010); primary and secondary (Goodman 2009; Graham et al. 2016; Stojanov 2023; McCormack et al. 2025); and higher education (Psychology) (Langdon 2007).

The next most common category was research conducted in community-based agencies ($n = 4$) (Gowen et al. 2014; Lenzi et al. 2019; Richardson et al. 2021; Robinson et al. 2021), followed by studies on youth justice and crime ($n = 3$) (Jamieson 2005; McCarthy and Walker 2006). Other areas were youth in care (Glynn 2021; Paulsen and Thomas 2018) and community youth projects/groups (Jones 2002; Spencer et al. 2004). The remaining papers explored respect in family contexts (Hendrick et al. 2010), NEET/community education (Ford 2020) and developmental psychology in early childhood (Engelmann and Tomasello 2019).

4.3 | Methodologies

There was a mixture of methodologies: quantitative, qualitative, mixed and review, discussion and philosophical papers. Four papers employed quantitative methods ranging from a longitudinal study to self-report questionnaires (Langdon 2007; Huo et al. 2010; Méndez 2018). Fourteen papers employed qualitative methods, with focus groups and interviews being the most frequently used approaches ($n = 7$) (Jones 2002; Spencer et al. 2004; Gaskell 2008; Graham et al. 2016; Paulsen and Thomas 2018; Lenzi et al. 2019). Semi-structured and narrative interviews featured in five studies (Gowen et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2018; Ford 2020; Glynn 2021; Richardson et al. 2021). Burns et al. (2017) employed group interviews incorporating stories and vignettes, and Robinson et al. (2021) drew on photo-research and social mapping techniques. Gaskell's (2008) mixed methods study combined surveys, focus groups and diagramming techniques. Eight authors contributed theoretical, review or discussion-based papers on the concept of respect, including Goodman (2009), Frierson (2021) and Stojanov (2023). McCormack et al. (2025) conducted a policy analysis of education documents in Ireland that address respect.

4.4 | Conceptual Bases of Respect

Several influential thinkers were referenced across the reviewed articles to frame the concept of respect. The philosopher Axel

Honneth was the most frequently cited in the fields of care and welfare services and education, with his recognition theory informing the work of Graham et al. (2016), Paulsen and Thomas (2018), Glynn (2021) and Robinson et al. (2021).

In psychology, Jean Piaget (1932) is cited by Audley et al. (2020) for his work on social rules and reciprocal respect. Stephen Darwall's (1977) philosophical distinction between recognition respect and appraisal respect underpinned Engelmann and Tomasello's (2019) review of fairness as equal respect in early childhood psychology.

Gaskell (2008) drew on Richard Sennett's sociological perspective of respect as a limited and negotiated resource to explore youth citizenship in London's Tower Hamlets. McCarthy and Walker (2006) drew on Sennett (2003) and Robin Dillon (2003) to explore the relationship between respect and youth crime and antisocial behaviour. Other notable theorists included Dillon (McCormack et al. 2025), Paulo Freire (1996) (Ford 2020), Maria Montessori (Frierson 2021), Nicholas Burbules (1993) (Jones 2002) and Jürgen Habermas (2001) (Stojanov 2023). Jamieson (2005) incorporated communitarian thinkers such as Putnam (2000) and Etzioni (1995) to critique New Labour's 2005 Respect Agenda in England and Wales.

Goodman (2009) drew on the philosophical traditions of Immanuel Kant, Mill (1861/1979), John Rawls (1971) and John Dewey (1938) to distinguish between *respect-due* and *respect-earned*. Huo et al. (2010) adopted a psychological framework based on their earlier work (Huo and Binning 2008), which proposed a dual pathway model linking respect to status and inclusion. Hendrick et al. (2010) proposed a model of respect comprising two key components: equality and mutuality, as well as caring and supportiveness. Anderson's (1999) *Code of the Street* had particular salience for the low-income, African-American youth of Gowen et al.'s (2014) study, for whom respect contributes to feelings of well-being, safety and acceptance among peers and within the community.

Several authors in this review did not ground their analysis in a specific theorist (Hart 2009; Burns et al. 2017; Johnson et al. 2018; Méndez 2018; Lenzi et al. 2019; Spencer et al. 2004) but drew on a variety of sources. Langdon (2007) sought a participant-generated understanding of respect informed by a psychology literature review that yielded definitions of respect as social power, social rules, caring, equality and accepting differences (pp. 473–474); while Hart (2009), for example, focused on a cultural citizenship approach that attends to difference as necessary to challenge disrespect and experiences of inferior citizenship.

4.5 | Conceptions of Respect: By, About, and by and About Children and Young People

The majority ($n = 15$) of papers focused on discussions of respect *about* children and young people, such as Audley et al. (2020), Engelmann and Tomasello (2019) and Ford (2020). Five papers explored respect both *by* and *about* children and young people, including studies by Gowen et al. (2014) and Johnson

TABLE 2 | Characteristics of included articles.

