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Contradictions between individually needed and institutionally offered forms of recognition

Abstract

This article studies contradictions that emerge between needed and offered forms of recognition. By using Honneth's conceptualization of the forms of recognition, I focus on love, rights and solidarity. This conceptualization has been used in research of relations between youth and, for example, social workers and youth workers. These studies emphasize that adults should offer all forms of recognition to young people. I argue, however, that individual youth and adults encounter each other in institutional roles that shape recognition. In some situations, young people's need for recognition contradicts adults' possibilities to respond to that particular need. I discuss these kinds of contradictions with two illustrative examples from interviews with young people living in a suburban neighbourhood and adults who encounter the youth in their work. This article advances the institutional aspect of recognition theory and opens horizons for empirical research on the recognition of young individuals in institutional situations.

Keywords

Honneth, institutions, recognition, social work, young people

1 Introduction

Various types of misrecognition between young people and professionals have been examined in earlier research. For example, social workers (Houston & Dolan, 2008; Warming, 2015) and teachers (Stojanov, 2009; Thomas, Graham, Powell & Fitzgerald, 2016) do not always recognize young people in an all-encompassing manner as emotional, equal and capable human beings. In this article, I study how institutional and professional roles direct and limit the recognition that can be offered (see Sointu, 2006). For example, a social worker's primary obligation in his or her institutional role is to respect the rights of clients equally and identically; however, this approach can lead to misrecognition if a young client expects to be treated like a friend, i.e., as an emotional and unique individual.

To systematically study contradictions in recognition, namely, what is institutionally offered and individually needed, I will utilize Honneth's (1995; 2004) three forms of recognition: loving and caring for another person (called love), respecting another person's rights (rights) and valuing unique skills and features of another person (solidarity). This threefold conceptualization has been widely used in research on the relations between youth and, for example, social workers (Houston & Dolan, 2008; Paulsen & Thomas, 2018; Warming, 2015), youth workers (Thomas, 2012), teachers (Graham, Powell, Thomas & Anderson, 2017; Hooper & Gunn, 2014; Stojanov, 2009; Thomas et al., 2016), researchers (Hooper & Gunn, 2014), foster carers (Sirriyeh & Raghallaigh, 2018), communication campaign coordinators (Edwards, 2018) and even Santa Claus performers (Hancock, 2016). In these studies, the recognition theory and related empirical results are usually illustrated in three column tables where love, rights and solidarity are kept apart (see Honneth, 1995, p. 129; Houston & Dolan, 2008, p. 463).

This disguises the possibility of *the forms of recognition being interrelated and often contradictory*.

Researchers who have previously utilized the idea of three forms of recognition have argued normatively, following Honneth, that *youth need all forms of recognition, and therefore, adults who encounter youth should try to offer all forms* (Hooper & Gunn, 2014; Houston & Dolan, 2008; Paulsen & Thomas, 2018; Thomas, 2012; Thomas et al., 2016; Warming, 2015). For example, a social worker should try to care for young clients (love), respect their rights (rights) and value their special skills and features (solidarity), because all of these are needed by youth. There are two assumptions behind this normative argument, first, that the social worker can offer every form of recognition in his or her institutional role, and second, that when he or she offers recognition, it matches what a young individual needs and expects. In this article, I will suggest that although in an ideal situation, certainly all forms of recognition are good and should be offered, there are situations that pose a contradiction between what young individuals need and expect and what adults can offer.

From the perspective of adults such as social workers, it is not possible to offer every form of recognition equally, as institutional roles¹, such as that of a social worker in relation to a client, set limits on recognition (Deranty & Renault, 2007). For example, a social worker's mandatory task in an institutional and professional role is to treat young clients equally and fairly by following laws and guidelines (rights). He or she may not be able to treat any one youth like a friend or a family member (love) because this could threaten the professional and neutral relation with the client. On the other hand, from the perspective of the youth, the forms of recognition that adults offer according to institutional roles are not always what they need the most or at all. For example, we can assume that, from the youth's perspective, being treated equally and neutrally as a client by a social worker can actually highlight the absence of personal emotional care.

