Dysrecognition and social pathology: New directions in critical theory

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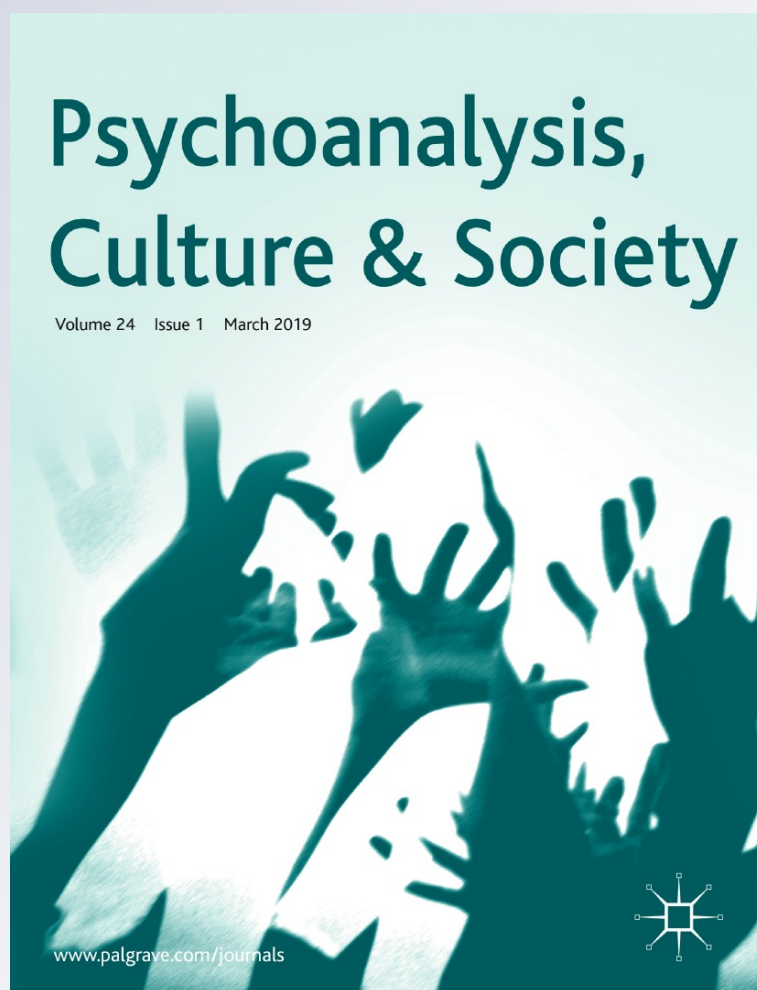Culture & Society**

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Dysrecognition and social pathology: New directions in critical theory

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Abstract   Contemporary recognition theory overemphasizes the role of rationality in human relations and fails to adequately consider the pathological valences that influence psychological motivation and social dynamics, particularly those that are unconsciously mediated. In offering an alternative Hegelian revisionist perspective, I will examine how capacities for recognition are informed by early developmental contingencies in attachment, self-formation, social relations, and the negation of difference, thereby addressing the psychodynamics of how dysrecognition and refutation of alterity lead to insidious pathologies within society and the clinic. The systemic failure to develop recognition within social collectives is rooted, I suggest, in a lack of empathy for the other.

Introduction

Psychoanalytic observations both inside and outside the clinic suggest that Axel Honneth's recognition theory (Honneth, 1995, 2012; Fraser and Honneth, 2003) relies upon an overly optimistic if not idealistic view of human nature. Although this is an ethical and noble ideal, we must seriously question whether intersubjective recognition "should prove to be a prerequisite of all human sociality" (Honneth, 2012, p. 4). This becomes particularly salient in the case of social collectives that regularly fail to

interact through reciprocal recognition even when they become aware of their mutual dependency on each other. For example, people often acquiesce to others for defensive reasons, not because they recognize them as being morally equal. They engage in avoidance or enlist a compromise function to thwart the possibility of the other's aggression being directed toward them. Honneth's optimism "that both sides are compelled to restrict their self-seeking drives as soon as they encounter each other" (p. 15) assumes that ethical self-consciousness and restraint is normative, when this is due to social maturation. From a psychoanalytic point of view, equal recognition of the Other is unrealistic since it is evident that collectives are largely possessed by unconscious complexes, emotional seizures, and attitudinal prejudices that militate against forming such ideal cohesive relations within social harmony.

To explore the confines of Honneth's position I wish to examine the dark side of recognition, namely, its asymmetrical pathological dynamics. Despite the human need to be acknowledged and understood, we are thrown into an intersubjective ontology that fosters dysrecognition, invalidation, negation of otherness, and a lack of empathy for alterity, especially when attachment pathology and psychic trauma sully the minds of social collectives.

The Need to be Recognized

We all seek recognition; this is a basic human need.[1] The ego is affirmed by the other, but not at first. There is originally the experience of inequality, whether this be the child's relation to the parent or the bondsman's relation to the lord. Arguably one of the most widely cited sections of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is Hegel's 1807 discussion of lordship and bondage.[2] In pithy form, spirit or mind (*Geist*) ultimately achieves ethical self-consciousness only by recognizing

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[1] Neuhouser (1986) attempts to elucidate the origin of the need for recognition itself by partially claiming that we seek recognition because our own demands for self-certainty are left unsatisfied without the presence and validation of others. This notion is compatible with many psychoanalytic conceptualizations of the development of subjectivity including attachment theory, object relations theory, self psychology, and interpersonal, intersubjective, and relational perspectives.

[2] The problem of alienation and spirit's struggle for recognition has received overwhelming attention in the Hegelian literature. Within this context, there has been an almost exclusive fixation on the master-slave dialectic introduced in the *Phenomenology*. It is interesting to note that Hegel's (1971, 1978) treatment of desire and recognition is contrasted differently in the *Encyclopaedia Phenomenology* and the *Berlin Phenomenology* (1981) from that of his Jena period. The most notable difference in his later writings is his scant discussion of self-consciousness in comparison to his original work, and that his famous section on "Freedom of Self-Consciousness" has been entirely purged. Hegel's master-slave discussion, or what we may refer to as lord and servant, and more generally the "*relationship* of mastery [*Herrschaft*] and *servitude* [*Knechtschaft*]" (Hegel, 1978, §433, emphasis in original), is given the briefest summation in the *Encyclopaedia*. This is undoubtedly why almost all interpretations of desire and recognition rely exclusively on the Jena *Phenomenology*. It is interesting to note that the terms "master" and "slave" may be translated differently, although most scholars agree that the actual arguments in the two books appear to be essentially compatible. See Mills (2002, pp. 143–149) for an extended discussion.

the other as an equal being. But this is a developmental achievement. In our intersubjective engagement with others, there is a battle for recognition that takes place between subjects. Yet, at first, parties in this struggle are unaware that they are looking for recognition, which is unconsciously mediated, the meaning of which is hence initially unclear to those involved. It is only through the process of confronting otherness that we become cognizant of what we truly want. We may observe how this is ontically infused in all spheres of life and plays a key role in our psychological health and social progress. Every human being wants to be recognized by others as an instantiation of human desire. This naturally extends to society. Before society raises itself to the status of improving its cultural practices for the sake of its peoples, including institutionalized ethics, law and order, and distributive justice, it must start with this basic psychic fact. Those who are deprived of recognition fail to thrive, just like infants abandoned to orphanages who are given no nurturance, love, or human touch.

The inequality of recognition first exists when two opposing subjects confront one other. Each wants to be what the other only represents; thus, each is determined to negate the other's independence in order to give one's own self value. This guarantees that the process of recognition is saturated with conflict. Two selves oppose the independence of the other and in so doing assert their independence. Put simply, two mutually confronting selves appear as physical things to each other that act independently and hence freely, which both recognize as being before the other. But freedom is something that must be fought for; it must be achieved or proven. This is why Hegel sees the tussles of recognition as an altercation – a struggle – for it is "a matter of life or death" (Hegel, 1978, §432).

People are largely seen by their fellows as mere objects – as *things* that exist "out there" in the world – because they are divorced from our emotional and personal lives in order for us to psychologically function. It is only when we contemplate the nature of this otherness that we are confronted with our own normativity: others are and have a self that exists independently from "me." "What is this other?" "What does the other have that I don't have?" "What do I want?" "What do I lack that the other has?" These questions lie on the sunrise of self-consciousness, because we are instantly made aware of the external reality of other human beings who are just like us in essence, although we have separate identities, personalities, and longings. We become aware of our desires through reflection upon (and as projected onto) the other: the subject that stands before us even though we see this other as an independent (impersonal) object. When we recognize the other as a desirous and intentional being, we are immediately made aware of the subjectivity of the other, one we have an obligation to address: "What does this other want?" This leads us to one of Hegel's most important insights: when we confront otherness, we are entangled in desire and lack, which initiates a skirmish for recognition. Who will be

acknowledged in this mutual otherness? Here subjectivities stand fundamentally opposed to one another.

What is often recognized is not the equality of the other, but rather a scornful inequality, namely, the fact that people often do not care about alterity over their own lives and self-interests, to the point that the Other becomes a dangerous threat to one's safety. Although we may acknowledge that others are independent persons, it does not mean that we "respect others as persons" (Hegel, 1967, §36). On the contrary, respect is earned. Avoidance, withdrawal, and submissiveness, on the other hand, are defensive modes of self-survival, especially in the face of a powerful opponent. Do our world societies and governments (*viz.*, Hegel's Objective Spirit) think about the common universal good for all, or merely their own self-regard and political pressures invested in their own nations and communities? Despite the fact there may be checks and balances designed to help treat citizens fairly, this does not generalize to a universal society of cosmopolitans (namely, citizens of the cosmos) who value all human life equally. Of course, such hypostatization of a so-called collective mind only makes sense as an abstract conception that embodies the spirit of democracy, as imperfect as this may be. But when it comes down to actualizing a universal good, humanity becomes a multiple personality split in its desires, needs, conflicts, demands, and dissatisfactions.

So when Honneth (2012) says that a distributional schema of justice "would have to be replaced by the involvement of all subjects in a given relationship of recognition" (p. 45), he seems to abstract from the reality of human experience. Most people do not readily give up their "egocentric desires for the benefit of the other" (p. 17). Not all people are disposed to, let alone capable of, a recognition of the other. We may have to contend that, in the end, recognition means tolerance of difference and not merely acceptance of the other, which could still bring about a pragmatic co-existence even if people cannot recognize each other as equals.

Contemporary Psychoanalytic Recognition Theory

Honneth's turn to Winnicott to bolster critical theory shows many promising redirecting shifts in applied social analysis, but recognition theory also has much to gain by engaging developments in contemporary psychoanalysis since Winnicott's time. The notions of recognition and intersubjectivity form a central position in contemporary psychoanalytic discourse (Benjamin, 1988; Mills, 2002; Stolorow and Atwood, 1992), particularly among object relations, self psychology, interpersonal, and relational traditions (Bacal and Newman, 1990; Mitchell, 2002), not to mention its primacy in the consulting room (Stolorow *et al.*, 1987). In her annexation of Hegel (1977), Benjamin (2004) has advocated for moving beyond the doer and done-to binary, endorsing a tertiary

moral comportment of recognition the analyst is obliged to adopt in treatment, while Nissim-Sabat (2009) argues that dysrecognition should be viewed as neither victimization nor survival. Although there are many nuanced theories of intersubjectivity in psychoanalysis that have emphasized various characteristics over others (Aron, 1996; Lacan, 1977; Orange *et al.*, 1997; Renik, 1993),[3] there is typically a privileging of the respective subjectivities that form the analytic dyad as a reciprocal relational unit, even if such relations are asymmetrical. Whether in society or the clinic, psychoanalysis is sensitive to power differentials and their unconscious relations that give rise to modes of entrenched opposition, need for control, resistance to others' demands, pathological accommodation, subjugation, and transferential enactments that thwart mutual recognition. This is why, in part, the ethical turn in psychoanalysis is enjoying a resurgence of consciousness raising and social activism that echoes the earlier days of critical theory (Goodman and Severson, 2016; Kiehl *et al.*, 2016; Orange, 2016).

The struggle for recognition, as psychoanalysis shows, is present from birth onward, from daycare to death, as each of us is mired in familial, societal, and cultural conflict that saturates our being in the world. The failure to recognize the other, and more insidiously, the chronic invalidation and repudiation of different peoples, produces and sustains intersubjective and interethnic aggression to the point of murder and war. Here, the Hegelian struggle for life and death is a lived reality that affects our conception of social justice and institutionalized forms of recognition. But the point I wish to make here is that dysrecognition may in fact trigger and sustain violence based on an unconscious revolt in reaction to political injustice. Indeed, aggression is not only instinctual, for lack of a better word, emanating from biological forces; it is also triggered by relational or interpersonal failures at validation and empathy that are sociologically instituted. When such dysrecognition is performed and sustained by the state, here we may say that a certain unconscious politics is operative on both the individual and collective level of a given society, which can lead to a vicious cycle of perpetration, victimization, and social malaise that always psychologically penetrates those who are marginalized. And this may be intensified as a post-traumatic act that resurrects earlier psychic pain experienced in childhood, especially when invalidation, abuse, and insecure attachments inform the next generation of social pathologies.

Unconscious Prejudice

Much of psychoanalysis is in sympathy with critical theory in its tacit hopes of bettering society; but psychoanalytic observations can be quite pathologizing as

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[3] I have critiqued this issue at length elsewhere (Mills, 2005a, 2012), the details of which do not concern us here.

well, and for good reason. Here, the two disciplines are critical of the way collectives think and behave. We may speculate that this has to do with, on some level, the way people are raised and taught to think and act in a given cultural milieu, yet we must begin with rudiments. What do people require psychologically in order to thrive? Beyond recognition, I suggest, lie psychic needs for love, validation, and empathy. These are essential for healthy development. When they are lacking, withheld, truncated, or absent, a person, and even whole societies, may develop a traumatic reaction to life. This notion is quite simple in fact, a basic ingredient of the human aspect. When individuals encounter one another, this naturally leads to the mutual desire to be recognized as an individuated, autonomous subject in their own right. People are differentiated and independent, yet face each other in mutual confrontation. This intersubjective dynamic further entails an implicit perception that each person is opposed to the other as an embodied entity that may do them harm. But this detection does not stop here. If the other is an independent will with needs, desires, intentions, and potentially manipulative self-serving actions, the other becomes an automatic threat. This triggers a psychological competition (sometimes physically or merely paranoiac confrontation) where one subject will inevitably be bested, while the other takes his or her subservient place in the confrontation. This is a fundamental psychological insight on behavioral dynamics governing human nature that we may all witness in the nursery and the playground: the foundation for adult politics. This abridged version of explaining how power differentials arise unconsciously when encountering alterity is advanced by psychoanalytic theory in innumerable ways.

One of the major roadblocks that derails a discernible intellectual picture of the need for mutual or collective recognition is in deciphering the anathema of unconscious prejudice that underlies the behavioral acts of every person in the world (Mills and Polanowski, 1997). People, societies, and governments do not act rationally, nor should we expect them to. We do not live in a purely adjudicated intellect or logical universe, but rather one derived from the prisms of our base urges, impulses, emotions, and internal conflicts that must undergo a developmental and educational process of exercising self-constraint, affect regulation, behavioral modification, and instructional training in order to achieve psychological and social maturity. The gleanings of reason, truth, virtue, and wisdom are higher order accomplishments, but this is hardly achieved by everyone. In fact, this level of psychic cultivation is more of an outlier than an actualization for most people. At most we are all striving for the attainment of certain values and ideals. What is more commonplace is that we succumb to our own immediate shortcomings and complexes, moral limitations of character, and attitudinal prejudices that condition how we relate to self, others, and the world.

We must seriously question the prejudicial unconscious forces that drive political states of affairs, from individual and communal choices to

international policy, for collective humanity is neither unified in its aims nor prioritizes matters outside of its immediate scope of parochial concerns or regional inclinations. Is the political unconscious a universal phenomenon, namely, is it structurally inscribed in the very ontological fabric of the psyche? With qualifications, all people are predisposed *a priori* to favor certain unconscious attitudes, even if the latter are irrational and ultimately self-destructive, and this is unequivocally taking place on a mass scale across all civilized parts of the world.

What we are witnessing in concrete forms is how the collective psyche is divided on the basis of unconscious politics as identified with certain ideologies and fortified by cultural relativity and animus toward alterity. Here we should question the capacity of the collective to make rationally informed judgements when wish, self-interest, and insular governmental hegemonies make decisions that affect us all. Yet a government is elected by the people in democratic countries, which brings us to question why in recent political times the majority of citizens would vote for leaders – say, in the United Kingdom and America – who are anti-environment, anti-immigration, xenophobic, racist, bigoted, religiously intolerant, misogynistic, anti-gay, and pro-war, just to name a few indecencies. From Brexit to the election of U.S. Republican president Donald Trump, humanity should beckon a call to reason. It is no surprise to psychoanalysis that we are witnessing the disintegration of culture, for illogical decisions are unconsciously chosen based on emotional prejudices, which speaks to the greater manifestation of collective social life immersed in its own *pathos*.[4]

A World Without Empathy

Although it is problematic to make mass generalizations, it may not be entirely illegitimate to say that we largely live in a world where there is no proper recognition of the other as the equiprimordial complementarity of the self. In other words, the dialectical onto-interconnectedness of identity and difference ensures that self-in-relation to alterity is a mutually implicit dynamic. When we attempt to analyze the human condition extraspectively or scientifically, and look into the psyche or soul through an introspective analysis of our interiority, we can discern the universal experiences that all people engage in psychologically, only to recursively fall back into bifurcation that maintains rigid antitheses. The self is experienced and thought *not* to be the other. The *Them* is eclipsed for the *I*, while the *We* becomes occluded.

We may argue that, strictly speaking, humanity is not an identity at all, but rather a collection of identities or subjects who largely exist and relate to one

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[4] For the ancient Greeks, *pathos* defined the human condition: to be human is to suffer.

another in opposition to mutual difference. Despite the fact that we all maintain shared identifications and values with others throughout our globalized world, not everyone is recognized, nor is this remotely possible given that people are divided based on their desires, conflicts, beliefs, values, identities, and moral principles. Here we should maintain no pretense of a pristine Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the subjective individual within objective social consciousness, where ethics and justice reach their logical zenith in the concrete universals of culture, for this is merely a theoretical abstraction. In fact, much of social reality resists sublation, and can indeed regress or withdraw back to early primitive instantiations governed by *pathos*.[5] The Absolute unity of the individual within the social as the logical culmination of pure self-consciousness is simply an illusion, although one that may spur along our continual pining for refining social systems of democracy, law, ethics, and justice. Here, reformation and advance is culture's teleological endeavor. Whatever values and ideals societies adopt, they are always mediated through unconscious psychic processes that condition (and taint) the collective (Mills, 2014), even when there are good intentions involved. Although the fantasy of wholeness conceived through Hegel's philosophy of spirit as a self-articulated dynamic complex holism arriving at pure unification of the individual within the collective is a noble ideal, such a grand (if not grandiose) logical synthesis belies the empirical confounds that reflect social reality today as marked by division, fracturing, and splitting of peoples, groups, and nations that radically resist unity. The projection of our aggression, hatred, and destructive envy onto a hating Other only ensures mutual conflict and dysrecognition, where some compromises conceivably occur. Despite these limitations and inevitable frictions between individuals and societies, collective identifications among people about ideals and social values do facilitate advances in ethical self-consciousness, which have a concrete impact on social policy and legislative reform that in turn restructure social institutions and the domestic practices of citizens.

One of the reasons for our impasse in achieving collective recognition of all people is a failure to possess, nurture, and demonstrate empathy for others. This failure is intimately tied to a subset of the problem, that is, our inability to foster global identifications with others. Empathy is based on an intersubjective identification with the other as an experiential self just like we are. Each of us stands united in spirit as an egalitarian subject that feels and needs. This basic shared identification with our fellow human beings is what gives empathy its value. But this is never easy to universally expect, let alone institute or institutionalize on a grand scale. It is an awareness that needs to be fostered, the seeds of which begin in early childhood, facilitated by a healthy, emotional

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[5] In *Origins: On the Genesis of Psychic Reality*, I provide my own revisionist amendments to Hegel's dialectical method that take into account the nature of dialectical regression, temporal mediacy, and the ubiquitous nature of contingency that challenges universal pronouncements of an Absolute unity of mind (see Mills, 2010, pp. 51–58).

holding environment grounded in secure attachments to parents, caregivers, and family members or their surrogates. Through personal experiences of being recognized, validated, shown care and psychological warmth, as well as feeling loved and understood, empathy for others develops as self-realization of the good and the need to embrace it, as does our emotional intelligence in socialization practices. Feeling felt, seeing the pain in others' eyes, and recognizing the experience of the other as a reciprocal self-relation to one's own interior helps to open up an ethical stance we are obliged to extend to the other as a fellow *Thou*. However, this is a form of ethical self-consciousness as felt compassion that not all people are psychologically capable of harboring or showing based upon their own personal plight or tragedies, family upbringing, cultural disenfranchisement, developmental traumas, and so forth. But this does not mean that empathy cannot be awakened or taught. If global societies were to promote empathy as an educational imperative and intrinsic valued commodity as an end in-itself institutionalized within a given community or culture – as well as promoting the value of fostering loving emotional attachment to others – the world would be a better place. But when the psyche and society is traumatized, this inevitably trickles down into the very ontological fibres of familial and communal life, where attachment patterns are compromised and the next generation inherits the collective suffering of the one before it.

Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma

Every persecuted clan, minority, subjugated group of peoples, and those affected by terror, trauma, and diaspora will suffer not only in the generations to come, but negatively condition the cultural unconscious complexes of the collective. The Jews and First Nations Native Americans, as well as Sikhs and Shia Muslims, are only a few examples in recent times. When civil disorder, war, and systemic trauma compound matters, such as in the recent migration and refugee crisis that displaced over five million Syrians, existential agony, shared misery, and mental illness are inevitable. Trauma fractures personality and society, where dissociation of the psyche, schizoid phenomena, and soul destruction efface the ability to properly function and lead a normal life, which in turn affects the ability to care for and nurture the young, trust people, develop sympathy and emotional connection to others, and feel safe. When body integrity and physical space are violated, so is the psyche. Others become threatening objects to fear and be wary of. As a result, interpersonal cognitive styles and forms of relationships are altered forever. Phobic, avoidant, and fundamentally paranoiac relations toward life are not uncommon occurrences. The impact on children maims the next generation, which in turn grows up with psychic scars and emotional deficits that are passed on to their children and

their future children because basic psychological capacities for intimacy and attachment are compromised in successive generations of parents.

We know from a vast body of research across the social sciences that the psychological and cultural effects of trauma become transgenerationally transmitted through childrearing and socialization practices (O'Loughlin, 2015; O'Loughlin and Charles, 2015). Traumatized individuals within a community of suffering do not relate to their children in normative fashions relatively free of conflict like non-traumatized people do. This in turn affects attachment patterns in the mother-child dyad, neurological arousal levels, cognitive processing, affect regulation, and the ability to meet basic psychological requirements during infancy (see Mills, 2005b for a review). This always impacts on the family unit in the most rudimentary of conditions: parents and their offspring are doomed to be psychically haunted in their own ways, which will be culturally transmitted through subsequent families in future generations by virtue of the fact that such collective trauma is emotionally dominant within the family milieu and society at large. This is inescapable in the most resilient of people: when its aftereffects (*Nachträglichkeit* or *après-coup*) are relived, reconstructed, or memorialized, leaving an affective aftermath that disfigures the socio-symbolic order. The trauma of history and its devastating impact on the psyche dismembers the capacity for healthy object relations and the ability to properly trust, love, be perceptually and affectively attuned to the needs of others, and show emotional intimacy, including acceptance, warmth, validation, understanding, and recognition of the unique subjectivity of the other.

Case Illustration

Consider the case of Lily, a Chinese-Canadian professional who came to see me for psychological treatment when she was 52 years old following a crisis at work.[6] Her major complaint was an increasingly strained relationship with her boss over a series of complaints about her interpersonal style, friction with co-workers, and difficulty in challenging his authority. Lily was in a high-level Human Relations position as a supervisor for a municipal government sector in a unionized environment. Her main contention was that she was not receiving proper recognition for her work from her boss due to complaints from lower-level staff whom she had to mediate, evaluate, and discipline, as is typical of HR environments. In turn, she received poor annual evaluations from her staff, and the department as a whole, which were shown to her anonymously. She was noted to have a conflictual and confrontational style of communication with almost everyone, and was reprimanded by her boss for being difficult, rigid,

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[6] She initially entered into weekly psychotherapy spanning many years, which later developed into a five-day-a-week analysis. (All details of the case have been sufficiently disguised to protect the patient's identity.)

inflexible, and "defensive." These complaints affected her performance evaluations, promotion opportunities, and salary. Such negative reviews augmented by a lack of recognition of her assigned projects and program developments led to increased frustration, irritability, impatience, and an underlying seething rage.

It soon became apparent that, despite her expertise, advanced education, and credentials, and her history of success in her position, the municipality was taking active steps to build a constructive dismissal of her employment due to her boss's dislike of her. His dislike was so intense that he stopped speaking to her and reassigned her to report to other superiors who purportedly intimidated, "bullied," and ordered her around without consulting or listening to her input. She was devalued repeatedly by her supervisors to the point that she broke down and cried at a meeting in front of peers due to unrestrained vituperations by a superior. She was forced to file a harassment complaint due to an increasingly hostile work environment and had to seek union representation, which secured her continual employment, but her duties were reassigned and she lost her supervisory role. As her position at work spiraled into unabating conflict, this had a devastating effect on her self-esteem and morale, where she felt systematically persecuted and victimized, to the point that it precipitated the experiential reliving of her past childhood traumas.

Although Lily was born in Canada, her parents emigrated from mainland China, where they were farmers. At first her father came to find work as a manual laborer in the oil industry in Western Canada, and when he had secured a position and saved enough money, he sent for his wife and elderly parents. Later, the family moved to a small rural community in Northern Canada where they opened the first Chinese restaurant the town had ever had. Being the only Chinese family to reside there, the business was successful and they were accepted in the community, despite being foreigners. A couple of years later Lily was born, followed by her brother two years after that.

Lily was repeatedly physically, verbally, and emotionally abused by her mother during her entire childhood. She was never shown love, recognition, or emotional warmth, given physical affection or hugs, and was constantly subjected to her mother's verbal tirades, explosive rages, and physical beatings when she did not do exactly what she was supposed to at the restaurant or in performing domestic tasks. Lily could never anticipate or know when her mother would become erratic: she would spontaneously fly into rages and start beating her with kitchen utensils or her fists, and was fond of throwing knifes and meat cleavers while in the kitchen. Lily was once taken to the hospital when she was hit in the back of her head with a knife her mother had thrown once it started gushing blood. She was forced to say she had fallen and cut her head. Her brother was also subjected to such lunacy, but to a lesser degree because he was mentally ill from an early age onward, likely exacerbated by his mother's abuse. He had developed schizophrenia and was later institutionalized for his

entire adult life: he died in a sanatorium. Lily also suspected that her mother was psychotic, which may in part explain her volatile behavior, but she was functional enough to help run the restaurant. Although Lily survived her childhood, it left an entrenched, traumatized internal structure where she was prone to unpredictable rages, verbal devaluation of others, and unprovoked violence just like her mother. By the time she was an early adolescent, she had gotten involved in drugs, organized a small youth gang who broke into houses to get money, and burned down a lumber yard. After being convicted for arson, she stole her father's car and ran down the local prosecutor while walking on the street. She was sentenced to a youth corrections facility, where she served until she was 18 years of age. She was then homeless, lived on the street, sold drugs, and "did anything to survive." In retrospect, Lily thought this was the only way she could escape her mother's constant abuse.

Remarkably, Lily was "saved" by the Salvation Army, was taken into their physical and spiritual care, educated, and went on to earn a Master's degree in one of their religious college affiliate institutions in the United States. She then returned to Canada as a professional adult and entered a successful career until the precipitating events with her boss and co-workers brought on feelings of reliving her childhood abuse. Her conflicts at work started to trigger her chronic, complex unresolved PTSD, which led to unrestrained swearing and devaluation of others, episodes of road rage, and the repeated physical battery of her husband, including even chasing him with a knife – in the kitchen no less, in an apparent identification with the aggressor.

What we may observe in Lily's life and in her family of origin is how various cultural forces of oppression, maltreatment, trauma, and lack of recognition informed the transgenerational transmission of systemic pathology. It is customary in many Asian cultures for brides to move in with their husbands' parents and extended family. Lily was forced to constantly work in the restaurant from a young age onward, including after school, at night, and on weekends, as did her brother. She remembered her mother constantly fighting with her grandmother, engaging in verbal arguments, and even once witnessed her mother beat her grandmother with a broom. She does not remember any more fighting between them after that. We may speculate that her mother was looked down upon, rejected, and/or devalued in some manner, and was expected to play a subservient and less recognized role by her father's parents, who had demanded respect as elders, having attempted to control or suppress their daughter-in-law. This was a power differential Lily's mother did not observe, especially in a new country where there were no traditional supports nor pressures to conform to Chinese custom.

The family restaurant was on the bottom main floor of a brick building, and the family lived upstairs. Lily recalls that her grandparents both died when she was in middle school, but she said that one of her frequent duties was to bring food to her grandfather's room upstairs, which she always found "scary"

because he always remained mute and emotionless, just sitting in a chair looking out the window. It is unclear if he was traumatized, abused, and/or had dementia of some kind, but Lily suspected that her mother had beaten him as well. The transgenerational transmission of cultural trauma is more certain because we know Lily's grandparents and parents had survived the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, having been spared from starvation and mass genocide under the Mao regime. During this era, the masses were oppressed by the Communist ideology of a totalitarian leader, where identification with the collective nation state eclipses the individual personality, not to mention that one could be worked to death, murdered at whim, or simply disappear as millions did. Added to this cultural ethos was the stricture that people were not recognized as individual subjects, but rather had to recognize the Communist state and its Chairman, its symbolic father. Where pride in social appearance, observance of tradition and ritual, "correctness," and control over emotions is prized, shame is the institutionally sanctioned corollary when one fails to recognize the constraints of custom. Nothing is worse than public humiliation, the ultimate form of dysrecognition.

And what about Lily's father? When he was sick and dying, long after he had moved to a major metropolitan city when her mother died, Lily looked after him in his house when he had developed Alzheimer's. When she repeatedly asked him, "Why didn't you protect me from her? Why did you let her beat me?," all he could say was that he "didn't know" or "couldn't remember." Even on his deathbed, Lily was offered no recognition.

Concluding Postscript

When transgenerational forces of trauma are imposed on the incipient mind, agency is eclipsed by transitory misidentifications in fantasy and reality, leaving a wake of psychic debris that structurally disfigures the self. When one is treated like a thing and not recognized as a proper human being, the subject begins to relate to others as things in a sea of objects where the kernel of the value of reciprocal recognition devolves into intransigent antagonism, strife, fear of alterity, paranoia, sustained aggressivity, and repetition compulsion. When cultural trauma saturates attachment and socialization patterns, we can assuredly predict a future full of human suffering, where psychic and sociological impairment leaves many existential stains. Here we must recognize that the many faces of pathology transfigure our internal natures and scar the social landscape, even when a given individual or society recognizes the collective good in recognizing others.

Axel Honneth's contributions to recognition theory may benefit from revisiting the ontic role of dysrecognition in the psyche and society in a way that poses challenges to a universal vision of intersubjective mutual recognition

among world collectives. Although the pursuit of a universal good, ideality, or abstract notion of right may necessarily entail forms of recognition within social institutions and intersubjective practices, there are many psychological and sociological variables that prevent masses from actualizing this utopia, especially when civil societies, not to mention developing countries, are beleaguered by pathological forces that erode mutual respect and empathy for the Other. When overly rational approaches – the morality of reason – are applied to social justice paradigms that do not fully take into account the penumbra of unconscious conflict, emotional prejudice, relational deficits, political ideologies, and psychological incapacities to recognize difference and alterity, then these dynamics present real limitations on what we can credibly expect from social collectives. Until we can convince world populations that mutual recognition is a common good and institutionalize the practical means by which to bring this about, I am afraid that mutual acknowledgment of difference is the most we can hope for as a preliminary step in redefining our humanistic principles and distributive schemas of justice.

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