	Author/s, year	Country	Design	Sample and age range	Dis/respect conceptualised by or about CYP?	Focus of paper	Themes/Conclusions
1.	Audley et al. (2020)	USA	Longitudinal quantitative study Self-report questionnaires	216 children, 110 girls, 103 boys, 3rd to 6th graders	About	The relationship between children's demonstrations of respect to peers and their social competence in middle childhood; how gender norms shape this relationship	Respect has different functions: respect as agency vs. unconditional respect; and different forms (behaviours vs. emotions vs. cognitions) Telling children to show respect to gain peer acceptance may be ineffective for those who are victimised, display overt aggression, or whose expressions of respect differ from peer expectations
2.	Burns et al. (2017)	Northern Ireland	Qualitative rights-based approach on respect for diversity Stories and case vignettes	15 group interviews (total = 145) with 7–11 year-olds in seven primary schools	By and about	Children's understandings of 'respect' and reasons why they may or may not respect members of other groups	Behavioural aspects of respect for diversity by children were identified as: attention; offering time; equality of treatment; and acts of solidarity
3.	Engelmann and Tomasello (2019)		Review of evidence, opinion article		About	Children's sense of fairness and the development of a sense of equal respect in early childhood	Children want and expect equal respect. Children's aversion to resource inequality derives from the lack of interpersonal respect that unequal distributions display
4.	Ford (2020)	UK	Qualitative insider-research, including semi-structured interviews	16–25 year old NEEs	About	How respect is formed through young people's expressed self-identity within collaborative music-making	Music helps increase respectful understanding and to tolerate differences in musical taste Young people distinguish between personal respect and musical respect
5.	Frierson (2021)		Discussion paper		About	Three-fold account of moral theory of Maria Montessori	Respect is agency-centered Respectful agents esteem others Respect is a set of moral rules for harmonious lives. Respect for activity, choice and non-interference

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

	Author/s, year	Country	Design	Sample and age range	Dis/respect conceptualised by or about CYP?	Focus of paper	Themes/Conclusions
6.	Gaskell (2008)	UK	Mixed method—survey, focus group discussions and small group diagramming techniques	428 young people	About and by Sennett	New Labour's Respect Agenda Exploration of respect and citizenship for young people	New Labour Respect Agenda demands respect from young people, and criminalises vulnerable young people, stripping them of self-respect, interpersonal respect and societal respect Understanding young people's experiences and views of respect are critical to developing respect as a useful analytical, theoretical and political tool
7.	Glynn (2021)	Ireland	Qualitative longitudinal case study	16 Interviews with young people aged 18	About	Transition out of care: recognition, precarity and liminality Respect in student-teacher relationships	Legal recognition, legal personhood for achieving self-realisation and full moral person-hood in society. Disrespect is the denial of entitlement to rights Respect: universal dignity and equality; esteem for the person Respect is a non-contingent aspect of all human relationships, which follows from the recognition that people are worthy ends in themselves (respect-due)
8.	Goodman (2009)		Philosophy article		About		
9.	Gowen et al. (2014)	USA	Semi-structured Interviews	50 African American adolescents aged 15–17	About and by	The meanings of respect in romantic relationships attributed by low-income, heterosexual African American adolescents	Interpersonal pro-social behaviours; inhibition of anti-social behaviours and showing respect in the community in public contexts Respect is necessary for safety and survival. Being treated right
10.	Graham et al. (2016)	Australia	Focus groups and interviews	606 students aged 6–17, 89 teachers and principals	About and by	How relationships act to facilitate and limit the experience of wellbeing at school	Describe respect as being cared for/as conditional, reciprocal or extended to all, and value for who the student is

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

	Author/s, year	Country	Design	Sample and age range	Dis/respect conceptualised by or about CYP?	Focus of paper	Themes/Conclusions
11.	Hart (2009)		Interviews and focus groups with 83 young people aged 14–16 attending schools in England		By	New Labour agenda on renewing citizenship. Young people's views and experiences of youth citizenship	Young people did not feel they were treated with equal respect to adults
12.	Hendrick et al. (2010)		Review/discussion article on various definitions of respect		About	Respect and the family	A model of respect of equality/mutuality and caring/supportiveness Respect as a cognitive, behavioural and affective Family norms and rules are important and may be developmental. Universal family norm is respect other members of the family
13.	Huo et al. (2010)	USA	Questionnaire	1377 students at two high schools, average age 15.75	About	How feelings of respect affect young people's wellbeing	Fair treatment from group members shapes attitudes towards the group and self through status and inclusion Perceptions of status predicted social engagement, and liking was more important in predicting wellbeing
14.	Jamieson (2005)	UK	Discussion paper Qualitative semi-structured interviews	30 young people subject to a variety of court orders	About	How the respect agenda fits into New Labour's overall youth justice project in England and Wales	Social respect New Labour's conception of respect is authoritarian and penal. Disciplinary powers of the state to tackle not just 'crime' but to restore order and pro-social behaviour, including bad/deficit parenting Respect is compliance

