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## Recognition in the family – based on the ideas of Axel Honneth

### Uznanie w rodzinie – na podstawie myśli Axela Honnetha

#### Abstract

**Introduction.** The starting point of this paper is Axel Honneth’s conception of recognition, which is embedded in the broader context of his philosophy, in the social theory elaborated by him, critical theory (the question of emancipation) and the problem of the struggle for recognition. The basis of Honneth’s conception of recognition, which derives from Hegel’s notion of intersubjectivity as mutual recognition, is the way in which recognition is formed and its meaning for the individual (as well as the meaning of its refusal or lack thereof) in three areas of social life: family, law, and economics.

**Aim.** The focus of this article is on the first of these areas, the family, and its significance for individuals’ understanding of mutual recognition. Drawing on Honneth’s thinking, I outline in the article the nature of the recognition relationship within the family and its significance for the formation of what matters most to individuals; individual identity and autonomy. The particular dimension of the recognition relationship in the fam-

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ily that Honneth brings out is its affinity with the relationship of love. In the article, I show how recognition is constructed, starting with the transformation of a young child into a mature person, and how recognition in the family becomes a source of individual autonomy, also becoming the basis for the construction of recognition (the struggle for recognition) in the other two areas of social life.

**Methods and materials.** Critical subject literature review.

**Results and conclusion.** The aim of this article is to describe a family model based on recognition/love relationships as fitting into current discussions about the family, particularly in feminist discourse, in which it is important that the Honnethian account of recognition/love leads to partnership and equality within the family and autonomy for its members.

**Keywords:** recognition, love, family, autonomy, intersubjectivity.

### **Abstrakt**

**Wprowadzenie.** Punktem wyjścia artykułu jest koncepcja uznania Axela Honnetha, która wpisuje się w szerszy kontekst, w opracowane przez niego teorie społeczną i krytyczną (kwestię emancypacji) oraz problem walki o uznanie. Podstawą honnethowskiej koncepcji uznania, którego źródłem jest heglowskie ujęcie intersubiektywności jako wzajemnego uznania, jest sposób kształtowania się uznania oraz jego znaczenie dla jednostki (jak również znaczenie jego odmowy czy jego braku) na trzech obszarach życia społecznego: rodziny, prawa i gospodarki. W artykule przedmiotem zainteresowania jest pierwszy z tych obszarów – rodzina oraz jej znaczenie dla rozumienia przez jednostki wzajemnych relacji uznania.

**Cel.** Na podstawie myśli A. Honnetha zarysowuję w artykule charakter relacji uznania w rodzinie oraz jego znaczenie dla kształtowania tego, co najistotniejsze dla jednostek, indywidualnej tożsamości oraz autonomii. Szczególnym wymiarem relacji uznania w rodzinie, jaki wydobywa A. Honneth, jest jego pokrewieństwo z relacją miłości. W artykule ukazuję, w jaki sposób budowane jest uznanie w procesie przekształcania się małego dziecka w dojrzałą osobę oraz w jaki sposób uznanie w rodzinie staje się źródłem autonomii jednostki, a następnie podstawą do budowania uznania (walki o uznanie) na pozostałych dwóch obszarach życia społecznego.

**Metody i materiały.** Przegląd i krytyczna analiza literatury przedmiotu.

**Wyniki i wnioski.** Celem artykułu jest opisanie modelu rodziny opartego na relacjach uznania i miłości jako wpisującego się w aktualne dyskusje o rodzinie, szczególnie w dyskurs feministyczny, w których ważne jest to, że honnethowskie ujęcie uznania i miłości prowadzi do partnerstwa i równości w rodzinie oraz autonomii jej członków.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uznanie, miłość, rodzina, autonomia, intersubiektywność.

Concepts of recognition that have emerged in contemporary philosophy, most of which follow the Hegelian model of intersubjectivity, build on the assumption that mutual appreciation and mutual respect are fundamental to the identity of individuals. Among these conceptions of recognition, I will focus on Axel Honneth's approach, which addresses the interplay of esteem and self-appreciation in different areas of social life. Based on Honneth's conception of recognition, I will present how it is formed in the family. This analysis of recognition will answer the questions: Why is recognition so important for the individual? Why is the family the primary site for the formation of recognition? What family model best enables recognition to be learned? Why is love within the family an essential condition for understanding recognition and for realising it also in social life?

As a preliminary step, it is necessary to demonstrate that recognition is a consequence of recognising oneself in mutual intersubjective relations. This is a concept central of the struggle for recognition created by A. Honneth, which has its origin in the philosophy of Georg Hegel. Recognition is, for both of these philosophers, the essence of the intersubjective relationship, in which it becomes a requirement, a moral norm and a condition of individual identity. From an analysis of Honneth's concept of recognition, the thesis emerges that a family model based on recognition relationships allows a person to develop self-respect, assertiveness, and freedom of judgement about one's own identity, which, according to A. Honneth is most valuable for the individual and his autonomy.

In the continuation of the paper, I will introduce the essence of the notion of *recognition*, which originates from Hegelian philosophy and has been re-activated by A. Honneth. I will then devote special attention to the recognition formed in close relationships within the family, especially between mother and child. An analysis of close relationships in the family will show a particular feature of recognition, namely that its form is love. Recognition-love understood in this way will prove fundamental in human development, both in close relationships in mature life and social relationships.