Therefore, in some cases, youth can even decline recognition (see Decker, 2012, p. 220; Ferrarese, 2009). Youth can expect recognition beyond the institutional limits in an interpersonal 'play', but social workers have to follow the rules of 'the game', namely, laws and guidelines (Mead, [1934] 2010, pp. 152–164). This discrepancy between these

positions can lead to feelings of alienation on both sides, as the young individuals long for recognition that they will most likely not get, and social workers can face insurmountable institutional barriers in terms of the recognition that they can offer in their work. I will illustrate this kinds of situations in which institutionally offered recognition differs from individually needed recognition with two empirical examples from interviews of young people (aged between 17 and 31) who live in the suburb of Tesoma in Tampere, Finland, and adults who encounter the youth in their work.

Honneth's theory has been used in the context of social work research in a way that focuses on the interpersonal aspect of recognition (Garrett, 2010). In this article, two illustrative empirical counterexamples support the theoretical argument that recognition is not only interpersonal, but also limited by institutions (Deranty & Renault, 2007; Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 31; Ikäheimo, 2015, pp. 26–27). Empirical testing can strengthen the theoretical understanding of recognition. Mendonça (2011) calls for the operationalization of Honneth's realms of recognition in empirical studies.

The analysis of different cases and sorts of struggles can be very enlightening for a deeper understanding of the actual dynamics of recognition. Struggles for recognition take on different shapes in different contexts. The application of these concepts to empirical realities will help to clarify the nuances of recognition, as well as its strengths and shortcomings. (Mendonça, 2011, p. 956).

Mendonça (2014) is, as far as I know, the only one who has empirically studied contradictions between forms of recognition. He analyses discourses related to the treatment of people affected by leprosy in Brazil (in his article 'What if the Forms of Recognition Contradict Each Other? The Case of the Struggles of People Affected by Leprosy in Brazil'). He studies discourses that simultaneously enable one form of recognition and exclude another². In this article, the reasons for forms of recognition contradicting each other are not related to different discourses but the discrepancy between individual needs and institutional possibilities³.

The structure of this article is as follows. First, I will introduce Honneth's (1995; 2004) three forms of recognition and how they have previously been utilized in social work research. Then, I will present the data collected from the Finnish suburb and the methodology used in the analysis. After this, I will empirically demonstrate contradictions between individually needed and institutionally offered forms of recognition with two illustrative examples from the data. At the end, I will discuss what the understanding of the institutional aspect of recognition and its contradictory relation to individual aspects means for young people and adults working with them and for the research of recognition more generally.

2 Three forms of recognition

To systemically study contradictions between institutionally offered and individually needed forms of recognition, I will utilize Honneth's (1995; 2004) recognition theory as a framework, especially his idea of three forms of recognition, namely, love, rights and solidarity, which are provided in different institutional spheres.

When an individual is born, the first form of recognition that she or he needs is *love*. Only with love can an individual secure basic self-confidence and not be afraid of being abandoned (Honneth, 1995, pp. 95–107). Love requires an intimate relationship based on emotional and physical closeness; however, it is not just a symbiotic oneness. It also endures the separateness, aloneness and independence of individuals (Winnicott, 1958). Love requires trust so that conflicts do not separate people; in other words, so that the other person endures even aggressive attacks and does not withdraw love in revenge (Honneth, 1995, p. 104). The most important institutionalized community to fulfil the need for this emotional recognition is family⁴, but friends and relatives can also offer love.

In contrast to love, the recognition of rights is cognitive, not emotional. It requires detachment from 'feelings of liking and affection'; in other words, a universal and general respect for another person (Honneth, 1995, p. 110). It entails the idea of everyone

being treated equally and identically as autonomous, independent and mature persons with rights. Rights are codified in modern law: a rational agreement between equal individuals. (Honneth, 1995, pp. 107–121.) Rights and legal recognition are actualized in, for example, the school or public services.

Unlike rights, *solidarity* is directed ‘at the particular qualities that characterize people in their personal difference’ (Honneth, 1995, p. 122). Solidarity refers to the social acknowledgement of another person’s uniqueness, personality, skills, endowments, talents, and individual accomplishments (Honneth, 1995, pp. 121–130). Solidarity can be actualized in institutions such as vocational schools or workplaces where people earn respect for their special skills and achievements. Less formally, people can also earn respect from their peers through common interests or hobbies.