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

	Author/s, year	Country	Design	Sample and age range	Dis/respect conceptualised by or about CYP?	Focus of paper	Themes/Conclusions
15.	Johnson et al. (2018)	South Africa	Exploratory research using Semi-structured interviews	10 Black South African adolescents in a primary school	By and about	Setswana-speaking early adolescents' perceptions of respect in educator-learner relationships in the South African context	The need to belong is paramount. (1) early adolescents need a 'parent figure' modelling respect; (3) positive emotions facilitate respect when learners feel valued and cared for; (4) an educator who shows respect, ignites reciprocity, thus demonstrating respectful communication within a secure structure and encourages academic excellence
16.	Jones (2002)		Discussion paper drawing on three studies involving young people and professionals (interviews and focus groups) Family centre, Youth project		By and about	Young people's interpretations of respect.	Respect meant that young people felt they were important; their ideas, experiences and participation were valued, they were 'looked after' and felt at ease in their surroundings. Concept of respect involved the valuing of people and their opinions. Self-identities were valued Paying attention, awareness Having space to get your point across.
17.	Langdon (2007)	USA	Survey	213 students aged 21.7 years on introductory and upper-level psychology course 70% women, 29% men	About and by	Conceptualisations of respect	(a) social rules –normative behaviours: proper and correct way to act; (b) equality—respect given to all persons; (c) caring; and (d) social power- people with authority or higher social status deserve respect; (d) personal attributes
18.	Lenzi et al. (2019)	Mozambique	In-depth interviews and focus group	13–19 year old women and girls	By	How respect relates to norms of femininity among adolescent girls in rural Mozambique	Respect as deference, chastity and modesty; being obedient, humble and quiet; being productive and serving others; sexual abstinence or being faithful to one partner

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

	Author/s, year	Country	Design	Sample and age range	Dis/respect conceptualised by or about CYP?	Focus of paper	Themes/Conclusions
19.	McCarthy and Walker (2006)	UK	Synthesis discussion/review of literature		About	UK respect agenda. The connection between respect and youth crime/antisocial behaviour	Critique of the government's one-dimensional conceptualisation of respect. Respect is unidirectional. Young people don't feel respected. Young people are willing to accord respect to others. Respect cannot be imposed on people from above
20.	McCormack et al. (2025)	Ireland	Policy analysis of 620 education documents		About	How respect is articulated in Irish education, policy, curriculum, circulars and legislation Directive recognition respect Eval	Respect understood in six ways: respecting difference and diversity; mutual respect/respect as relational; respecting the child; respecting the environment; respecting parents' rights, views and values; and respecting the 'ethos' of the school Respect is so ubiquitous it becomes valueless
21.	Méndez (2018)	Mexico	Quasi-experiment using participative observation and questionnaires pre and post intervention	15 pupils aged 4–5 years	About	How the value of respect can be developed/fostered in children through a classroom intervention	Respect as a moral value which implies being tolerant, acting in a just way and with self-control, leading to positive human coexistence. Respect value can be taught to children from a very young age
22.	Paulsen and Thomas (2018)	Norway	Interviews and focus group	43 adolescents, aged 17–26	About	Young people's experiences in the transition to adulthood from child welfare	Respect as access to information, participation and collaboration. Importance of being recognised The need for a good relationship to emotional recognition, the need for participation to legal recognition, and the need for affirmational support to social recognition

(Continues)

TABLE 2 | (Continued)

	Author/s, year	Country	Design	Sample and age range	Dis/respect conceptualised by or about CYP?	Focus of paper	Themes/Conclusions
23.	Richardson et al. (2021)	UK	Semi-structured interviews	6 young people aged 10–13	About and by	The way in which young people who have experienced parental intimate abuse make sense of romantic relationships	Definition of respect can be inferred to mean caring for, caring about, supportive, accepting of one another, pro-social emotions and attitudes (happy, safe, joy)
24.	Robinson et al. (2021)	Australia	Interviews using social maps, photo-research and repeat interviews	42 young people aged 18–25 with cognitive impairments and their support workers	About and by	The role of relationships with paid support workers in strengthening the rights and wellbeing of young people with cognitive disability in Australia.	Rights, love and solidarity translated with and by young people as 'cared for', respected, and 'valued' Young people equated respect with their voice being heard, making choices and having influence over time and activities. How young people feel about being with another person can contribute to developing their self-esteem, self-respect and self-confidence
25.	Spencer et al. (2004)		Exploratory study	7 focus groups with 91 children and adolescents aged 7–18 Community youth groups	By	Young people's experiences and understandings of their relationships with the important adults in their lives using relational-cultural theory	Importance of an adult engaging with them in ways that convey mutuality and respect. Respect has to be mutual and respectful understanding. Active listening. Respect for privacy Mutuality, Authenticity, Active listening and Confidentiality
26.	Stojanov (2023)		Philosophy of respect		About	Philosophy of education using Habermas work, moral norms and the need to treat children with respect	Children's inclusion in moral decisions is a matter of respect due to them not so much on the basis of their prospective rational autonomy, but rather on the basis of their actual status as children. It <i>epistemic</i> respect for the perspectives and the claims of children