## **Mutual recognition**

The essence of the philosophy of A. Honneth's philosophy is the analysis of recognition (the struggle for recognition, the meaning of recognition, and the refusal of recognition) in the different social areas in which intersubjective relations occur. In this philosopher's view, recognition is an intersubjective condition for self-realisation (individual identity) and gaining autonomy because it is the basis for positive self-empowerment in different areas of life in society. Honneth's concept of recogni-

tion fits into contemporary post-traditional and pluralistic societies: “Contemporary societies thus appear as a differentiated structure of spheres of recognition – as socially established patterns of interaction in which various rules related to recognition are anchored in each case” (Honneth, 2012a, p. XLVII).

The concept of recognition presented by A. Honneth mainly in his work “The struggle for recognition” assumes that the intersubjective relationship is fundamental for the constitution of identity. Recognition in different social fields is defined by A. Honneth as “an act in which it is articulated that another person has value (*Geltung*) as a person, is a source of a legitimate claim to this” (Honneth, 2012a, p. XLVI). Since recognition is a fundamental feature of an intersubjective relationship, a requirement for reciprocity, i.e., mutual recognition, is embedded in interpersonal practices. This act of recognition is both a moral requirement for individuals, as well as a gift from another person(s) and an affective experience. For A. Honneth’s starting point is the trait of the person (borrowed from G. Hegel) who demands recognition, and recognises others without coercion, and the recognition of the partner becomes the condition for being recognised. At the same time, it is not only about recognition from the immediate partner or the social environment but also from anonymous people, recognition in society and culture. Every person desires recognition and requires intersubjective appreciation of his or her qualities and needs, skills and achievements because it expresses the fact that the person has value. Recognition is the “I” in the eyes of other people, it is their opinion of us, their respect and acceptance. Recognition is also an imposed requirement to which we feel obliged. Thanks to the recognition that the other person bestows on us and that we also give him or her, we can build a positive relationship with him or her (and with ourselves).

The act of recognition is also normative, A. Honneth, who adopts the path of moderate axiological realism, identifies it as a rational way of responding to the axiological properties that we have learned to perceive in human subjects. It thus implies a moral action that requires us to be constrained for the sake of another human being. “The attitude of recognition has to be described as a moral action because the value of other persons determines it – it is therefore oriented not to one’s intentions but to the evaluative properties of other persons” (Honneth, 2012a, p. 195). Recognition is based on accepting the value of others and valuing them, which requires the assimilation of communal value patterns. Recognition is therefore the result of a process that already begins in the mother-child relationship and is thus shaped in the family. It then requires the assimilation of patterns of interaction and community requirements established by society.

Why is recognition so important to the individual? Why do people expect and need recognition? First of all, it enables the development of positive forms of self-respect, which vary in different spheres of recognition, but the centre of them all is self-respect. A person who perceives himself or herself as worthy of respect has the capacity for au-

tonomous judgment. The experience of social esteem triggers confidence in one's abilities and achievements, self-confidence, self-esteem, and dignity. This kind of relationship with oneself can be described as positive self-esteem, for which the basis is a symmetrical or reciprocal appreciation of one's value and one's various qualities as well as abilities, achievements, and skills. The experience of appreciation influences a person's actions.

Through its relationship to self-esteem, recognition ensures self-realisation and, as a result, the emergence of intersubjective structures of personal identity

[...] individuals acquire the status of persons only by learning to see themselves from the approving or motivating perspective of another, within which they turn out to be positively endowed with certain qualities and abilities. The extent of these qualities and the degree of positive self-empowerment (critical reflection on one's desires) increases with each new form of recognition that the individual can relate to themselves as a subject (Honneth, 2012a, p. 169).

Positive self-empowerment is a necessary condition for self-realisation, inner and outer freedom in the process of expressing and realising life goals, and is consequently the basis for a successful life.

The result of these positive types of self-empowerment is the acquisition of what is most important for individual identity, i.e., autonomy and consequently the satisfaction of one's own needs and the realisation of possibilities. Thus, the goal of recognition, according to both A. Honneth and G. Hegel, is human autonomy: only a person who has a sense of recognition by others can relate to himself in such a rational way that he can be called free in the full sense of the word. It is free and at the same time takes into account others and the rules of the community.

Recognition constitutes an ideal interpersonal relationship based on reciprocity between subjects, in which each treats the other as equal and simultaneously distinct. This relationship is constitutive of subjectivity, for we become individual subjects only when we recognise the sovereignty of another subject and are ourselves recognised by others (Honneth, 2012a, p. 25).

Instead, the lack of recognition, and therefore its denial, influences the experience of various types of contempt and humiliation that destroy the autonomous construction of one's own identity: from a lack of confidence in one's abilities and self-confidence to withdrawal and social exclusion. At the social level, the denial of recognition deprives specific subjects of any possibility to assess the social value of their own competencies. The consequence of the evaluative degradation of specific

patterns of self-actualisation is, for their representatives, that these subjects cannot relate to their own ongoing life as something that has positive meaning within their community (Honneth, 2012a, p. 131), resulting in significant damage to their self-esteem and therefore a loss of the chance to understand themselves as a being valued for their distinctive qualities and skills. Disregarding an individual's way of life results in a sense of harm; a person needs approval of his or her way of self-realisation from both loved ones and anonymous members of society. Recognition from them guarantees a positive attitude towards oneself (self-confidence, self-respect, or positive self-esteem), guarantees to see oneself as an autonomous and individualised being and to identify with one's goals and dreams. Recognition and lack of recognition trigger emotional reactions and sensations: from self-confidence to rage, anger, shame, and feelings of hurt.

Recognition of the concept of A. Honneth is treated as the fullest manifestation of the social nature of our being in the world. It shows that without the other we do not exist, we cannot develop, realise ourselves, and function normally. At every moment of our life, we see ourselves in the eyes of other people, based on their opinions we build our self-esteem, their expectations often determine the paths of our decisions.

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In the intersubjectivity of the recognition relation, A. Honneth emphasises the ethical and political potential of this idea and its relationship to the struggle for recognition, and attempts to create a conception of the state based on a post-traditional, democratic ethicality through which legally guaranteed autonomy and individual particularity could be reconciled with the demands of a social life built on a common value system. "This post-traditional, democratic ethicality is not only to include intersubjective conditions for individual self-realisation but is also to be based on deep, social solidarity. It is thus to be a formula that combines the requirements of formal, universalist morality with a specific conception of the good life" (Bobako, 2012, p. XXX).

The meaning of recognition and its relevance for the individual, especially as an intersubjective condition of his or her autonomy, as well as recognition in different areas of social life can be explained by referring to elements of the philosophy of G. Hegel, which are the basis of the Honneth's concept.

## **The Hegelian basis of recognition**

The basis and source of Honneth's conception of recognition is the philosophy of G. Hegel, especially from the Jenaean period (1802–1807), which has been reconstructed and updated by A. Honneth. For G. Hegel recognition is a fundamental dimension of intersubjectivity and reciprocity: "To acknowledge means: to recognise another and to be recognised by another oneself. Through recognition, the 'I' finds itself and its place with and alongside others in the meaningful space of the world: (Hegel, 1963, p. 181). The starting point of Hegel's model is the speculative thesis that associated with the formation of the practical self is the assumption of mutual recognition between subjects: only when the individual sees confirmation of his or her autonomy in the eyes of the opponent can a complementary understanding of himself or herself as an autonomously acting and individual self be achieved.

Underlying communal life, therefore, is some primordial moral necessity, which G. Hegel identifies with the desire to be recognised. The recognition of the person as a free being, according to G. Hegel, makes individual autonomy possible (the idea of autonomy as a moral requirement was taken over by G. Hegel from I. Kant). Thus, in the Hegelian model, recognition combines self-reflection and orientation towards another. This reciprocal conditioning of the relation to self and intersubjectivity, which was formulated by Johann Fichte, was expressed in the writings of the Johann Fichte period. According to G. Hegel, the autonomy thesis is the starting point, as it explains the essential feature of social objectivity, which is precisely at stake in his theory of ethics. Here, A. Honneth refers to the Hegelian view of recognition in the context of intersubjectivity, and the specificity of his concept is the problem of the struggle for recognition, the question of the meaning of social conflicts and social change.

According to A. Honneth, being with others and intersubjectivity in different areas of social life is based on recognition: "[...] the reproduction of social life is subject to the imperative of mutual recognition since subjects can only achieve a practical model of self-empowerment if they learn to view themselves from the perspective of their interaction partners, i.e. as their social addressees" (Honneth, 2012a, p. 90).

The thesis most relevant to the Honnethian conception of recognition, G. Hegel derives from the premises of the theory of intersubjectivity: G. Hegel argues that there are various forms of mutual recognition to which correspond different degrees of autonomy that a subject can acquire. In these successive forms, individuals affirm each other increasingly as autonomous and individualised persons. In the three areas of social life: love, law, and ethics, G. Hegel sees three types of relations of recognition within which individuals confirm each other.

According to G. Hegel, ethicality is formed following the stages of intersubjective relations of recognition. In the system of ethical life, the recognition of the individual appears in the context of the formal character of law. The desire to be recognised and the struggle for recognition ultimately takes on a political dimension in G. Hegel a political dimension. Through institutions, the recognition of each individual by himself takes place. He thus places the problematic of recognition in the context of political philosophy, and for this reason, it is characterised by a form of ontotheology or metaphysics, i.e., the speculative or conceptual reference of identity to the whole. The considerations of G. Hegel make metaphysical assumptions and therefore do not consider the intersubjective relation as an empirical event in the social world but as a formative relation between individual intelligences. A. Honneth seeks to reduce these metaphysical assumptions by reconstructing Hegelian theses in the light of an empirically grounded social psychology drawn from the work of Herbert George Mead and the continuators of the psychoanalytic tradition (Donald W. Winnicott, Jessica Benjamin). The place of identity/wholeness is taken by human multiplicity as the impassable reference of relations of reciprocity and recognition. Underlying A. Honneth's re-updating is the conviction that a balance can be struck between Hegelian themes and a rejection of the metaphysics of the absolute. At the same time, the philosopher defends the Hegelian idea of constructing a normative theory of society and combines conceptual speculation with empirical verification, thus reconstructing the Hegelian thesis in the context of empirically grounded social psychology. The strategy of re-actualisation adopted by A. Honneth consists of a combination of speculative argumentation and theoretical framing on the empirical base of interactions between individuals in a model of social genesis and identification of the self on recognition (this model is borrowed from H. G. Mead).

Honneth's reconstruction and re-actualisation of the Hegelian philosophy of law involves three spheres of recognition, also present in G. Hegel, the spheres of recognition and the three institutions associated with them: the family, the law, and the economy/culture, which satisfy the needs for recognition in different ways and realise the intersubjective relation in different ways. For G. Hegel, this classification of forms of recognition is needed to obtain a categorical framework for a theory capable of explaining the process of ethical formation as a consequence of states of intersubjective relations of recognition that adopt the logic of a developmental process mediated by stages of moral struggle. For A. Honneth, the sequence of forms of mutual recognition is a condition for the development of the self, while its absence is an injustice to the subjects that motivates them to engage in a struggle for recognition. This is because they correspond to the three experiences of social depreciation resulting from the denial of recognition. These spheres are interconnected, and the individual builds up his positive forms of self-empowerment and autonomy in all of them. In the process



of development, this is initially done within the family and only later at the interface between family and law. The legal aspect of recognition is subsumed into the structure heralding it, the family, and the structure beyond it, culture.

Among these three models of recognition, a special place is given to the family, which is the primary site for the formation of recognition in the developmental process of the child and the relationships between family members. The choice of the model of recognition in the family, which was identified by A. Honneth with the relationship of love, will make it possible to show its importance for the identity of the individual, for the development of his/her autonomy and its successive stages. To move from the issue of mutual recognition to recognition in the family, which is characterised by close emotional ties between a small number of people, I will return to the questions posed at the beginning: What is the significance of recognition in the family? How is it formed in the developmental process of the child?

### **Recognition and love in the family**

Among the three planes of recognition outlined, the family will be in the foreground, which for A. Honneth proves to be fundamental. Indeed, the recognition obtained in the family is the foundation for its subsequent forms, and this applies both to relationships in the family of adults and to children, who receive recognition precisely here and learn it from the beginning of their development.

The family, as defined by A. Honneth, encompasses relationships between a limited number of people who are connected by direct, extra-legal ties and strong emotional relationships. For A. Honneth, the concept has a much broader sense than just an institution since, in his view, it also refers to partner, intimate, and friendship relationships.

The family, the composition of which can be anything, is shaped by relationships between people based on strong emotional ties and in which economic and state coercion is absent.

The family understood as a close relationship between a small number of people, is where recognition is experienced and learned. A particular assumption made by A. Honneth following G. Hegel is that in these direct and close relationships, the form of recognition is love. Relations of mutual recognition are identical to relations of love, which also implies a reformulation of the traditional sense of love. Already for G. Hegel the affirmation of love in close relationships was a form of intersubjective recognition. The starting point for G. Hegel was to expand the Romantic sense of love that was valid in his epoch. Because of this, it does not mean only and exclusively intimate sexual relations, but in a broad and neutral definition, love relations are fundamental ties based on strong emotional bonds between a small number of people. Similarly, for A.

Honneth “love is more than just a sexual relationship between a man and a woman” (Honneth, 2012a, p. 93). It is an emotional relationship within the family. Thus, love as a form of recognition is realised in affectional, emotional relationships concerning people within the family (parent-child), but also between partners and even in the bonds of friendship.

What does the recognition-love relationship within the family consist of? A. Honneth explains that it is an emotional relationship that is based on mutual concern. It is also possible to explain recognition-love in the family through the basic Hegelian formula that defines intersubjectivity as “being oneself in another.” How is it expressed within the family, in both recognition and love relationships? An analysis of the recognition-love relationship within the family makes it possible to understand how we learn recognition from childhood and how love received and given allows us to experience recognition.

Love is thus, for G. Hegel the basic paradigm of all other forms of recognition, and it can only be experienced in close relationships, i.e., in the family. The Hegelian formula of “being oneself in another,” which defines love, includes mutual care and understanding of the importance of needs, self-restraint (for the sake of others), and autonomy, as well as the tension between closeness and independence. All of this contributes to an understanding of recognition that is characterised by positive self-empowerment and autonomy together with self-limitation for the sake of others.

Furthermore, G. Hegel emphasises that it is only in the intersubjective relation that the individual learns to be a free subjectivity, while at the same time freely self-limiting. This intersubjective relation, however, in its original form has the dimension of love. A. Honneth, in a 2013 conversation with Filipe Campello and Gennaro Iorio, confirms that it is in G. Hegel we find the idea that the individual subject obtains its self-understanding through the experience of being loved by someone:

So, in exploring this kind of reciprocal love relationship, I think he developed the basic factor of recognition, namely that reciprocal recognition is a kind of reciprocal self-restraint, and that in this self-restraint we not only remain free but probably become even freer than if we did not have this experience. Thus, I think that from the very beginning, this linked the idea of mutual love and with it, a form of recognition with the concrete idea of freedom – namely, that freedom is best understood. And in its highest form, it is not something that can be obtained or acquired individually, but something that you only have by having that concrete experience, because in that experience you feel at home with yourself, limiting yourself. So, this is the main idea: to feel at home with someone else. To feel at one’s place with someone else, but in this particular way; such that we limit ourselves without experiencing a commitment (Campello, Iorio, 2013, p. 247).

Being oneself in another, i.e., the self-limitation of freedom for the sake of another is expressed in love through mutual care, attention and understanding of the importance of one's own needs and those of others. G. Hegel assumed that, through the relationship of love, subjects realise and affirm their drive nature, thereby recognising each other as concrete beings with specific needs. A. Honneth develops and continues the idea of G. Hegel that subjects in the family affirm each other in their concrete needs. In the mutual experience of relationship and the gift of love, they feel united in the interdependence of their needs. Needs are reciprocated directly, acknowledgement is like approval and encouragement directed towards them, and the relationship of acknowledgement is related to the bodily existence of concrete persons and their needs. In the case of love, the effect of care and attention, thanks to the continuity of support, approval and encouragement directed at the needs, the child (as well as the adult) acquires the confidence to communicate them unforced, resulting in self-confidence, self-confidence and self-understanding. This enables the child to respect him/herself and develop a positive relationship with himself/herself:

On this first level of mutual recognition, experiencing care, involvement and emotional closeness from those around them, the individual should learn to see him or herself as an individual with specific, elementary needs, an individual who is, however, dependent on others and their attention for his or her ability to develop an undisturbed relationship to oneself (Frazer, Honneth, 2005, p. 153).

The consequence of the recognition obtained through the love, attention and care shown within the family towards a person's bodily identity together with his or her needs is a positive relationship with oneself, which consists of trust and self-respect, resulting in the conviction of one's ability to make judgements and moral judgements and the recognition of one's capabilities. This totality of positive self-empowerment gained through recognition can be described, following Mirosława Nowak-Dziemi-anowicz (2020), as the satisfaction of ontological security. Through the experience of this form of recognition rooted in the family, the individual also learns to accept another person, to see the importance of another person's perspective (acquires social and civic competence), to understand and respect the other person, her or his needs and her distinctiveness. These attitudes can be defined more broadly as tolerance, understood as openness to difference, dissimilarity or otherness, as well as full involvement and concern for the particularity of others. In the family, children and adults learn to accept, understand and take into account the autonomy of each person, regardless of the gender roles assigned to them in reproduction, symbolism and culture.

Primal emotional relationships are not only the site of love in the experience of recognition, but also the site of its learning in the young child's developmental process.

A. Honneth's approach to the psychoanalytic tradition associated with the concept of object reference explains this process of learning recognition in loving relationships. Honneth's description of the parent-child relationship, especially the mother-child relationship from early infancy, points to the essence of love in the tension or balance between symbiotic self-attachment, attachment and individual self-affirmation, self-reliance:

In so far as this form of recognition through love, which Hegel described as "being oneself in someone else," is here not a permanent subjective state, but a kind of communicative tension through which there is a mediating continuity between the experience of being alone and being united (Honneth, 2012a, p. 103).

A. Honneth has tried to combine the ideas of G. Hegel's ideas on mutual recognition and psychoanalytic theory (D. W. Winnicott, J. Benjamin), and therefore describes the formation of recognition in loving relationships within the family in the process of child development. The family, and within it the relationship between mother and young child, becomes the starting point for understanding recognition and consequently individual autonomy. The aim of A. Honneth is to explain how the child can, through recognition, become an autonomous subject and, at the same time, how the child can learn to understand and accept the separateness of the mother or the other person. Furthermore, the child learns how an independent subject can experience unity with the other person in the form of mutual closeness. A. Honneth who follows D. W. Winnicott\* interprets, in the context of the psychoanalytic theory of object reference, the process of the child's maturation as a certain task in which the two subjects, mother and infant, remain initially in a state of symbiotic unity and then have to learn one from the other how to separate from it and become independent beings. The result of this process is to achieve a balance between symbiosis, unity, and self-determination. This is because, based on emotional bonds and through the love received from the parents, the child learns to conceive of itself as an independent entity, which is the first step for mutual recognition.

According to this theory, analysed by A. Honneth based on the psychoanalytic theory of D. W. Winnicott, immediately after birth the young child remains in a state of absolute dependence on the mother. On the one hand, this is due to the direct satisfaction of the infant's needs, the infant's inability to distinguish itself from its environment and its illusion of omnipotence, and its inability to communicate its needs; on the other hand, the mother strongly identifies with the child's needs she co-sensitizes them. This relationship of primary intersubjectivity, which is characterised by the absence

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\* In this article I refer exclusively to the interpretation of the ideas of D. W. Winnicott as presented by A. Honneth in his book "Struggle for recognition."

of a boundary between self and other, can be described in D. W. Winnicott's terms as absolute dependence, symbiotic unity, or symbiotic community. On the basis of this symbiotic unity, a process begins in which, based on the mother's love and care, both subjects free themselves from the state of undifferentiated unity, acquire some form of independence and consequently learn to accept and love themselves as independent persons. The acquisition of independence in the case of the mother occurs when her bodily identification with the infant weakens and she can return to social activity, to her daily routine, no longer having to meet all the child's needs (these can be met differently or by other people), so she can leave the child alone for increasingly longer periods. This process corresponds to the intellectual development of the child, who acquires the capacity to cognitively separate himself or herself from the environment and begins to understand that his or her needs can be met later or indirectly so that the child learns to endure the mother's short absence. In addition, through play, especially the manipulation of objects, the child prepares himself for his actions, often accompanied by acts of aggression and disobedience directed towards his mother, allowing him to develop his sense of control and omnipotence. The child begins to enter a world in which other autonomous entities exist beside him or her.

In this phase of relative dependence, bonds are re-created based on the love and care of the mother, or more broadly of the parents and loved ones. The child experiences dependence on the expressions of love of a person existing independently of him or her, a being with specific needs of the child's own. The mother learns to accept the child's independence (and even disobedience), sets boundaries for the child's aspirations, and feels a dependence on the child's affections, but no longer a symbiotic union. The child has a sense of the mother's existence on which to rely, and gradually develops the capacity for solitude and independence. Only then can it surrender to inner impulses without fear of abandonment and follow them creatively as well as be open to experience. This phase of childhood involves building a balance between independence and symbiosis (although already understood differently). In this context, A. Honneth cites H. G. Mead's thesis, which is close to his own, that when the child develops a self, he trusts in the permanence of the support of maternal (or parental) love. Even when the loved one's attention is diverted to something else, she will continue to give them love (Honneth, 2012a, p. 102). In turn, this certainty is the outward appearance of trust that the person will always meet the child's needs. This trust is built up by the belief that these needs are important to the mother, they will be met because they are of special value to her. Consequently, a self-trust is created that is the basis for positive individual self-empowerment. At the same time, the child learns to recognise the mother as an independent person in the experience of separation. This creates a relative dependence between mother and child, a transition from a mature form of love, to a Hegelian being itself in someone else. The consequence of this relationship

is the capacity for solitude and, at the same time, the capacity for intimacy and bonding with someone else. The loved person, thanks to the love shown to him or her, acquires the strength to open up to himself or herself in a reflexive self-referral liberated from tensions and to become an autonomous subject with whom unity can be experienced in the form of mutual intimacy. When such love is sustained, the child is dependent on its commitment and can develop trust relating to the fulfilment of his needs as well as the social fulfilment of one's claims relating to needs.

The mother-child love relationship becomes the basis for understanding love in close relationships in adulthood. Recognition-love makes it possible to move from absolute dependence, a characteristic of the child-mother relationship, to an invisible bond between loving persons in an intertwining of absence and presence. "Only a ruptured symbiosis allows this productive balance between closeness and distance to emerge between two people, which, according to Winnicott, is part of the structure of mature love relationships formed by getting rid of mutual illusions" (Honneth, 2012a, p. 102). The relationship between mother and child thus becomes a pattern of interaction that is repeated in adulthood, in both bonds of love and friendship, whose common feature is a bond of affection, relating to each other with trust, much like a child who relies on the emotional support of the mother.

It is therefore necessary to start from the hypothesis that all amorous bonds are stimulated by an unconscious reminiscence of the primordial sense of union with which the first months of life of the child and its mother are marked. Thanks to this inner state of symbiotic unity, a pattern of experience is shaped that gives complete satisfaction, which has a decisive influence on the fact that, as it were, behind the subjects' backs lies the desire to merge with another person throughout their lives. This desire for anastomosis, after all, can only develop into love if, due to the unavoidable experience of separation, it is so disappointing that it becomes a constitutive component of the recognition of the other as an independent person. Only a ruptured symbiosis allows this productive balance between closeness and distance to emerge between two people, which, according to Winnicott, is part of the structure of mature love relationships [...]. Within these relationships, the capacity for solitude is that pole of intersubjective tension that is related to the subject, while the opposite pole is the capacity for closeness and anastomosis with someone else (Honneth, 2012a, p. 102).

In a relationship of love, bonds consist of a shared experience (consent, unity) and at the same time of separateness, precisely because the loved person, thanks to the love shown to him or her, obtains the strength to open up to himself or herself and to be an autonomous subject in a relation liberated from tension.

The essence of love (and also of friendship) is thus a bond in which an intertwining of unity and autonomy takes place together with mutual consent and mutual trust, in which “reference to the self and symbiosis are counterbalancing elements, mutually challenging each other, which only when taken together enable a mutual being-in-itself in someone else” (Honneth, 2012a, p. 103). Thus, acknowledgement as a constitutive element of love is not about cognitive respect for the other, but about the affirmation of the other’s selfhood, which he or she supports with his or her emotional commitment.

Adult partners similarly go through a trial of separation in their love relationships, which brings the emotionally costly benefit of being able to be alone. This one intensifies in proportion to the partners’ belief in the permanence of the invisible bond that is formed in the intertwining of presence and absence. Between these two poles – emotional bonding and self-affirmation in solitude – a relationship of relative dependence is created in the course of the history unfolding between loving individuals, which is strong enough to lay in ruins the illusions of omnipotence originating in the early phases of childhood. In this context, the ability to detach gained at the price of many disappointments can be seen as the equivalent of the trust that keeps lovers together. Another aspect of love (friendship) can be added here: lovers (friends) consent to each other’s existence, it is through this consent that love or friendship itself becomes a valuable good in the situation of separation and the situation of reunion. The humiliation felt as a withdrawal or refusal of this consent affects the person in his or her being with another, for without approval the person cannot be autonomous and complete.

A concept close to A. Honneth is cited by Paul Ricoeur, who describes in “Ways of recognising” the figure of friendship as seen by Simone Weil. Friendship is, in Hegel’s language, the desire for the Other. S. Weil, like A. Honneth, outlines a relationship of friendship in which encounter and separation are inseparable. Friends and lovers are united by the one good that is most important to them: to love each other in such a way as to be one and in such a way as to be able to maintain a mutual bond at a distance. These sentences by S. Weil

[...] elevating friendship, as in Aristotle, to the rank of the good – “the one good,” as it is written – refers to a phase of maturity in which the empirical figures of love resonate with speculative structures taken over from Hegel. One can speak in this context of a dialectic of bonding and rupture manifesting the features of both speculative and empirical love. Breaking denotes the suffering of absence and remoteness, the experience of disillusionment, while binding denotes the strength of the soul, which is embodied in the capacity to exist alone (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 187).

The consequence of these experiences is confidence in the permanence of mutual care. The love relationship within the family (and also any love relationship) is based on sympathy and attraction as well as autonomy and requires mutual trust and recognition, i.e., acceptance of the separateness of persons and their needs. Such positive feelings of affection and attraction are only possible towards close individuals and in primordial social relationships, so they are difficult to transfer to more interaction partners. But, as A. Honneth and G. Hegel already note, in love lies the “structural kernel of all ethics” (Honneth, 2012a, p. 105), for individual self-trust becomes the basis for autonomous participation in public life.

The thesis of G. Hegel and also by A. Honneth is that recognition within the family becomes essential for understanding and shaping the totality of recognition relations in the other two spheres of social life, namely law and economy/culture. Each of the spheres of recognition contributes to the formation of positive self-referential qualities. Without self-confidence, of which love is a prerequisite, no one can participate autonomously in public life.

In addition to the positive qualities – self-confidence and self-respect, obtained through recognition in the sphere of love and the sphere of law – another aspect of personality is thus added: through the experience of being recognised for one’s talents and abilities, practical self-empowerment is created, which consists of valuing oneself. These three positive types of self-empowerment allow the individual to see themselves as a person with specific needs, as a reasonable person and as a person of value (Honneth, 2012a, p. 153).

Recognition understood in this way is a condition of one’s own identity, which receives attention, care and respect for one’s own moral competence, allowing one to formulate moral judgements, distinguish right from wrong and respect any abilities, capacities and involvement in the community that one finds valuable. All three forms of recognition that A. Honneth describes: love, respect and valuing oneself, provide the individual with positive self-empowerment, which he learns through each successive form. Love in the family has a fundamental function in these, because there, especially in early development, the child acquires the skills to understand recognition and the relationships of self-respect and respect for others that are the foundations of recognition in the other areas:

As in the case of love, when, thanks to the continuity of support shown by the mother, the child acquires a confidence that allows him or her to communicate his or her needs unforced, so, too, thanks to legal recognition, the adult subject acquires the ability to understand one’s action as an expression of one’s autonomy



that is met with universal respect. That self-respect plays the same role in the case of a legal relationship as self-confidence does in the case of a love relationship is already suggested by the similarity between the framing of rights as anonymous signs of social respect and love as an emotional expression of support also shown at a distance: whereas the latter is the psychic foundation of every human being, through which he or she can trust the impulses that signal his or her own needs, the latter allows for the development of the awareness that he or she can respect himself or herself if he or she deserves the respect of all other individuals (Honneth, 2012a, p. 115).

We see the same logic in love and law: we can only develop and understand ourselves as having certain rights if we know each time what our normative obligations are towards other people. Through the perspective of the generalised other, we learn to recognise the rights of other members of the community, we also see ourselves as legal persons, and we have the certainty that our specific claims will be fulfilled by society. We are not guided by feelings towards others, yet for their sake, we impose limits on our aspirations and will. Recognition in the cultural sphere consists of an evaluation of specific qualities and skills, a respect for particular qualities that distinguish some persons from others and refers to a socially established evaluative system of reference within which the value of the qualities that characterise a particular person can be measured, the feedback effect of which is to value oneself.

The three forms of recognition are in a dialectical relationship, and at the same time form a process of practical learning through which moral subjects expand their experiences and expectations of recognition. At the level of the first sphere, loving recognition as primary socialisation in the family is *the sine qua non* condition for the entry of socialised individuals into the legal and cultural sphere of recognition. It thus has a non-historical character. Legal recognition and cultural recognition turn out to be products of the historical process of the formation of social spheres and the law of the value horizon.

## **The educational and emancipatory function of the family**

An analysis of Honneth's concept of mutual recognition as part of his project of the struggle for recognition leads to the conclusion that recognition is fundamental to the development of individual identity of individuals, as it is essential for positive self-empowerment or self-understanding. The basis of this positive self-empowerment is trust and self-respect, valuing oneself and, consequently, the fear-free realisation of one's own needs and goals. Every person needs recognition, it must be reciprocal, the ex-

pression of which is autonomy (freedom), in which self-realisation and dependence on others are combined. An attitude of care, respect, and tolerance towards people is also required of each person. These dependencies are expressed on a social level in attitudes of respect, as well as in taking into account the rules of law, and community values and transforming them by striving for justice and equality.

In the work of A. Honneth the focus is on the social determinants of recognition, which are realised in two spheres of social life: law and culture/economy, in which mutual recognition is shaped and in which the struggle for recognition takes place. The article examines another plane of recognition, the family, which is the site of close, direct relationships that underpin the experience of recognition and its formation. In these relationships between a small number of people, the form of recognition is love, and the mother/parent and child relationship is the site of the learning of love and recognition, which can then be developed in adulthood and at other levels of social life.

The essence of love in close relationships is respect for the principle of reciprocity, a relationship of dependence and autonomy, which consists of both self-empowerment and concern for one another. Autonomy is inseparable from caring for, appreciating, and understanding the aspirations and needs of the other, and so mutual recognition is a requirement for self-restraint for the sake of the other, and self-sacrifice for the sake of the other. A special case of love is the relationship between child and mother/parent, which can be seen as a continuous process of experiencing and learning recognition, in which self-awareness and self-confidence are developed and strengthened so that the person can realise themselves as an independent subject based on the bond of mutual dependence. The child achieves independence in a relationship of dependence, affectionate closeness and care, this is his or her primary and fundamental experience – it is the pathway to building an independent self.

Which model of the family and which relationships within it can be adopted as the most optimal for achieving what, according to A. Honneth's view of what is most important for human beings, namely autonomy, allows the unfettered realisation of one's needs and possibilities in a given social situation and with an understanding of intersubjective requirements? A. Honneth avoids identifying the family exclusively with a social institution and with culturally defined roles of man and woman. In it, the mother-child relationship can be replaced by a parent-child relationship; family members are equal partners to each other. These close relationships, in which the gender of the partners is not particularly important, are based on mutual recognition, which determines the ethical requirements of intersubjectivity and the limitation of each partner for the sake of the other. An individual can only enter into a relationship of recognition, self-appreciation, and self-respect with each other if he or she learns to see himself or herself from the normative perspective of the interacting partner. In a family understood in this way, the equality and autonomy of each person are paramount, which means

that they can negate and reject culturally dominant family models, gender roles, culturally established rules, entitlements and responsibilities. Such women's liberation through relationships in the family is highlighted by the feminist perspective represented by Federica Gregoratto (2015), who recognises the emancipatory potential of A. Honneth. A woman's liberation would be that she no longer needs to be defined within the dichotomous organisation of gender identities, and therefore as a person who understands herself as devoted to others, that is, as someone whose main activity and responsibility is to take care of the needs and desires of others, and sets aside her own needs and desires. According to this interpretation, the woman is a family member who is subordinate to others and attaches herself to a position of dependence on others (the man), which makes it more difficult for her to strive for independence, to fight to be recognised as independent, and thus to struggle to exercise power or to gain a position of authority (Gregoratto, 2015). Conversely, a family based on self-respect, autonomy and equality opens up opportunities for free self-realisation and participation.

The family is the place of the primary experience of love and recognition, as well as the place of understanding intersubjectivity. Therefore, not only does it have the primary function of educating one to be a free human being about others, but also, as A. Honneth notes, it is the place of civic education in a democratic society. Education is conceived by A. Honneth concerning politics and morality. In his few writings on it, in which he addresses the topics of democratic ethics and being a good citizen, he separates the area of education through school from the area of education through socialisation, especially in the family. This is because he regards recognition as a whole process of education that begins in the family and is fundamental to the formation of real freedom in society (Honneth, 2012b, 2012c, 2015). This freedom requires respect for intersubjectivity, but at the same time a critical approach to and liberation from current cultural and economic social conditions. A. Honneth thus emphasises the educational function as well as the emancipatory and transformative function of the family, which she also points out in her later work "Freedom's right" (Honneth, 2014). In it, he demonstrates that the love relationships on which the family is based are constructed within an autonomous social sphere. Love itself and the choices of partners in modern societies are already regulated by their normativity, which is far removed from other imperatives, especially from economic dependencies or class divisions, as they are mainly based on sexual desire and mutual affection. The sphere of love is strongly demarcated from other spheres (although we recognise their influence on identity), and the principle of interdependence and recognition becomes a priority. It requires equality and negotiation, each partner realises their own independence and subordinates themselves at the same time, moreover they seek what is common. In these relationships of love, "[...] our inner being is released through mutual affirmation" (Honneth, 2014, p. 32). In being at home with another, each partner "[...] presents a condition for the free-

dom of the other” (Honneth, 2014, p. 151), which means opening up the possibility of being an autonomous and free person, developing self-awareness and the ability to discover and realise one’s desires and projects.

This idea of a loving relationship entails a transformative potential, which can then be realised in the form of a struggle for recognition, as love and recognition liberate from social constraints. In the family, a person’s freedom is conditioned by the other person, thus getting rid of socially imposed constraints. Therefore, cultural and social conditioning can be negated and rejected in the family, and individuals who are aware of their freedom acquire the capacity to transform it.

Why is recognition so important for the individual? Based on the thought of G. Hegel, A. Honneth emphasises that for the individual in relationship with others, the desire for recognition and mutual recognition, which are the essence of intersubjectivity, are fundamental. Recognition is important for the individual because of his or her autonomy, understood by A. Honneth in the Hegelian sense of freedom of self-determination in social circumstances (taking into account the principles of law and communal moral requirements as well as limitations for the sake of others). Recognition is fundamental for the individual, as everyone desires appreciation and respect from others for their choices and actions. It is a source of positive self-empowerment that allows one to satisfy one’s needs without fear or resistance and to take advantage of opportunities, which is a condition for self-realisation. At the same time, the individual learns that the other person has value and that he or she deserves respect, which means self-restraint for the sake of the other.

The family is the primary place for the formation of recognition, as it is a gradual process of experience and learning that already begins in the relationship with parents in early childhood. Recognition obtained in the family is therefore the foundation for its subsequent forms. Only there can recognition be realised in the form of love, which is characterised by mutual concern for the needs of others, trust, closeness and independence. It is through love that one can learn to understand the needs of the other, to be self-restrained for the sake of the other, and through the given care and given feelings to build up faith and trust in oneself as a person with one’s own needs. Through relationships of appreciation and love in the family, one learns to accept the different person, learns to see the importance of the other’s perspective, to understand and respect the other, which also means building social competencies (tolerance, caring, diversity, and respecting the other), as well as love, respect and valuing oneself.

Which family most fulfils the conditions for recognition described by A. Honneth? In a family, the most important things are emotional and affectional bonds, equality and autonomy of each person, care, respect, understanding of needs, trust, and limiting oneself for the sake of another. Thus, the family model can be anything, but it must be based on the moral requirements of intersubjectivity.

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