The three forms of recognition have been used in various ways in social work research (see Table 1)⁵. Houston and Dolan (2008) use three forms of recognition to conceptualize *child and family support*, which social workers offer to their young clients. Warming (2015) criticizes Houston and Dolan for not focusing on *asymmetrical power relations* and therefore studies misrecognition in different forms between social workers and youth. Thomas (2012) utilizes three forms of recognition to study *children’s participation* and their relationship with youth workers who are employed to facilitate young people’s participatory forums. Furthermore, Paulsen and Thomas (2018) examine the *transitional support* that young clients of child welfare services need from social workers in their transition to adulthood. Table 1 depicts in more detail what researchers have understood the three forms of recognition to mean and require in different relations and situations.

Table 1. Studies in which the three forms of recognition are utilized to analyse relations between social or youth workers and young people.

	Love	Rights	Solidarity
<p>Proper child and family support requires that social workers:</p> <p>(Houston & Dolan, 2008)</p>	<p>Provide closeness, warmth and emotional support to young clients.</p>	<p>Offer young clients the right to participate and have a voice in planning services.</p>	<p>Acknowledge unique talents, attributes and interests of young clients.</p>
<p>Child and family support entails asymmetrical power relations between children and social workers in residential institutions for children because:</p> <p>(Warming, 2015)</p>	<p>Emotional support for children is often restricted by the professional position of the staff. The children need the adults emotionally but not vice versa.</p>	<p>Parents' rights often override children's rights, as the parents make the final decisions.</p>	<p>Adults very rarely positively acknowledge children's special personalities or contributions to the collective.</p>
<p>Children's full participation in participatory forums requires that youth workers facilitating the process:</p> <p>(Thomas, 2012)</p>	<p>Ensure a sense of warmth and affection for the children (also, enhancing friendships encourages the children to stick with the group).</p>	<p>Ensure the children's right to have their voices heard.</p>	<p>Ensure that children see the real impact of their participation and can be proud of contributing to their local communities.</p>
<p>During the transition to adulthood, young people need the social workers of child welfare services to:</p> <p>(Paulsen & Thomas, 2018)</p>	<p>Have an emotionally supportive, personal and informal role rather than a professional one; being almost like 'family, a big brother, weird uncle and aunts, my second dad, and like a big brother'.</p>	<p>Listen to young people, provide them with information and enable their participation in issues related to support.</p>	<p>Have faith in young people, be encouraging towards them and focus on their strengths and future plans.</p>

As we can see, the three forms of recognition have been utilized as a framework in several studies focusing on different aspects of encounters (social support, power relations, ensuring participation) between social or youth workers and young clients. What do these studies have in common? First, they share the normative argument that adults *should aim to offer every form of recognition to youth*. It is true that this is a desirable goal. However, I suggest that in non-ideal circumstances, people are *not able to offer every form of recognition* because institutional roles set limits. In the social worker/client example, showing particular emotional care (love) for one young individual can pose a risk because such behaviour may compromise the social worker's professional duty to treat young people neutrally according to laws and guidelines (rights) (Sercombe, 2010, p. 114). Sometimes, expressing emotions is possible and even useful for social workers (Jaynes, 2019; McLeod, 2010; Sercombe, 2010, p. 120), but it is not always risk-free (Banks, 2013).

Such contradictions are not identified in the research because the three *forms of recognition are usually seen and addressed as separate* (Houston and Dolan, 2008; Warming, 2015). Theory and empirical results are often illustrated in three column tables, where love, rights and solidarity are separated (see Honneth, 1995, p. 129; Honneth, 2004; Houston & Dolan, 2008, p. 463; also Table 1). In this kind of representation, the possibility of *the forms of recognition being interrelated and often contradictory* is not taken into account.

Honneth (1997, pp. 32–33; 2004, pp. 362–363) acknowledges the possibility of relations and tensions between forms of recognition, although he does not develop the idea very far (Mendonça, 2014, pp. 34, 43). He states that when various relations of recognition raise conflict, forms of recognition cannot be ranked from some superior vantage point. 'In the case of conflict we have to decide according to different guidelines which of our bonds is to be granted priority' (Honneth, 1997, p. 33). However, in this article, I suggest that individuals do not always decide which bonds are granted priority but instead are expected to act in institutional roles according to rules relevant to the situation (Stahl, 2011; Thompson, 2019, p. 23). Honneth does not originally take into consideration the institutional aspect of recognition (Marcelo, 2013, pp. 210–211). 'There is a deep

tendency in Honneth to reduce interaction to the horizontal relationship between singular individuals, to inter-personal interaction', which leads Honneth to 'adopt a unilateral stance on institutions' (Deranty, 2009, pp. 348, 469).