et al. (2018). Six papers specifically examined respect by children and young people; for example, Spencer et al. (2004) and Hart (2009).

The appraisal of methodological quality was conducted using the Joanna Briggs Institute 10-item checklist (Lockwood et al. 2015). Each paper was appraised for congruity across key items, such as research methodology and research questions, and data collection and analysis (Table 3). The appraisal indicates that the papers are congruent. Papers published in the early 2000s did not include ethical statements, which are now a standard requirement. Two other omissions are statements on researcher reflexivity and positionality, which are increasingly common in research, in recognition of how one's class, sex, or race and social situatedness can influence the research design, the questions asked, and the interpretation of the data (Berger 2015). Such statements are recognised as a 'major strategy for quality control' in research (Berger 2015, 230), helping to identify and minimise, for example, the stereotyping of marginalised groups or the stigmatisation of children and young people from low-income working-class backgrounds. Non-empirical papers, such as Engelmann and Tomasello (2019), Frierson (2021) and Goodman (2009) were not appraised.

Appraisal of congruity between the research methodology, data representation and analysis and interpretation of results is 'unclear' for Jones (2002) and Jamieson (2005). Congruity with the research question was also unclear in Jones (2002). The discussion is based on two previous evaluative research projects that interviewed participants but offers only summary details of the methodology. Jamieson (2005) refers to data from interviews with 30 young people but does not explain the methodology, the research questions, or how the data was interpreted. Méndez (2018) was also included despite five appraisal items being rated as 'no' or 'unclear'. These papers were nevertheless included because they met the inclusion criteria. The papers appraised as 'NA' are philosophical papers whose authors did not conduct empirical research.

4.6 | Developing the Themes

The themes were developed through inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), which involved close engagement with and several re-readings of the constructions, conceptualisations and definitions of respect presented by the authors included in this review. As many of these papers drew on well-established and widely cited thinkers such as Kant (1797) on dignity and respect for persons; Honneth (1992) on recognition respect; Darwall (1977) on recognition and appraisal respect; Sennett (2003) on mutual recognition; Dillon (1992) on object, directive, institutional, care and evaluative respect; and Piaget (1932) on reciprocal respect through peer interactions, we were able to methodically map the key findings against established typologies, constructions and varieties of respect, including respect as attitude, affect, valuing, caring, perception and worthiness.

We also engaged in extensive reading of the philosophical and sociological literature on respect, the key elements of which

were presented earlier in this paper. This process was further informed by the first author's background and research expertise in the philosophy of education, including the philosophical tradition on moral philosophy, personhood and respect. The first two authors compiled excerpts into a table that explained, described and reported on respect or disrespect. After several classifications of the papers under different themes, they were finally grouped under these five themes: 1. *Recognition and moral worth*; 2. *Relational and reciprocal dynamics*; 3. *Respect as a behavioural, emotional and cultural construct*; 4. *Educational and developmental value*; and 5. *Social justice, inclusion and power*.

4.6.1 | Theme 1: Recognition and Moral Worth

Respect in the studies described here is conceptualised as a form of recognition that affirms others' agency, dignity and moral status. This includes recognition respect, appraisal respect and respect as a universal moral entitlement. Philosophical and empirical studies highlight how respect, whether grounded in dignity, equality, or agency, supports moral development, social solidarity and equitable relationships across diverse contexts, including schools and care settings (Goodman 2009; Paulsen and Thomas 2018; Engelmann and Tomasello 2019; Audley et al. 2020; Frierson 2021; Glynn 2021; Robinson et al. 2021). In a philosophical discussion of respect as a value in schools, Goodman (2009) distinguishes between *respect-due*, which is universal and premised on human dignity, and *respect-earned*, which is contingent on qualities that one possesses or acquires (appraisal respect). In a review of evidence on children's aversion to inequity, Engelmann and Tomasello (2019) found that children's sense of fairness is rooted in their expectation of equal respect, which emerges through collaborative interactions and is closely connected to recognition respect. Young children perceive unequal treatment as a lack of interpersonal respect, rather than merely unequal resource allocation.

