

“Yob culture” is a contradiction in terms’. Discuss with reference to one or two texts.

Culture can be split into as many different forms as you can probably think of. Well known examples are ‘popular culture’ and ‘high culture’ but one that has become more and more popular over recent times (mainly the last thirty years) is ‘yob culture’. News stories about loutish behaviour either abroad or on our own streets has become a regular occurrence. However associating these two words could be seen as a contradiction in terms. Having two complete opposites to describe something may confuse their meanings. Although it has only come to light recently, the history of yob culture lies right back in the 1900’s when working class males would spend time together on the weekend taking part in activities such as archery and whippet racing.

To outline how different these two words can be, I thought the best way to start off discussing this question is to get definitions of what they mean. The definition of yob was;

“a young man who behaves in a very rude, offensive and sometimes violent way.”(Cambridge Dictionary)

Contrasting to that, the definition of cultured was;

“describes someone who has had a good education and knows a lot about art, music, literature, etc.” (Cambridge Dictionary)

As one can see, the difference between the two is massive. Although the cultured definition gives a slightly better description of what kind of person they would be, we can imagine the kind of background that a yob might have. The stereotypical image of a yob has changed in appearance but the mentality has remained basically the same however the image and mentality of a cultured person has not changed at all. We still get the picture of a person with thick rimmed glasses and bland clothes.

The problem with using one term to describe a large group of people is that it often over-generalises. Although people within one group may have several things in common, they also have many differences and cannot be accurately described by two words e.g. yob culture. The line between ‘yob’ and ‘cultured’ becomes blurred in the text ‘Fever Pitch’. In the book we are presented with Nick Hornby’s story of his obsession with Arsenal football club and the ups and downs that it brings. Underneath what seems like a biographical account of 20 years of football support, there are clues running throughout it that go further to support the belief that ‘yob culture’ is a contradiction in terms.

What would we consider Nick Hornby? Is he a yob or is he cultured? This is where it becomes confusing. He makes no excuses for his education. Although he denies being good enough to get into an Oxbridge college due to his poor performance in the entry exam and interview, he still attends Jesus College, Cambridge, gains a degree and becomes an English teacher. At several points he also plays down his intelligence, especially on one occasion when he talks about his girlfriend in 1977, who’s collection of Yevtushenko baffles him. One would tend to believe that in some way he resents his schooling and to prevent himself becoming a highly educated snob, he supports a football team. One would even think his love for the Gunners is strengthened by the fact that it keeps him in touch with the lower classes. Even though he may not agree with the yobbish behaviour such as violence that some of the Arsenal fans show, it still does not deter his desire to sit amongst them on the North Bank (in a way this is a coming of age and a rite of passage for him). He may not partake in all of the yob rituals but it is still mentioned that he smokes, drinks and behaves like everybody around him on the terraces. Hornby realises the range of people that football attracts when he makes this comment;

“It is true that most football fans do not have an Oxbridge degree (football fans are people, whatever the media would have us believe, and most people do not have an Oxbridge degree either); but then, most football fans do not have a criminal record, or carry knives, or urinate in pockets, or get up to any of the things that they are all supposed to.”(Hornby 1992, 88)

Hornby seems to recognise himself as in the centre of both parts of these sections of society but in doing so, alienates some of the people around him such as the women in his life. As

everybody does at certain times in their lives, Hornby goes through certain difficulties in his personal life and sees Arsenal matches as a break from reality. Escapism seems to be a running theme throughout the book with him often hiding behind eleven men. It seems that him and the crowd around him empathize with the players and certainly feel associated with the success or the failure of the team. It could be compared to somebody looking at piece of art in the way the viewer's senses are aroused and identify with what the artist is trying to achieve. In that sense yob and culture have similar meanings.

The release of 'Fever Pitch' in the early 90's and to a certain extent, the film that followed a few years later made football more accessible and more easily shared amongst society. Upper classes which may have been more inclined to follow cricket or rugby now found themselves following fashionable football. Yobs were now integrated amongst the cultured and there was no longer a clear divide. David Baddiel, like Hornby educated at Cambridge and known as a witty comedian said during the time;

"I no longer feel ashamed to be a football fan" (Baddiel, 1995)

It is funny to think that the sport that you follow closely can determine how other people perceive what kind of person you are.

Yob culture also questions gender. Being intelligent and having an interest in literature and the arts would be considered feminine where as drinking and smoking is seen as masculine. It is sad that trying to better yourself is laughed upon by sections of the public. 'Fever Pitch' crosses both of these boundaries as Nick Hornby has interests in both areas. It could be argued that putting 'yob' and 'culture' together is almost the same as trying to describe masculinity and femininity as the same thing, which is a false statement.

In conclusion, yob culture could definitely be considered a contradiction in terms but the question is if we didn't use that term then how would we classify this way of life? I suppose the same could be said about other culture classifications but yob culture seems to have a particular difference that sets it apart from the rest. The two words are completely different and individually describe opposite ways of life, an oxymoron. The yob on one hand is meant to be the picture of a typical male where as a cultured person is seen as the opposite but similarities can be drawn from the two. There is no clear-cut line where one stops and the other begins. As 'Fever Pitch' has shown, it is possible to have characteristics from both. Trying to classify any group of people under one title will not give the whole picture. To prevent it from being an oxymoron, more words are needed for it to be able to become an effective description that doesn't contradict itself.

Reference:

Cambridge Dictionary Online, 15 March 2004, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Hornby Nick, 1992, *Fever Pitch*, London, Penguin

BBC, 8 March 1999, Our Decade: New Lad Rules The World, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/special_report/1999/02/99/e-cyclopedia/289778.stm