In the context of social work, Garrett (2010) criticizes researchers for uncritically adopting Honneth's approach, and therefore, overestimating the interpersonal and underestimating the institutional aspect of recognition between social workers and their clients. The examples in this article from the social work context illustrate that recognition is not actualized between singular individuals but rather between people in institutional roles. Taking into account these institutional roles – and the ensuing contradictions of recognition – enables research into messy social life, with its diverse overlaps and clashes in relations.

In addition, in the previous empirical research, it seems that young people are thought to *always need, expect and accept all forms of recognition that are offered to them*. This would mean that youth, for example, as students or clients, always need emotional care, respect of equal rights and the valuing of special skills and features (Hooper & Gunn, 2014; Stojanov, 2009; Thomas, 2012; Thomas et al., 2016; Warming 2015). Although it is true that generally all forms of recognition are needed, in particular situations, *not all offered forms of recognition are necessarily accepted by youth*. One reason for this is that recognition is not always positive but can restrict a person to a certain institutional role. By respecting a young person's rights, the social worker has the power to place that person in the role of a client. This type of formal respect between a professional worker and a client may actually amplify the lack of emotional care experienced by youth. This demonstrates that institutional relationships between young people and adults can be hierarchical and nonreciprocal. Professionals do not need recognition from their young clients (Warming, 2015, p. 255). Therefore, for young people, this one-sided offered recognition is not proper recognition (in Honneth's sense of the term) (Stahl, 2011, p. 362; Thompson, 2019, p. 16). Later, I will provide empirical examples of situations like this, but first, I will present the data and methodology that I have used.

3 Approach: Illustrative examples from an empirical case

To show how individual needs and institutional possibilities can contradict each other, I used two illustrative examples from empirical data collected during a research project that took place in the suburb of Tesoma in Tampere, Finland. The examples were chosen to illustrate the theoretical argument and show how forms of recognition can contradict each other when individual needs and institutional possibilities do not coincide. The purpose was not to provide any typical/most common or most important examples or definitive and exhaustive accounts of contradictions between forms of recognition. To make the examples illustrative, all forms of recognition (love, rights and solidarity) were included. The first example is from the perspective of a young person, and the second is from that of a social worker.

For the research project, young people living in Tesoma and adults in various roles working with them were interviewed. The goal was to paint a general picture of young people's lives and needs in the suburb. Altogether, nine young people between 17 and 31 years of age were interviewed individually. In addition, six group interviews were conducted. The interviewees either were or had been youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) or personally knew NEET youth living in the Tesoma area. In addition, 24 adults working in a variety of services supporting young people were interviewed in five thematic groups and four individual interviews. In the five thematic groups, a wide spectrum of topics was discussed. They included a) wellbeing, b) education, c) vocational education and employment, d) social networks and e) housing and livelihood.

The illustrative examples emerged during the data analysis process. Utilising Honneth's three forms of recognition as an analytical tool, it was observed that sometimes, the forms of recognition the young people needed and expected were in contradiction with what they were offered by social workers. This observation differs from previous studies on recognition between young people and social workers in which forms of recognition are

analysed separately and, therefore, not in contradiction with one other (Hooper & Gunn, 2014; Houston & Dolan, 2008; Paulsen & Thomas, 2018; Thomas, 2012; Thomas et al., 2016; Warming, 2015). From the examples, it also became inferable that the institutional position of social workers restricts the forms of recognition they can offer and young people may expect forms of recognition that they cannot get.

To understand the illustrative examples in this article, it is important to know about their context. The *local context*, the suburb of Tesoma, is a residential area built in the 60's and is located in the western Tampere area. Tesoma is a quite deprived suburb, and the unemployment rate, especially among young people, is high (City of Tampere, 2015). One can say that in Tesoma, young people suffer from a lack of recognition because of, for example, broken families (love) and unemployment (solidarity). In the Finnish welfare state, which is the *national context*, the objective has traditionally been to compensate these kinds of shortcomings in love and solidarity with strong social rights (Honneth, 2004, p. 362). For example, children with a poor home environment (love) have had a right to child welfare⁶. On the other hand, young people suffering from unemployment (solidarity) have had a right to unemployment benefits. However, it has been argued that the role of welfare institutions has diminished, as they no longer guarantee, for example, economic security for unemployed youth (Majamaa, 2011). Individuals are increasingly alone and responsible for their own recognition (Willig, 2009, p. 353). They must know how and where to obtain recognition; sometimes, they must demand it. Young people in vulnerable positions may find this difficult; they may need and expect recognition regardless of institutional roles and limits. Although strong social rights can compensate the lack of other forms of recognition, social workers and other employees of the welfare state cannot replace the primary people who should offer love and solidarity to young people (Warming, 2015, p. 256).

4 Contradictions between individuals' needs and institutional possibilities – two illustrative examples

In the following examples, forms of recognition are shown to contradict each other. In these examples, a youth worker and a social worker respect the rights of youth, but the youth instead expect emotional recognition or recognition of their individual and unique features. In the first illustrative example, according to a youth, a youth worker does not show emotional and physical closeness to him (i.e., does not behave like a friend); in other words, the youth worker does not recognize the youth with *love* but only respects his *right* to emotional and physical integrity. In the second example, a social worker speaks disapprovingly about a young woman who has a *right* to social assistance but misuses it to buy a tattoo and to gain recognition from her friends in the form of *solidarity*. The young woman is supposed to pay for her rent with the social assistance, and the social worker cannot accept the young woman's actions because it is her duty as a social worker to take care of the client's right to accommodation.

4.1 Example A. Youth worker and young person with emotional needs – the contradiction between love and rights

Daniel is a young man. He describes how at home he and his father verbally attack each other. According to Daniel, this is not a sign of conflict but a shared 'game', which is part of their mutual sense of humour. Daniel explains that young people try to build similar kinds of relationships with youth workers. However, in contrast to his father, youth workers often lack the right kind of attitude that he and his father have. They talk to the young people in an overly correct manner. The youth provoke and purposefully try to irritate the youth workers to obtain a response, for example, by calling them names. The youth workers do not 'snap back' by coming up with new and worse nicknames. Instead, they refer to common customs and say that calling someone names is

impolite. According to Daniel, the problem is that youth workers always follow formal rules and are not authentic individuals. In the research interview, Daniel and the interviewer (a former youth worker) talk about the fact that verbally 'snapping back' could get the youth workers fired. Moreover, physical contact is constrained in youth work. According to Daniel, if a youth becomes aggressive, the youth worker keeps 'three metres distance' although holding, or a so-called 'bear-hug', would be needed to calm the young person. Daniel and the interviewer talk about the 'holding method', namely, the restraining of youth physically. The interviewer explains to Daniel that 'holding' is regulated by the law, and its use is restricted to institutional care.

The situation can be conceptualized with the forms of recognition. According to Daniel, young people long for relationships with youth workers that are similar to *loving* relationships with parents, friends, etc. Verbal 'snapping back' would be a sign of an authentic emotion, and it would also show that the emotional relationship endures this picking on each other. Moreover, physical contact and restraint could be calming and comforting in some cases. However, the youth worker focuses on Daniel's *right* to emotional and physical integrity. The problem, according to Daniel, is that the youth workers follow formal laws and guidelines too meticulously, not that they are emotionally uncaring per se. Unlike love, which adjusts to the particular emotional needs of an individual, the recognition of rights is cognitive and general. The youth worker recognizes the youth as 'a generalized other', not as a particular individual with changing emotional needs.

Different laws and guidelines require that youth workers respect the physical and emotional integrity of young clients. For example, the right to physically restrain a person requires a separately stated reason in Finnish law (The Penal Code of Finland, 2003, Chapter 4, Section 6). The right to restrain a person exists in the context of institutional care (e.g., Child Welfare Act, 2007, Section 68) but not in the context of youth work (Youth Act, 2006) or social work (Social Welfare Act, 2014). In addition, ethical guidelines for professional social workers call for 'an appreciative interaction' between

social workers and clients (Talentia, 2017, p. 7). According to these guidelines, ‘The use of humour at work can be acceptable, but there may be situations in which it is not suitable. [...] It is inappropriate for professional social workers to talk about clients in a disrespectful tone.’ (Talentia, 2017, p. 41, translation J.S.)

In this case, the young person longs for recognition beyond the institutional limits determined by laws and guidelines. The youth may expect recognition that is not in the form that the youth workers are able to offer. Especially those interviewed who are underage or have just turned 18 may not have wholly internalized the institutional rules, according to which youth workers cannot be primarily in the role of a *friend*. Instead, the youth worker plays the role of a *professional* or an *employee* taking care of the young person’s formal rights to receive services as a *client* and to enjoy physical and emotional integrity. This does not mean that the youth worker acts like a robot carrying out orders. He or she can be friendly and caring towards the youth and adjust to the needs of the youth. Ultimately, however, his or her most important and imperative duty is to treat the youth not as a loved family member or a friend but as an autonomous member of the civil society who has rights that are codified in laws and guidelines. Loving the youth is outside the job description of the youth worker (Thomas et al., 2016, p. 513). Mutual emotional bonds are reserved for “‘the private sphere”, the biological family and related networks – not to professional work’ (Warming, 2015, p. 256).

4.2 Example B. Getting a tattoo with social assistance – the contradiction between rights and solidarity

A social worker tells a story about a young woman misusing social assistance. The young woman had received so-called preventive social assistance to take care of two months’ unpaid rent. Instead of taking care of the unpaid rent, she paid for a tattoo with the money. Subsequently, she was threatened with eviction from her home. The social worker disapproved of her behaviour because the purpose of the assistance was to ensure that she had an apartment.

This illustration exemplifies the contradiction between rights and solidarity. Although the narrator is the social worker and not the young woman herself, one can suppose that she gained recognition from her friends who value tattoos. Obtaining something as personal and permanent as a tattoo solidified the recognition from her peers in the sphere of *solidarity*, in which uniqueness, personality and talents are valued.

The social worker does not necessarily ignore the young person's need for recognition as a unique individual per se but instead focuses on following the law that secures the fulfilment of the client's basic needs and *rights*. Social assistance, which is a last-resort financial assistance under social welfare, is supposed to cover housing costs (Social Assistance Act, 1997, Section 7b). In special circumstances, it is possible to receive so-called preventive social assistance, which is additional and discretionary, and 'can be granted for instance for measures [...] to secure housing, to alleviate difficulties as a result of over-indebtedness or a sudden deterioration of the financial situation' (Social Assistance Act, 1997, Section 13). This is the very last way to secure, for example, housing before eviction. It is the responsibility of the social worker to ensure that the client is not evicted and left without accommodation. In this kind of a situation, there may not be room for recognition of the other needs of an individual.

In this example, the young client challenges the order of recognition. This exemplifies how individuals may not gratefully and inevitably accept the recognition that is offered to them (see Ferrarese, 2009). The institutions do not force people to act in a certain way. However, opposing institutional order causes a loss at an objective level, namely, the threat of eviction.

The illustrative examples show how individuals' needs and expectations can differ from what can be institutionally offered to them. Next, I will explicate gaps in the research field to which the illustrative examples lead us. I will contemplate how conflicts and contradictions stemming from the relation between individual and institutional aspects of recognition can be addressed in future research.

5 New directions for studying recognition: contradictions, institutionality and individuality of recognition

The examples show that *forms of recognition should not be studied as separate but as intertwining and relational*. There are situations in which recognition and misrecognition occur simultaneously. Recognition can entail misrecognition and vice versa. In addition to contradictory relations, forms of recognition can also enable or compensate each other (Barry, 2016, p. 97). For example, it can be postulated that self-confidence created in loving relations may be a requirement for other forms of recognition; on the other hand, love and social bonds can in some situations compensate the lack of recognition in other forms. Overall, the three examples suggest that there are many kinds of relations and links between forms of recognition to be studied empirically (Deranty & Renault, 2007, p. 103). In this research, contradictions between forms of recognition stem from the fact that *individual needs and institutional possibilities do not always match*.

The illustrative examples suggest that from the perspective of those who offer recognition, *not all forms are equally possible*. It is important to focus on the limits of recognition and ask ‘what is realistic’ to better understand the situation in which recognition is offered. Mead ([1934] 2010, pp. 152–164) suggests that there is a so-called gamelike nature to recognition. In a gamelike situation, people are bound by myriad institutional rules. Like in a sport such as baseball, people work as a coordinated team, aware of the whole field, the rules and everyone’s roles. When an individual interprets the situation to be like a game, he or she acknowledges that not all forms of recognition are equally possible. Moreover, recognition is not just something that happens between two people, ‘you and me’, in ‘an idealized dyadic setting’, but between people in institutional roles (Deranty & Renault, 2007; Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 31; Ikäheimo, 2015, pp. 26–27)⁷. In other words, institutions structure cognitive relations. Institutions are relatively stable, shared, habitualized social mechanisms and structures (Berger & Luckman, 1987, p. 70–71) that are ‘shaped by the cumulative impact of many individuals interacting with one another over long periods of time’ (Young, 1988, pp. 3–5). The meaning of institutions cannot be completely comprehended by any one individual, even

adults. Young people especially, who are in the middle of the socialization process, may have difficulties grasping the purpose of some institutions (Berger & Luckman, 1987, pp. 149–157).

Although institutional roles constrain the actions of individuals, the needs of individuals do not necessarily follow them. *Individuals can need and expect all-encompassing recognition that is not limited by institutions* but happens between two people, ‘you and me’. Mead ([1934] 2010, pp. 152–164) calls this the playlike character of recognition. In ‘play’, individuals expect the form of recognition they need the most and expect the other person to adapt to a role that best corresponds to their needs. In contrast to games, in ‘play’, people do not acknowledge institutions that set rules and limits for recognition. ‘Play’ is not pre-determined. Rather, ‘players’ are initiators and agents (Caillois, 2001, pp. 3–10) and are free to expect any form of recognition. For example, in the first illustrative example used in this article (example A), the youth expects emotional and physical closeness – as well as caring – from the youth worker despite the fact that the rules of the game set limits on recognition.

In some cases, *individuals do not need, accept and welcome all forms of recognition*. Recognition can be a way to subordinate an individual ‘player’ to some institutional role or the rules of ‘the game’. The offer of recognition can be a way to control an individual; therefore, the rules of ‘the game’ can be coercive. Individuals are not always grateful for any kind of recognition but can expect an exact, particular form and simultaneously be willing to decline other forms. Those who are recognized can refuse to accept some particular form of recognition (see Ferrarese, 2009). For example, in the second illustrative example of this article (example B), the young woman takes the social assistance but misuses it from the perspective of the social worker. Taking the money and using it to gain respect from her peers or friends excludes her from being recognized as a client who has rights. Through recognition, the one who recognizes can predetermine the needs of the one who is recognized and place him or her in an institutional role (Butler, 2005; MacNay, 2008). More research is needed on how recognition is used by those who are recognized as active agents, not just objects of recognition (Decker, 2012).

If recognition theory is to be applied in research on young people's recognition needs, one should especially focus on the contradictions between individuals' needs and institutional possibilities, in other words, the relation between playlike and gamelike aspects of recognition. According to Mead ([1934] 2010, pp. 152–164), young people are moving from the play stage to the game stage, and they are learning to understand the meaning of distinct roles in the whole institutional 'field', in which one person can have several alternating roles (see also Berger & Luckmann, 1987, p. 77). At this stage, the youth are realizing and recognizing the significance of institutions and institutional roles more widely. They realize that they encounter people in institutional roles and that they have to take institutional roles. They are going through a process of socialization. However, this process never ends. People always have particular individual needs and expectations for interpersonal recognition (play) that cannot be fulfilled in real-life institutional situations (game). Misrecognition does not stem only from the faults of individuals but from the contradiction between the needs of individuals and the system of institutions.

6 Conclusion

Focusing on individual and institutional aspects of recognition opens up a new research field, namely, researching the contradictions in recognition between what individuals need and what can be offered to them in particular institutional situations. Potential empirical cases related to this are manifold. Next, I will reflect on, firstly, the consequences of the approach presented in this article on research of recognition more generally and, secondly, the very practical ramifications of it on understanding recognition relationships in the contexts of social work, youth work, education, etc.

There are alternative ways to utilize the three forms of recognition in research. First, love, rights and solidarity can be used to study *individual needs*, for example, the needs of young people and thereby what the adults working with them ought to offer. This is the way that recognition theory has usually been applied, for example, in social work

research (Houston & Dolan, 2008; Paulsen & Thomas, 2018; Warming, 2015). Second, *institutional possibilities and limits of recognition* can be studied. This approach emphasizes not just how things ought to be but what are the real possibilities for change, if any (Canivez, 2019, p. 77; