

Education and Axel Honneth's theory of recognition

A educação e o conceito de reconhecimento em Axel Honneth

La educación y la teoría del reconocimiento en Axel Honneth

Maria Patrícia Cândido Hetti¹

ABSTRACT

This paper presents Axel Honneth's (2003) recognition theory and the psychological and philosophical underpinnings that support the concept in the work *Luta pelo reconhecimento: a gramática moral dos conflitos sociais*. Furthermore, I argue that recognition theory is crucial for thinking about pedagogical practices that take into account the process of denying the values and rights of social groups and people, as well as the struggles for recognition of these historically excluded communities.

Keywords: Theory of Recognition. Axel Honneth. Education and Recognition. Critical Theory.

RESUMO

Neste artigo apresento a teoria do reconhecimento de Axel Honneth (2003) e os fundamentos filosóficos e psicológicos que sustentam o conceito na obra *Luta pelo reconhecimento: a gramática moral dos conflitos sociais*. Ademais, argumento que a teoria do reconhecimento é fundamental para pensar práticas pedagógicas que levam em consideração o processo de negação dos valores e dos direitos dos grupos sociais, bem como as lutas pelo reconhecimento dessas comunidades historicamente excluídas.

Palavras-chave: Teoria do Reconhecimento. Axel Honneth. Educação e Reconhecimento. Teoria Crítica.

RESUMEN

El artículo presenta la teoría del reconocimiento de Axel Honneth (2003) y los fundamentos filosóficos y psicológicos de este concepto en el libro *Luta pelo reconhecimento: a gramática moral dos conflitos sociais*. Asimismo, argumento que la teoría del reconocimiento es fundamental para pensar las prácticas pedagógicas que tienen en cuenta el proceso de negación de valores y derechos de grupos sociales y personas, además de las luchas por el reconocimiento de esas comunidades históricamente excluídas.

Palabras clave: Teoría del Conocimiento. Axel Honneth. Educación y Reconocimiento. Teoría Crítica.

¹Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de São Paulo, São Paulo, SP, Brazil. Email: patriciahetti2013@gmail.com 

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4966-2729>

This article is the result of research conducted in educational institutions to understand and unveil education today, and to analyze theoretical suppositions that underpin a pedagogical approach that considers the “I” to be inseparable from the “we,” as Honneth (2003) would say. Honneth’s (2003) theory of recognition provided the basis for comprehending the discussion of education that is concerned with the constitution of being, based on the reconstruction of the socio-historical trajectory of social groups who have been denied recognition.

An elitist school project has prevailed in Brazil, whose history is permeated by the myth of racial democracy, masking the relationships between different social and ethnic groups, and silencing the conflicts and processes of domination that exist in our society. According to Souza (2011, p. 304), “Brazilian public schools were established within a liberal ideology, contaminated by a culture born of slavery that never ceased to deny it.” For the author, the rules of the game in schools demonstrate the link with the *coronelismo* [authoritarianism] of our society, forging a school culture that always hides the violence of school failure, thus configuring itself as elitist and segregating. Even in the face of this school culture, the author considers that there are internal conflicts within schooling that provide mechanisms to escape school models that merely reproduce the *status quo*.

To better understand school culture, this text adopts a critical theory perspective that provides concepts and categories for analyzing the relationship between the culture of our society and schools. In using recognition theory, it became necessary to present the general characteristics, concepts, and construction of Honneth’s theory, mainly in his work *The Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth, 2003).

Therefore, the objective of this article is to present, in general terms, Axel Honneth’s (2003) work *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, whose critical theory provides important categories for the analysis of current social conditions, and circumscribes issues of critical theory to contemporary society. According to Nobre (2003, p. 7), Honneth’s theory can be considered to be centered on social life and conflicts, without forgetting that such themes and discussions are hallmarks of the critical theory inaugurated by Marx. It can be argued that not only the object of reflection of the theory, but also the approaches and methodologies adopted by Honneth, allow this author to be included in the critical field as an “authentic continuator of the inaugural meaning of critical theory, obscured especially by the hegemony of the paradigm of the ‘critique of political economy’ in the version given to it by Horkheimer in the 1930s” (Nobre, 2013, p. 12).

In Honneth’s doctoral thesis, presented to the Free University of Berlin in 1983, *The Critique of Power* (Honneth, 2009), the author argues that the project of analyzing society adopted by critical theory lacked an approach that would promote social action and, therefore, presented a sociological deficit. He points out that there was a need to analyze the role of social action as a mediator between economic determinants and the rationalization of the individual. In this work, he analyzes in detail the problems to be overcome by the Institute for Social Research, emphasizing the need to verify the adequacy of the mediation between theory and praxis, so that the examination of the present, with processes of domination and alienation, would allow us to think about an emancipatory project for today’s society.

Honneth considers that the initial project of critical theory was focused on identifying the injustices experienced by the oppressed class and overcoming the capitalist social model. However, Honneth (2009, p. 74) states that critical theorists, including Horkheimer, distanced themselves from the initial path proposed in the 1937 text, *Traditional and Critical Theory* (Horkheimer, 1991). Honneth (2009) seeks to revive the original proposal of the Institute for Social Research, as he believes that the theoretical principles of this seminal article were lost in subsequent texts.

In *Critique of Power* (Honneth, 2009), he revisits the work of various theorists — Horkheimer, Adorno, Foucault, Habermas — seeking to identify the “sociological deficit” of each of their lines of

critical theory. In *The Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth, 2003), the concept of recognition becomes essential to overcome this “sociological deficit.”

This article focuses specifically on the work *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Honneth, 2003), as it considers the idea of the struggle for recognition to be fundamental to the ethical and critical formation of the individual and society. Thus, examining some assumptions and discussions regarding the concept of recognition and the struggle for recognition can help understand the process of education of individuals in school institutions, and provide a basis for an education that discusses the issues of “historically disadvantaged” groups whose rights and values have not been recognized.

In *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth (2003) seeks to develop a theory of intersubjectivity that is based, according to him, on how a “concept of the person emerges, in which the possibility of an undistorted relation to oneself proves to be dependent on three forms of recognition: love, rights, and esteem” (Honneth, 2003, p. 1). The author seeks a critical theory of society that explains “processes of social change by referring to the normative demands that are, structurally speaking, internal to the relationship of mutual recognition” (Honneth, 2003, p. 2).

To conduct this project, Honneth (2003) draws on concepts and assumptions from the works of Hegel and Mead that are useful for developing his theory. In the works of the young Hegel, particularly *The System of Ethical Life*, Honneth (2003) finds a theory of intersubjectivity, and in George Mead's *Mind, self and society: from de standpoint of the social behaviorist* (2015), Honneth (2003) finds the suppositions of social psychology.

Honneth identifies the foundations of the theory of recognition in Hegel, finding in social struggle an essential factor in the transformation of those who have been denied their rights and recognition, so that they can act as autonomous subjects, both socially and morally. According to the author, Hegel gives greater importance to the intersubjectivity of public life and draws on Plato and Aristotle.

However, according to Honneth (2003), in his analysis of natural law, Hegel does not present a solution to the question of the social organization of individuals, but in *The System of Ethical Life* (1991) he outlines the path to be followed in his later works. One of the characteristics of Hegel's theory of natural law is the return to the Aristotelian model, since, according to Honneth (2003, p. 14), “the nation [*Volk*] comes by nature before the individual. If the individual in isolation is not anything self-sufficient, he must be related to the whole nation in one unity, just as other parts are to their whole”. It can be inferred that, for Hegel, all philosophical theory starts from ethical bonds, within which subjects move from the beginning. Hegel is guided by Aristotelian ideas, according to which the nature of man brings with it the substrate of community relations, which was fully realized in the Greek *polis*. According to Crissiuma (2013, p. 64-65), for Honneth, the Hegelian concept of ethical life is fundamental to understanding that socialization is not guided by the interest of self-preservation — an assumption of modern philosophy, mainly based on Hobbes' *Leviathan* —, but rather by a state that, from the outset, is characterized by the existence of elementary forms of intersubjective coexistence.

In this sense, natural ethical life would be inherent in every individual, as would the development of this characteristic, the driving force behind human socialization. According to Honneth (2003, p. 15), natural ethics and all forms of social organization are guided by relationships of ethical totality, thus ruling out the possibility of a social contract, of something external to explain the regulation of social coexistence. In this sense, it presupposes the “existence of intersubjective obligations as a quasi-natural precondition for every process of human socialization” (Honneth, 2003, p. 15).

Hegel interprets the meaning of history as the result of a process of conflictual universalization of moral potentiality (Honneth, 2003) and reinterprets Fichte's theory of recognition to understand

how ethical life can come into being. Ethical life in Hegel is conceived as the intertwining of the processes of socialization and individuation, the result of which would be a model of society that finds its organic cohesion in the intersubjective recognition of the particularity of all individuals (Honneth, 2003, p. 45). Honneth identifies some problems in the use of the Hegelian model, noting that there is a new context, after Jena, in which Hegel believes that ethical life is due to a process of subject formation, whose conflict lies within the human spirit.

In his work *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth (2003) establishes a clear difference between the idea of the struggle for recognition in Hegel's *System of Ethical Life* (1991) and in Hegel's ideas in later writings characteristic of a "philosophy of consciousness." It should be noted that Honneth (2003) believes that the struggle for recognition is conceived as a social process that leads towards communitarization, in the sense of decentralizing individual forms.

For Honneth (2003), this distinction is important because there is a theoretical change from the early Hegel. In this first moment, he conceived the formation of individuals within human relations, in their process of social and ethical interaction. In the later Hegel (2012), as in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, there is a loss of emphasis on this intersubjective dimension. This is because, in this second moment of Hegel's work, Honneth considers that Hegel introduced a theory of consciousness into his political philosophy, distancing himself from a conception that begins from forms of social interaction and moving towards a theory that starts from "stages of self-mediation of individual consciousness" (Honneth, 2009, p. 65).

Hegel shifts from an Aristotelian orientation to assume the perspective of a philosophical theory of consciousness, thus giving the conceptual model of the struggle for recognition a distinct version. If, initially, the political community takes effect through the conflict of elementary structures of a natural and original ethical life, in later works, it will be understood through the formation of the spirit, mediated by the formation of consciousness. Honneth (2009) follows Hegel's change of perspective, analyzing that, in the new context, he seeks to reproduce the process of spirit formation. In this sense, the ethical relations of the state lose the central function they had in *The System of Ethical Life*. According to Honneth (2003, p. 71), human consciousness is no longer integrated into the process of construction in ethical social relations, so that the social and political relationships of men become transitional stages in the process of the formation of human consciousness.

The process of realization of the spirit, which is reflected in the sphere of consciousness, presents stages: "First the relationship of individual subjects to themselves, then the institutional relations of subjects among themselves, and finally the reflective relationships of socialized subjects to the world as a whole" (Honneth, 2003, p. 33).

In this philosophy of the spirit, the stages mentioned above represent, respectively, the formation of the subjective spirit, the effective spirit, and the absolute spirit. This tripartite model will be important for the formulation of Honneth's (2003) theory of recognition, although this is not based on idealistic foundations.

Honneth takes his theory a step further by rethinking Hegel's theses on the formation of consciousness based on the construction of a social philosophy. For him, Georg Herbert Mead's theory constitutes a bridge that allows "translating Hegel's theory of intersubjectivity into a post-metaphysical theoretical language" (Honneth, 2003, p. 123), paving the way for giving the theory of recognition a materialist inflection.

According to Mead (2015, p. 7), "in social psychology, the whole (society) precedes the part (the individual), not the part the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part or parts." Sass (2004) states that, for Mead, the social origin of man includes the social expression of his physiology. First, Mead (2015) argues that there are consistent physiological elements that explain human social organization; therefore, the human social process depends on

physiological impulses. In the beginning, man is a socio-physiological impulse and the attitudes that result from this, such as reproduction, protection of children, and certain gregarious behaviors. The complex human physiological equipment enables individuals to adopt social behaviors that are impossible for other animal species. It can be asserted that, according to Mead (2015), the social origin of man, based on the innate social matrix and social relations, allows for the realization and development of the human mind and the individual self.

Another important factor in the development of Mead's (2015) analysis is understanding the complexity of human physiological processes that have been metamorphized from the biological dimension to the psychological dimension as a result of social action on the individual. For Mead (2015), this construction occurs through the development of intelligence, which is identified with the emergence of the self. The emergence of the human animal is found in the development of communication. In social theory, the role of the communicative process allows for mediation between the individual and society, enabling the construction of personality. The conversion of language into self only occurs because the individual is social, therefore, this capacity only develops in society. As a self, the individual can turn to themselves and guide their actions.

Language generates reactions "in which the individual can influence himself as he influences others" (Mead, 2015, p. 243). In this sense, Mead (2015) indicates that human nature is social, with the perception of the other taking precedence over the development of consciousness, through which a kind of importation would take place from the field of social objects to the amorphous and disorganized field of internal experience. Once the process of organization occurs in the form of self-consciousness, each individual can gain control of this organized material.

For Honneth (2003), Mead's social psychology has points of contact with the young Hegel, arguing that "Mead also aims to make the struggle for recognition the point of reference for a theoretical construction in terms of which the moral development of society is to be explained" (Honneth, 2003, p. 71). The author considers that Mead arrives at an intersubjective conception of human self-consciousness: "A subject can only acquire a consciousness of itself to the extent to which it learns to perceive their own action from the symbolically represented second-person perspective" (Honneth, 2003, p. 75).

After outlining the idea of the formation of self-consciousness, Mead (2015) broadens the discussion to the formation of the individual through the constitution of moral judgments. For the author, in the attitudes of the individual, assumed in their role as a partner in an interaction with the other, the presence of normative expectations of their social environment can be identified, considering, therefore, that the subject incorporates the moral instance, based on the intersubjective resolution of conflicts. Thus: "By putting itself in the normative point of view of its interaction partner, the other subject takes over the partner's moral values and applies them to its practical relation to itself" (Honneth, 2003, p. 77).

In the individual's experience, there are two components in the structuring of *the self*: "me" and "I." The "I" has a relationship with the "me." Although separate, the two dimensions are parts of the same whole. "Me" consists of the internalization of the generalized other, in the reactions formed and organized by society. "I" is reactive behavior, free and original to the subject.

Taken together, the two dimensions of the self constitute each individual's identity as it appears in social experience. The "I" is the organism's reaction to the attitudes of others; the "me" is the set of attitudes of others that the individual adopts for himself. Without these two phases, the individual could not have conscious responsibility, and there would be nothing new in the experience.

According to Honneth (2003, p. 134), Mead presents a gradual generalization of the "me" in child development, as children develop their personality by learning to conceive of themselves from the normative perspective of their counterpart. By learning social norms with an increasing number

of partners, they expand their practical self-image. Mead (2015) uses two phases of children's play to explain the direction of human evolution. In the first stage, called *play*, children communicate with themselves by imitating their specific interaction partner, playing at being a doctor, mother, teacher, etc. In the second stage, called *game*, the child, when playing a competitive game with rules and norms, perceives their own role and that of others in the context of organized collective action. Based on the change in the child's behavior, Mead extracts the basic mechanism of the human socialization process. Honneth (2003) summarizes the structure presented by Mead as follows:

In learning to generalize internally an ever-larger number of interaction partners to such an extent that a sense of social norms of action is acquired, the subject gains the abstract ability to participate in the norm-governed interactions. For those internalized norms tell one both what one can expect from others and what one is legitimately obliged to do for them (Honneth, 2003, p. 78).

If the subject learns to assume the social norms of action of the "generalized other," then they achieve the identity of a socially accepted member. The subject acquires knowledge about social rights, about which rights belong to them and which claims they can demand to be satisfied. According to Mead (2015), in being recognized by the community, the subject acquires dignity, with which they see themselves as a bearer of rights and a member of society. By being aware of their value, Mead (2015) observes in the individual an attitude of self-respect, that is, they understand that there is a sense of the social value of their identity in the community, and that, therefore, there is self-recognition.

The experience of being recognized by their community as a person with rights gives the subject a positive attitude towards themselves. However, if a reverse process occurs, in which it is not possible to recognize the subject's abilities, Mead (2015) will include in his theory the potential to overcome the situation faced by the subject. In this model, in which there are "creative deviations with which, in our everyday action, we ordinarily react to social obligations" (Honneth, 2003, p. 81), the subject opposes the community and modifies it according to their own needs. The "I" is formed from an insurgency against the community's expectations. Honneth (2003, p. 81) argues, in this sense, that our practical spontaneity is attributed to the operations between the "I" and the "me."

For Mead (2015), it is in the impulsiveness of the "I" that the subject secures a greater field of the right to freedom. Thus, to the extent that the subject experiences moral conflict and attempts to secure their intentions in a possible collectivity, they guarantee the movement that leads to a process of social evolution, that is, they guarantee an expansion of legal recognition.

In this way, Honneth (2003) believes that we can speak of a theory of recognition, bringing together the theories of Mead and Hegel. Honneth (2003) states that it is possible to think that, for both thinkers, "the historical liberation of individuality occurs in the form of a long-term struggle for recognition" (Honneth, 2003, p. 88).

Thus, Honneth's starting point (2003, p. 155) is based on the idea that the reproduction of social life takes place under the imperative of mutual recognition. There are two important movements in Honneth's proposal: first, the conception that subjects have a practical self-relation, learning to see themselves, from the normative perspective of their interaction partners, as their social recipients; the second movement obliges individuals to give "social expression to the claims of their subjectivity" (Honneth, 2003, p. 156). It can thus be deduced that the process of individuation is linked to the expansion of relations of recognition. This hypothesis is outlined within a dialectical perspective internal to the practices of social life, that is: it is the collective, morally motivated struggles in an attempt to institutionally and culturally establish expanded forms of reciprocal recognition (Honneth, 2003, p. 156).

Honneth (2003) seeks to clarify this process in a tripartite model of social recognition theory. Based on Hegel and Mead, he points to three distinct patterns of relationships as forms of recognition that concern both practical self-relationship and the moral development of society.

Honneth (2003) establishes primary loving relationships as the first sphere of recognition. He uses the term "love" in the sense of understanding it as a primary relationship, insofar as it consists of an emotional bond between people in their inner circle, thus seeking to go beyond the merely sexual meaning of the relationship between two adults. Taking Hegel's conception of love as "being oneself in another" as his starting point, Honneth (2003, p. 96) considers that "This way of speaking of primary affectional relationships as depending on a precarious balance between independence and attachment is much the same as the approach taken, as part of an attempt to determine the causes of pathological disorders, by psychoanalytic object-relations theory" (Honneth, 2003, p. 96). Thus, guided by the concept of an interactive, affective, and dependent process in childhood, he takes the concept of love "as the interactive relationship that forms the basis for a particular pattern of reciprocal recognition" (Honneth, 2003, p. 96).

The contributions of psychoanalytic theory of object relations indicate a first attempt at a conceptual response to the psychic value of early childhood interaction experiences. To understand the loving relationship as a process of mutual recognition in the sphere of primary relationships, Honneth (2003, p. 163) turns to Winnicott.

Winnicott's approach (1975), which Honneth (2003) distinguishes from an orthodox approach to psychoanalysis, indicates the complexity and significance of the early stages of development of each human being, emphasizing "good enough" mothering that can allow the dependent baby to constitute itself as a subject. The "good enough mother" that Winnicott (1975) refers to is based on the premise of an almost complete adaptation to the needs of her baby in its early stages, until a kind of failure in this mother/baby complementarity appears, resulting from the process of gradual separation between the two. If all goes well, the baby can "profit" from the experience of frustration, since this incomplete adaptation to the child's needs makes objects real. The adaptation needs to "almost precisely" fit the infant's needs, so that it becomes possible for them to begin to experience a relationship with external reality or even form a conception of this reality, which presupposes the postponement of satisfaction and, therefore, knowing how to deal with frustrations.

Describing the primordial stage of the infant as a unit, as a limiting membrane between the outside and the inside, with the possibility of affirming that there is an internal and external reality, did not seem to be sufficient for Winnicott (1975). According to him, there is a moment of transition in the human being that constitutes an intermediate area of experimentation, to which internal and external reality contribute. For the author, in the journey from a purely subjective baby to gaining access to the objective field, there is a transitional object which paves the way for the process of becoming able to accept the difference and similarity between the self and the world.

The transitional object represents the breast, or the object of the first relationship, and can be a cloth, teddy bear, or hard toy, that is, a material object from the child's environment that the child invests in emotionally. The transitional object is not an internal object, it is a possession, nor is it, for the baby, an external object. The baby can use the transitional object when the internal object is alive, real, and sufficiently good. The baby perceives the breast only to the extent that there is a breast, because the baby receives the breast that is part of themselves, and the mother offers milk to a baby that is part of her. Thus, the internal object depends, in terms of its qualities, on the existence, vitality, and behavior of the external object.

According to Winnicott (1975), transitional objects represent substitute formations for the lost mother (from whom the baby has separated), taking such objects as elements that make it possible to continue living the original fantasies of omnipotence after the experience of satisfaction.

Transitional objects are, therefore, elements that allow the transition from the primary experience of being fused with another being to the experience of being separated from it — which may involve furious attacks and attempts at destruction —, thus “In the playful interaction with these affectively charged objects, the child repeatedly attempts to bridge, symbolically, the painful gap between inner and outer reality” (Honneth, 2003, p. 103).

After the baby’s experience of illusion, the mother’s role is to create disillusionment. In the gradual process of disillusionment, the baby will be prepared for frustrations. In the acceptance of reality, which is never complete, there is tension in the process of relating internal and external reality, which is relieved by an intermediate area of experience. The intermediate area is necessary for the beginning of the child’s relationship with the world and is related to play. Transitional objects are used by the baby in this intermediate phase. Thus, for Winnicott (1975), the meaning of play acquired significance in the study of transitional phenomena, dating back to human development, from the primitive use of a transitional object to the stage of the autonomous being’s capacity for cultural experiences.

This area of play is not a specifically internal psychic reality, but a process of transition to the external world. In play, children manipulate external phenomena in the service of fantasy and dress chosen external phenomena with dreamlike meanings. It is clear that there is an evolution from transitional phenomena to play, from play to shared play, and thus to cultural experiences.

In Winnicott’s theories (1975), cultural experience is located in the potential space between the individual and the environment. The same is true of play. For every individual, the use of this space is determined by the life experiences that take place in the first primitive stages of their existence. At first, the baby has intense experiences in the “potential space between the subjective object and the objectively perceived object, between the extensions of the self and the non-self” (Winnicott, 1975, p. 139). This space is between the self and the existence of objects and phenomena beyond the baby’s omnipotent control. The potential space occurs in the relation of the baby’s feeling of trust, that is, in the trust related to the reliability of the mother figure or environmental phenomena. This area of potential space is part of the organization of the ego, which “is not the bodily ego, which is not based on the pattern of bodily functioning, but on bodily experiences” (Winnicott, 1975, p. 140).

Honneth (2003) is interested in understanding the modification of the person’s structure through an interactive construction, and to do so he turns to Winnicott. The original fusion that marks the relationship between mother and child in the first months of life, that is present in the constitution of the symbiotic state, is an important experience for Honneth (2003); that is, it is an important pattern in the interactive relationships of the adult subject. This important feeling of fusion found in early childhood can result in a constant need to be reexperienced, according to the latter.

In this sense, Honneth (2003) revisits Hegel’s thesis and reinterprets it in light of object relations theory, arguing that the “form of recognition found in love, which Hegel had described as ‘being oneself in another’, represents not an intersubjective state so much as a communicative arc suspended between the experience of being able to be alone and the experience of being merged” (Honneth, 2003, p. 105).

Honneth emphasizes that the relationship of recognition between subjects cannot be characterized as a cognitive acceptance of the other, but that a “release into independence has to be supported by an affective confidence in the continuity of shared concern” (Honneth, 2003, p. 107). Recognition as a constitutive element cannot be restricted to cognitive respect, but rather can be understood as an affirmation of autonomy, accompanied by mutual dedication. The author sees this primordial interactive relationship between mother and baby, of symbiosis

and delimitation in relation to the other, as support for other relationships in public life. It is important to note that Honneth (2003) distinguishes the spheres of interaction of the field of primary affective relationships from public relationships, but both presuppose mechanisms of mutual recognition.

Love, as the first sphere of recognition, paves the way for other forms of mutual recognition, since the successful intersubjective experience of love, which forms the basis of autonomy and self-confidence, is also the affective foundation of self-respect.

Honneth seeks to elucidate how the form of recognition of love differs from another sphere of recognition, in the field of law: the legal relationship. He returns to Hegel and Mead to propose questions referring to the field of the public sphere: the structural properties of legal recognition assumed in modern societies. For Lima (2013, p. 110), Honneth seeks to clarify how legal principles would be determined by members of the community to guarantee individual freedom, conditioning it to effective conditions of freedom for others.

To better situate issues related to legal recognition, Honneth (2003) presents aspects of the transition to modernity, highlighting how it was marked by a dissolution of the model of rights and duties in traditional societies. It should be noted that, in pre-modernity, rights were linked to the social role that a person had in the group, while in modernity, rights are universal and extend to all equally, as there is a universal property shared by all. The traditional legal relationship is based on particular properties, on the difference and value that each person innately carries by belonging to a status group.

In modernity, the growth of legal pretensions was a process in which “the extension of the universal traits of a morally accountable person increased step by step” based on the struggle for recognition (Honneth, 2003, p. 189).

With post-traditional law and the institutionalization of civil rights of freedom, a movement to expand rights began, resulting from the organized struggle of disadvantaged groups, generating the need for legal protection of communities to ensure social participation and cultural and economic development under conditions of equality, so that everyone is able to act autonomously.

Expanded legal relations are the result of the struggle for recognition within the sphere of law. An expansion of rights occurs when subjects experience denied recognition and fight for the establishment of their rights. The recognition of rights establishes a self-relationship of respect in subjects, configuring a positive relationship between the subject and themselves.

According to Honneth (2003, p. 198), the constitution of the subject mediated by intersubjective relations, established in the spheres of affective dedication and legal recognition, results in feelings of self-confidence and self-respect.

The presentation of a third sphere of recognition arises from the experience of social esteem, which gives individuals the opportunity to refer positively to their concrete traits and abilities. Unlike legal recognition, social esteem for Honneth (2003, p. 122) is directed “at the particular qualities that characterize people in their personal difference.” For the author, social esteem requires a “social *medium* that must be able to express the characteristic differences among human subjects in a universal, more specifically, intersubjectively obligatory way” (Honneth, 2003, p. 122).

The task of social mediation is operated by a symbolically articulated framework that serves as a reference for assessing the potential of subjects. The culture of a society establishes criteria that guide social esteem, based on which people's abilities are judged intersubjectively. The community of value guided by common goals is marked by historical transformations, just as legal recognition has undergone changes.

With modernity, social esteem has come to be guided by “intramundane” values, and no longer by the transcendental values adopted by the feudal and aristocratic world. Thus, in modernity, the

social recognition obtained by the individual stems from the realization of their actions. Universal values must be open to different forms of self-realization, and the greater the plurality of values that make up a society, the greater the possibility of achieving symmetrical relationships.

With the decline of traditional society, the idea of “honor” has ceased to occupy a central place and given way to ideas of “reputation” or “prestige,” through which “one must grasp the measure of esteem that the individual enjoys socially in terms of his or her achievements and individual abilities” (Honneth, 2003, p. 206). It should be noted that the definitions of traits and abilities established in modern societies depend on the struggles and conflicts of social groups, and that relationships of social esteem are dependent on the struggle of social groups, the temporary outcome of which reaffirms the symbolic strength of a group and allows it to gain public attention.

Honneth (2003, p. 207-208) seeks to emphasize that social movements are able to draw public attention to neglected traits and abilities that are represented in such groups, thus creating the possibility of raising the social value of their members in society. It is clear, at this point, that Honneth (2003) is linking forms of social esteem to struggles in the world of life determined by the performance of social groups.

Thus, there is a difference between social esteem built on the basis of status groups, whose measure of distinction refers to the collective identity of the group, subjecting the individual’s achievements and recognition to the traits of their status group. The individual is not the recipient of esteem, but rather their group is.

In the case of modern societies, the practical relationship with oneself and with the group is altered, since an individual who enjoys respect does not extend this esteemed value to an entire group. There is a feeling of self-worth or self-esteem that an individual presents as their own property. Thus, each individual is given the chance to have their values and life recognized socially, consequently establishing a valuable understanding of self.

In summary, the first form of recognition, as we have seen, is obtained in primary relationships, through love and friendship, establishing a practical self-relationship of self-confidence. The second form is recognition in legal relationships, which guarantees self-respect. The third form of social value recognition establishes a practical self-relationship of self-esteem. For Honneth (2003), such modes of recognition, of assent from an other, are inseparable from the experience of human integrity.

Thus, a positive view of oneself can be confirmed by intersubjective relationships or, conversely, depending on the relationships, a negative view of oneself can be created, compromising a person’s identity.

Disrespect or offense, according to Honneth (2003), signal the denial of spheres of recognition. Starting with the first form of disrespect, that which affects a person’s bodily integrity, there are forms of abuse in which all possibilities of free control over one’s body are violently taken away from a human being. This form of disrespect implies a kind of personal degradation, causing the person to lose confidence, as their autonomous control over their own body is taken away. The most basic form of practical self-relation is destroyed: self-confidence.

This is because every attempt to gain control of a person’s body against his or her will — irrespective of the intention behind it — causes a degree of humiliation that impacts more destructively than other forms of respect on a person’s practical relation-to-self. For what is specific to these kinds of physical injury, as exemplified by torture and rape, is not the purely physical pain but rather the combination of this pain with the feeling of being defenselessly at the mercy

of another subject, to the point of feeling that one has been deprived of reality (Honneth, 2003, p. 132).

The second form of degradation is inscribed in the experience that affects moral self-respect. This is a process that refers to the forms of personal disrespect inflicted on a subject because they remain structurally excluded from possession of their rights. Thus, if there are no rights, the subject is not granted moral imputability, and the deprivation of rights or social exclusion represents not only a violent limitation of personal autonomy, but also assumes that the individual does not have the status of a partner of interaction with equal or compatible moral value. The individual feels harmed in the intersubjective expectation of being recognized as a subject capable of forming moral judgment, losing self-respect. Honneth (2003, p. 133-134) affirms that,

For the individual, having socially valid rights-claims denied signifies a violation of the intersubjective expectation to be recognized as a subject capable of forming moral judgements. To this extent, the experience of this type of disrespect typically brings with it a loss of self-respect, of the ability to relate to oneself as a legally equal interaction partner with all fellow humans.

The third form of denial of recognition refers to the denial of the values of individuals or groups. In this model, certain groups or subjects are deprived of any possibility of attributing positive social value to their own abilities.

This experience of social devaluation typically leads to a loss of personal self-esteem, that is, a loss of the possibility of seeing oneself as being valued for one's characteristics. Attributing a negative value to certain patterns of self-realization makes it impossible for the individual to experience positive respect and esteem. For Honneth (2003, p. 134):

For those engaged in them, the result of the evaluative degradation of certain patterns of self-realization is that they cannot relate to their mode of life as something of positive significance within their community. For individuals, therefore, the experience of this social devaluation typically brings with it a loss of personal self-esteem, of the opportunity to regard themselves as beings whose traits and abilities are esteemed.

The individual consequences of experiences of disrespect in the three spheres of recognition can be described with metaphors. The experience of torture and rape can be characterized as psychological death. Slavery, as a collective experience of deprivation of rights and social exclusion, can be described as social death. The disrespect involved in the cultural degradation of a way of life is related to the category of vexation.

The experience of degradation and humiliation threatens the identity of human beings, but when analyzing the denial of recognition, one can extract data about what could contribute, so to speak, to the integrity of human beings. To avoid feelings of disrespect, one must ensure relationships of recognition capable of protecting subjects from suffering. The negative reactions that accompany the experience of denial of recognition may represent the affective motivational basis on which the motivation to fight for recognition is anchored. Thus, experiences of suffering and denial of recognition can be overcome through actions, such as forms of political resistance to achieve the desired recognition.

To understand how a subject can enter into a struggle or practical conflict, according to Honneth (2003), Hegel and Mead did not identify the psychological link that would lead from

suffering to active engagement, cognitively informing the affected person about their social situation. Honneth (2003) defends the thesis that negative emotional reactions can be drivers of the struggle for recognition. Shame, anger, vexation, or contempt are the psychological symptoms based on which a subject is able to recognize that social recognition is unjustifiably denied to them. The reason for this can be seen, in turn, in the constitutive dependence of human beings on the experience of recognition: to achieve a successful self-relationship, they depend on the intersubjective recognition of their abilities and achievements; if this form of social approval does not occur at some stage of their development, a psychological gap opens, in which negative psychological reactions come into play.

To make this practical self-relationship of the subject comprehensible from a theoretical point of view, Honneth (2003) refers to a conception of human feeling as developed by John Dewey in his pragmatic psychology. Dewey opposes the conception that emotional excitations should be understood as forms of expression of internal moods. For Dewey, feelings generally represent emotional reactions to the success or failure of our practical actions: “either they accompany the experience of particularly successful ‘communications’ (with people or things) as bodily states of excitement, or they emerge as the experience of being repelled by a failed, interrupted attempt to execute an action” (Honneth, 2003, p. 136).

Taking these ideas as a starting point, Honneth (2003) believes that it may be possible to find a path to other differentiations when seeking to understand the “types of disturbances” that impede human action. Each unsuccessful expectation must be analyzed according to the particularities of each case, which Honneth (2003) divides into two general types: instrumental expectations of success and normative behavioral expectations. According to the author:

Should actions oriented towards success fail as a result of unanticipated obstructions, this leads to ‘technical’ disruptions in the broadest sense. By contrast, should actions guided by norms be repelled by situations because the norms taken to be valid are violated, this leads to ‘moral’ conflicts in the social lifeworld (Honneth, 2003, p. 137).

This second part of disrupted actions is what interests Honneth (2003). Assuming that our feelings are reactions to the success or failure of our practices, Honneth (2003) affirms that one can more accurately understand, for example, that emotional reactions are measured according to the violation of a norm that restrains action. Thus, in the face of restrained action, we experience a shift in attention to our own expectations, becoming aware of our feelings and the moral reactions that impede our actions.

In this sense, the spheres of recognition presuppose tensions that can trigger social conflicts, which are characterized as social because they go beyond individual interests and spread in a generalized manner. Honneth (2003) points out that the denial of recognition of rights and social esteem enables social conflicts, as such personal experiences of disrespect can be seen as experiences shared by other subjects. Thus, “individual experiences of disrespect, when interpreted as crucial experiences typical of an entire group, require actions that trigger expanded relations of recognition” (Honneth, 2003, p. 257).

The model of social struggle defined by the author contrasts with the models established by sociological theory, since, for Honneth (2003), until then, social struggles were understood as determined by general and utilitarian interests. This analysis broadens the notion of social conflict, since a social struggle is formed in the context of a moral experience that stems from the frustration of individual and collective expectations of recognition.

If these normative expectations are disappointed by society, this generates precisely the type of moral experience expressed in cases where subjects feel disrespected. Hurt feelings of this sort can, however, become the motivational basis for collective resistance only if subjects are able to articulate them within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that they can show to be typical for an entire group (Honneth, 2003, p. 164).

Considering that there is a moral experience of disrespect that the individual perceives to be collective, the author assumes that the emergence of social movements depends on collective semantics, that is, when an individual experience of injury or suffering due to lack of recognition extends to an entire group. Thus, collectively engaged action leads to overcoming the state of degradation, therefore, the individual in struggle indirectly feels their own moral and social value. Another element that the author adds refers to the sense of solidarity and mutual esteem triggered by the collective action of a group.

For Honneth (2003), the logic of relations of recognition must be considered in an explanatory framework to understand the formation of social struggles. Analyzing conflicts and struggles by considering the moral struggle for recognition means changing our view of historical and sociological research material.

In this sense, it should be noted that moral experiences of disrespect and injustice should be seen as triggers for transformative actions and how these unfold in relations of recognition. The struggle for recognition must be understood as “a critical interpretive framework for processes of social evolution,” according to Honneth (2003, p. 269), requiring a theoretical justification from a normative point of view to guide it.

Honneth presents a relationship between morality and ethics, inspired by Hegelian moral philosophy and ancient ethics, according to which the validity of universal moral principles must be considered in light of “historically changing conceptions of the good life”, that is, of ethical attitudes (Honneth, 2003, p. 172). In his theory, ethical life is understood “to include the entirety of intersubjective conditions that can be shown to serve as necessary preconditions for individual self-realization” as normative presuppositions (Honneth, 2003, p. 173).

For the author, the fact that the possibility for positive self-relation is given by the experience of recognition is an indication of conditions for personal self-realization. However, Honneth (2003) draws attention to the fact that the freedom of self-realization is dependent on conditions that are not available to the subject, as they can only obtain it with their partner in interaction. The central issue of Honneth's (2003) contribution is the link he identifies between the experience of recognition and the relationship with oneself, which, according to the author, results from the “intersubjective structure of personal identity.” In other words, individuals learn to refer to themselves as beings endowed with certain traits and abilities deriving from experiences of recognition: from love, through which they experience self-confidence; from legal recognition, self-respect; and, from solidarity, self-esteem.

The author concludes that the conditions for the methodological criteria of a formal conception of ethics are outlined, as he points out below:

On the one hand, the three patterns of recognition — which now can count as just as many preconditions for successful self-realization — are defined in a sufficiently abstract, formal manner to avoid raising the suspicion that they embody particular visions of the good life. On the other hand, from the perspective of their content, the explication of these three conditions is detailed enough to say more about

the general structures of a successful life than is entailed by general references to individual self-determination. (Honneth, 2003, p. 174).

Through forms of recognition of love, law, and solidarity, intersubjective protective mechanisms are constituted, ensuring internal and external freedom, dependent on the articulation and spontaneous realization of individual life goals, but at the same time representing universal patterns of behavior, distinct from particular forms of life.

The second problem in thinking about a methodology for the theory of recognition concerns the normative conditions of self-realization in the historical context. The three patterns of recognition must be introduced historically:

in such a way that they can be viewed as elements of ethical life only at the highest level of development of each. The character of intersubjective prerequisites for self-realization becomes visible only under the historical conditions of the present, which in every case has already opened the prospect of further normative development regarding relations of recognition (Honneth, 2003, p. 175).

Honneth (2003) aims to present a model of ethical life that is anchored in the historical process, open to changes, but without losing its normative content. For Honneth, the aspect of post-traditional ethical life must be analyzed in the three spheres of recognition. With regard to the recognition of love, the author does not identify a broader normative development in love from traditional to post-traditional society. However, “it is possible that the development of its invariant basic structures will be all the freer from distortion and coercion, the more rights come to be shared by partners in a friendship or love relationship” (Honneth, 2003, p. 176).

In analyzing the patterns of recognition of rights, it is clear that, “on its own, legal recognition holds a moral potential, one which can be developed via social struggles in the direction of an increase in both generality and context-sensitivity” (Honneth, 2003, p. 176). The legal sphere is highlighted in Honneth’s (2003) theory of recognition, as the ethical framework of law is related to the first sphere of recognition, making it an important field for ensuring personal integrity in the experience of love. In addition, the legal relationship also interferes with conditions of solidarity, insofar as it establishes limits to the formation of community values.

The moral conditions of modern law ensure the recognition of a community’s values, as it embodies the principle of equalization and individualization in the legal field of post-traditional societies.

Honneth states that the relations of recognition of a community of values must coexist with the standard of recognition of love and law. When analyzing today’s society, he finds that

social-structural upheavals in developed societies have so greatly expanded the possibilities for self-realization that the experience of individual or collective difference has become the impetus for a whole series of political movements (Honneth, 2003, p. 179).

The demands of movements that arise within this modern context can be fulfilled in the long term, leading to an expansion of solidarity relations. Thus, he affirms that material values must be introduced alongside forms of legal recognition and love.

Honneth aims to provide a moral grammar of social conflicts, proposing, however, considerable flexibility, without establishing which types of practices correspond to each form of interaction.

Honneth's dialogue with the contributions of Winnicottian psychoanalysis and George Mead's social psychology indicates a concern for giving an objective dimension to the Hegelian proposal to make evident a structural framework based on the intersubjective fabric of social relations, necessary for the analysis of society.

In this sense, Honneth's (2003) theory outlines a concrete logic of forms of social configuration, based on intersubjective relations of recognition that can help grasp the dynamics and experiences of social movements beyond models that understand social movements to be guided by a need to overcome class conditions. According to Melo (2014a), Honneth advances the connection between social movements and the moral experience of disrespect, making it possible for recognition theory to elucidate the foundations of a normative social theory in which the concept of social struggle has moral feelings of injustice as a starting point.

The theory of recognition proposes to understand the moral grammar of social conflicts, but in the case of this study it can help us understand the foundations of the conflicts found in Brazilian educational institutions. The discussion of the intersubjective relationships that constitute subjects, which are based on the recognition of the other, underpins a conception of school that prioritizes a practical relationship between the subject and the other and with oneself, culminating in a positive construction of the self, based on the relationship with the other.

In this sense, when reflecting on the history of Brazilian society marked by differences that sustain inequality, one encounters the fact that social conflicts date back to the violation of universal rules of mutual recognition, which justifies the use of recognition theory to interpret historical conflicts, including ethnic-racial ones, in the constitution of the social fabric in Brazil. When analyzing the struggles of Black people in Brazilian history, we find that experiences of racism have motivated the search for an ethnic, individual, and collective identity, in favor of normative and legal regulation that defines relationships of mutual recognition capable of guaranteeing the universalization of social rights.

Honneth (2003) proposes a new approach to social struggles, unveiling the moral grammar of struggles as a guiding principle for individual actions, that is, as "the horizon of moral norms of action, that are subtly involved in in everyday life" (Honneth, 2003, p. 166).

Like society, Brazilian schools are marked by a process of exclusion and denial of recognition of the values of certain groups, which prevents the process of constituting the subjectivities and identities of these subjects from being based on the relationship of constructing oneself from the other, of a positive self-relationship with oneself and with the other, with a view to a collective construction of each person's personal integrity.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARIA PATRÍCIA CÂNDIDO HETTI holds a doctorate in Education from the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). She is a full professor at the Instituto Federal de Educação Tecnológica de São Paulo (IFSP).

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Responsible Editor: Terezinha Oliveira  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5349-1059>