Audley et al.'s (2020) longitudinal quantitative study shows that respect plays an important and diverse role in peer relationships among elementary school children in the USA. Based on 216 self-report questionnaires, they found that respect has different functions and forms, encompassing respect as agency, behaviours, emotions and cognitions. In Frierson's (2021) discussion of Montessori's (1912) moral theory, respect is also agency-focused. Agency is a norm-governed, self-perfecting activity, which is the proper object of respect and the basis of social solidarity. Respect, understood as both recognition and appraisal, and non-interference, enables moral development through mutual regard and shared purpose. Robinson et al. (2021) found from their interviews with 42 Australian participants (aged 18–25) that these young people with cognitive impairments equated respect with being heard, making choices, and having influence over their time and activities. Rights, love and solidarity were construed as being cared for, respected and valued.

Legal recognition of all, regardless of personal characteristics, emerged as a central finding in Glynn's (2021) qualitative longitudinal case study of 16 young people leaving care in Ireland. Recognition respect, acknowledging individuals as distinct and valued members of a group, is essential for self-realisation and moral personhood, affirming young people's entitlement

TABLE 3 | Included articles quality appraisal (Lockwood et al. 2015).

Author, year	Congruity between the stated perspective and the research methodology	Congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives	Congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data	Congruity between the research methodology and the representation of data	Congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results	Statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	Influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed	Participants, and their voices, adequately represented	Research is ethical and approved by an appropriate body	Conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data	Include?
Audley et al. (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	NA	NA	NA	Y	Y	Y
Burns et al. (2017)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Ford (2020)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gaskell (2008)	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Glynn (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gowen et al. (2014)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	U	Y	Y	Y	Y
Graham et al. (2016)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Hart (2009)	Y	Y	Y	Y	U	N	N	Y	U	Y	Y
Huo et al. (2010)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N/A	N/A	N/A	Y	Y	Y
Jamieson (2005)	Y	Y	Y	U	U	N	N	Y	U	Y	Y
Johnson et al. (2018)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Jones (2002)	Y	U	Y	U	U	N	N	Y	U	Y	Y
Lenzi et al. (2019)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
McCormack et al. (2025)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	NA	NA	Y	Y
Méndez (2018)	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N	U	U	N	Y
Paulsen and Thomas (2018)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Richardson et al. (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

(Continues)

TABLE 3 | (Continued)

Author, year	Congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology	Congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives	Congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data	Congruity between the research methodology and the analysis of data	Congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results	Statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	Influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed	Participants, and their voices, adequately represented	Research is ethical and approved by an appropriate body	Conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data	Include?
Robinson et al. (2021)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Spencer et al. (2004)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	U	Y	Y

Abbreviations: N, no; NA, not applicable; U, unclear; Y, yes.

to rights; denial constitutes disrespect and exclusion. Paulsen and Thomas (2018) found that the 43 adolescents whom they interviewed or spoke to in focus groups in the Norwegian child welfare services associated respect with access to information, participation and collaboration. As in Glynn's (2021) study, recognition respect was important to the young people: good relationships resulted in emotional recognition, participation was the basis for legal recognition and affirmational support underpinned social recognition.

4.6.2 | Theme 2: Relational and Reciprocal Dynamics

In the following studies, respect is portrayed as a mutual, relational process, grounded in dialogue, active listening and authentic engagement in interpersonal interactions. It plays a critical role in identity formation, educational and romantic relationships, and collaborative settings. The expression of respect is shaped by recognition, care and being valued (Jones 2002; Spencer et al. 2004; Gowen et al. 2014; Graham et al. 2016; Johnson et al. 2018; Ford 2020). In Jones' (2002) discussion paper on three studies involving young people and professionals, respect emerged as a 'communicative virtue' rooted in reciprocity. Young people learn from and value each other's identities, experiences and contributions. It involves mutual appreciation, attentiveness and consideration, which nourish a sense of being valued, safe, and understood in personal and communal interactions. Gowen et al. (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with 50 participants aged 15–17 to explore their conceptions of respect in romantic relationships. The participants described respect as involving supportive and prosocial behaviours, avoiding harmful actions, and maintaining respectful conduct in public. For low-income African-American adolescents, respect was closely tied to safety, survival and being treated well. Johnson et al. (2018) undertook an exploratory study with 10 Black South African primary school pupils to examine their perceptions of respect in teacher-learner relationships. The findings revealed that the young adolescents develop a sense of respect through feelings of belonging and observing respectful behaviour modelled by caring adult figures. When educators foster positive emotions and demonstrate respect, they create a secure environment that encourages reciprocal respect and academic growth, leading to flourishing relationships.

In an exploratory study with seven focus groups involving 91 children and adolescents aged 7–18 years in the USA, Spencer et al. (2004) found that respect was founded on mutuality, authenticity, active listening and confidentiality. The young people emphasised the importance of adults modelling these virtues to them. Respectful relationships were seen as growth-promoting when adults were open to being influenced by the young person and valued them for who they are. Graham et al. (2016) explored how Australian primary and secondary school students understand the concept of respect. Drawing on focus group responses from 606 students and interviews with 89 teachers and principals, the study found that students associated respect with feeling cared for and being valued for their individuality within the school environment. Graham et al. (2016) identified three distinct forms of respect which promote wellbeing: conditional, reciprocal and universally extended, highlighting the nuanced ways in which respect is expressed and experienced

in educational settings. Disrespect was linked to misrecognition, while identity formation was shaped through recognition in the forms of love, rights and solidarity, with respect for legal status being a key aspect of their rights as citizens and persons (see Glynn 2021; Robinson et al. 2021). Finally, Ford (2020) engaged in a qualitative insider-researcher study on social development among musicians aged 16–25 in Cardiff, Wales. Using data collected from rehearsal observations, group activities, interviews with three staff members, and five of the 30 participants, Ford (2020) found that respect entailed considering others' viewpoints through dialogue and friendship. Collaborative music practice helped the young people develop respectful understanding and tolerance of differences, where respect was earned through communication, identity sharing and mutual recognition. They distinguished between personal respect and mutual respect, valuing either interpersonal qualities or musical talent and preferences.

4.6.3 | Theme 3: Respect as a Behavioural, Emotional and Cultural Construct

The themes of respect in the authors represented here are similar to those in Theme 2. Here, however, respect is expressed through behaviours and emotions, involving social norms, equality, caring and recognition of authority. Respect is shaped by cultural, gendered and familial contexts (Langdon 2007; Huo et al. 2010; Lenzi et al. 2019).

Langdon (2007) evaluated understandings of respect from a survey of 213 introductory and upper-level university psychology students in the USA. The findings revealed respect to be a complex five-dimensional construct comprising *social rules* about the proper way to act; *equality* in which respect is given to all persons; *caring*; *social power* in which respect is conferred upon individuals who hold authority or possess high social status; and *personal attributes* such as trustworthiness. To explore the relationship between respect and well-being, Huo et al. (2010) administered 1377 questionnaires to students in two US high schools. The data indicated that students construe respect as an individual's evaluation of the quality of their relationships with others, expressed through attitudes and behaviors, such as fair treatment, that signify status, inclusion and interpersonal value.

In their review of various definitions of respect, Hendrick et al. (2010) proposed a two-component model of respect based on equality/mutuality and caring/supportiveness. When applied to families, Hendrick et al. (2010) found that, while parents and children do not share equal authority, parents can empower their children by nurturing their confidence and gradually increasing their responsibility, although this approach varies across cultures. Family norms, such as respecting other members, are essential and often evolve with the child's development as a 'normal' part of social growth. Lenzi et al. (2019) examined norms of femininity among rural girls aged 13–19 in Mozambique, the only study in this review to explore the gendered dimensions of respect within a Global South cultural context. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study found that respect was closely associated with humility and deference. Girls were expected to be obedient, quiet and polite towards elders and community members, and to serve others. Respect was

also strongly linked to chastity and modesty: girls were expected to dress conservatively, abstain from sexual activity, and avoid inappropriate interactions with boys and men.

4.6.4 | Theme 4: Educational and Developmental Value

The authors of the studies presented under this theme conceive of respect in behavioural, affective and cognitive dimensions and understand it as a moral and epistemic value that supports moral development, harmonious co-existence and inclusive relationships. Respect is a teachable moral value and a developmental goal. It is linked to school ethos, pedagogy and citizenship and diversity education (Goodman 2009; Burns et al. 2017; Johnson et al. 2018; Méndez 2018; Stojanov 2023; McCormack et al. 2025). Burns et al. (2017) undertook a qualitative, rights-based approach to understand primary school children's beliefs about respect for diversity in Northern Ireland, UK. Through 15 group interviews with 145 7–11-year-olds, Burns et al. (2017) found that children expressed respect for diversity through behaviours such as attentiveness, offering their time to others, equal treatment and acts of solidarity. These behaviours were affectively motivated by empathy and friendship, the moral norms of inclusion, human rights principles, and the belief in the equal worth of all. Méndez (2018) implemented a quasi-experimental classroom intervention with 15 Mexican pupils aged 4–5 years to assess how respect can be cultivated in early childhood. The study found that respect is understood as a moral value that involves tolerance, fairness and self-control, and that it contributes to positive coexistence. As a moral value, respect can be instilled in children from an early age to support their ethical and moral development. In a philosophical analysis of respect, Stojanov (2023) contends that children deserve respect, not merely because of their developing autonomy, but because of their status as children and their unique perspectives. This respect is both moral and epistemic, requiring adults to engage genuinely with children's views and be open to revising their own normative claims. Meaningful moral dialogue depends on adults' willingness to be surprised, enriched and shaped by children's insights and experiences (p. 257). Goodman (2009; see above) likewise regards respect as a foundational value in schools, cautioning that understanding the teacher-student relationship solely as one of 'respect-due' (i.e., 'ruler and ruled') reinforces hierarchical authority and obedience, thereby limiting the potential for a collaborative educational ethos. Demanding respect-due also undermines the development of students' moral autonomy and critical faculty for effective choice-making.

4.6.5 | Theme 5: Social Justice, Inclusion and Power

These studies examine respect in relation to social inclusion and citizenship rights, highlighting how state-imposed, punitive respect agendas fail to acknowledge and respect young people (Jamieson 2005; McCarthy and Walker 2006; Gaskell 2008; Hart 2009; Paulsen and Thomas 2018; Robinson et al. 2021). Jamieson (2005) critiques the New Labour Government's (in power from 1997–2010) conception of respect and young people, arguing that it is rooted in authoritarian and punitive frameworks because of its emphasis on compliance and discipline. Influenced by conservative communitarian thinkers, New

Labour linked respect to rights-as-responsibilities and intolerance of antisocial behaviour, an approach that viewed respect as a mechanism for restoring order, including extending state control to improve so-called ‘bad’ or ‘deficit’ parenting. In a synthesis of the literature on interviews with prisoners and their children, McCarthy and Walker (2006) explore the relationship between respect and youth crime, as well as antisocial behaviour, to critique New Labour’s ‘one-dimensional’ framing of respect. Respect, as defined by the young people, should be mutual and earned rather than demanded by adults and institutions. It involves recognising the intrinsic value of others and treating them with fairness and empathy, grounded in principles of reciprocity. Attempts to impose respect from above are ineffective.

Gaskell (2008) also critiques New Labour’s discourse on citizenship and anti-social behaviour, arguing that it fosters a controlling agenda that relies on naming and shaming young people. Drawing on Sennett, Gaskell suggests that respect is cultivated through self-development, care of the self and reciprocal recognition (p. 227), but is corroded by experiences of shame and fear. Young people argue that meaningful policy should treat respect not as a demand, but as an outcome of understanding their lived experiences. Hart (2009) too condemns New Labour’s respect agenda, noting that it alienates young people and contributes to feelings of disrespect through age-based exclusion. Drawing on interviews and focus groups with 83 students aged 14–16 years in England, the study found that young people define respect as being recognised, listened to without prejudice and being treated with the same dignity as adults. A negative consequence of the New Labour respect agenda was that young people felt disrespected because of their age.

5 | Discussion

What the preceding synthesis reveals is that respect is a foundational moral and social value that affirms individual dignity, agency and recognition among young people, regardless of context. Respect is a value that can be cultivated from a very early age. It is deeply relational and reciprocal, emerging through dialogue, collaboration, mutual appreciation and authentic engagement in personal, educational, communal and care settings, as well as youth justice contexts. Respect, moreover, is shaped by cultural norms and expressed through behaviours, emotions and attitudes that support inclusion, fairness and moral development. Top-down, punitive approaches to inculcating respect, whether to inculcate a sense of citizenship or respect for authority, are ineffective because they are disrespectful—a manifestation of the denial of recognition—and consequently alienate young people. Instead, approaches that advocate for mutual, earned respect, rooted in empathy and understanding, and that value and esteem the dignity of the person are far more likely to result in effective policy.

Researchers will inevitably identify different aspects of respect depending on the theoretical frameworks they draw upon, how they organise and interpret their findings, the question(s) they ask, the methods they use, and whether their participants are invited to conceptualise respect as co-researchers rather than merely describe their experiences as research participants.

Hence, the varieties of respect we find in this review. Which of these features most prominently depends on context, norms, rules, relationships, conventions, actions, duties, consequences and obstacles, as well as the guiding theoretical framework. However, despite the variety of approaches and methods, one type of respect was predominant in the research that asked children and young people to explain or conceptualise respect: *Recognition respect as care-respect* (Hart 2009; Spencer et al. 2004; Langdon 2007; Burns et al. 2017; Lenzi et al. 2019). *Recognition respect as directive-respect and care-respect emerged* in Langdon (2007), while *Recognition respect as directive-respect* was predominant in Lenzi et al. (2019). Interestingly, despite the predominance of *Recognition respect as care-respect*, the authors each draw on a different theory: cultural citizenship (Hart 2009), relational cultural theory (Spencer et al. 2004), review of psychological literature (Langdon 2007), bi-directional respect (Gowen et al. 2014), rights-based approach (Burns et al. 2017), Honneth’s recognition theory (Robinson et al. 2021) and African cultural commonality (Lenzi et al. 2019).

The young people in Hart’s (2009) study described what it felt like to be disrespected in their communities. Indeed, they took part in the study because of their indignation at adults’ age discrimination and the lack of inclusion and equality:

Adults don’t seem to know what we’re like because the media is a very powerful tool, all you see on the news is the youths who broke the windows and got drunk in the park, things like that, that’s all you see, that’s the only portrayal that you see.

(Ava, aged 15, p. 560)

It makes you feel like you’re lower down in society and, like, a bigger community because, well especially Nottingham and Manchester, because there’s a lot of gun crime and stuff, and drugs, they all stereotype you that obviously if you’re under 18 you’re carrying a gun and doing drugs. And that just makes you feel like you’re just not worth it.

(Amy, aged 15, p. 651)

In response to the question about what respect means, nearly all the young women in Lenzi et al.’s (2019) research said it meant showing respect to parents, being polite, avoiding arguments, being humble and quiet, and showing boys and men respect:

[She] speaks with respect [to boys her own age], even if they say something she doesn’t like. The ones who are not “in line” insult and abuse their boyfriends... She [also] speaks with respect with older men, doesn’t get close to them. But the girls who are not “in line” sit close to older men, and don’t respect them.

(15-year-old girl, p. 581)

Recognition respect as care-respect also emerged as an important form of respect in 14 of the papers (e.g., Paulsen and Thomas 2018; Audley et al. 2020; and Glynn 2021), in which children and young people described their experiences of respect and what

it means to feel or be respected. *Recognition respect as directive-respect* emerged as a strong variety in 12 of the papers in terms of rights-claims (Paulsen and Thomas 2018; Engelmann and Tomasello 2019; McCormack et al. 2025), respect-due to authority (Jamieson 2005; McCarthy and Walker 2006; Gaskell 2008), respect-due in teacher-student relationships, family members, among student peers (Goodman 2009; Hendrick et al. 2010; Audley et al. 2020), fostering respect (Méndez 2018).

6 | Limitations

Although we conducted a comprehensive search of 10 databases for articles in English, German and Spanish, which strengthens the robustness of the review's findings and discussion, we may have inevitably missed papers in other languages. Limited time and budget constraints hindered our ability to identify and translate research into English.

Further, although we searched on some of the largest academic databases, such as Scopus, we may have missed research from regions such as Latin America, Africa and Asia. Research from these areas may be indexed on region-specific repositories not hosted by our institutional library, such as Africa Portal and LatinDex. Consequently, the predominance of literature from Europe and the USA has informed the review's conceptions of respect. As we saw in Lenzi et al.'s (2017) research in Mozambique, culturally and philosophically distinct understandings of respect, both by and about young children, may differ significantly from those prevalent in the West. The analysis presented here is, therefore, limited by its grounding in the Western Enlightenment tradition, which may not capture the diversity of global perspectives on respect.

7 | Conclusion

This review highlighted that respect is a foundational value in human relationships, moral development and social inclusion. However, its conceptualisation and experience by children and young people have often been overlooked in both the philosophical and empirical literature. However, the studies have shown that when children and young people are invited to articulate their own understandings, respect emerges as a deeply reciprocal, mutual and context-dependent phenomenon, grounded in dignity, recognition, care, agency and mutuality, which we termed *recognition respect as care-respect*. Approaches that construe respect solely as deference or compliance—whether in schools, care settings or the community—fail to capture the complexity and risk perpetuating exclusion, marginalisation and disempowerment. In contrast, practices that cultivate environments in which children and young people's voices are authentically heard and valued can promote inclusion, equality and the capability for flourishing.

The implications for practice and policy are clear: respect should not be unidirectional but grounded in mutual and epistemic respect, as well as equality. Future research, policy and practice should therefore centre the perspectives of children and young people, recognising them as capable and competent contributors

to the theorisation and enactment of respect, rather than as passive respondents to adult-framed questions. While children and young people are increasingly recognised as epistemic agents capable of co-producing, co-designing and co-constructing research designed to influence their lives, this review shows that they remain marginalised in conventional approaches to theorising and conceptualising respect. Treating them as epistemic agents is not only essential for research integrity, but also a fundamental requirement for rights-based, inclusive educational and social practices.

Author Contributions

Alison MacKenzie: conceptualization, writing – original draft, methodology, writing – review and editing, formal analysis, investigation. **Montserrat Fargas:** conceptualization, writing – original draft, methodology, writing – review and editing, investigation. **Amy Hanna:** writing – review and editing. **Bronagh Byrne:** writing – review and editing. **Siobhán McAlister:** writing, review and editing. **Claire Cassidy:** writing, review and editing. **Mary-Louise Corr:** writing, review and editing. **Dirk Schubotz:** writing, review and editing. **Gail Neill:** writing, review and editing. **Laura Lundy:** writing, review and editing.

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Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Consent

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

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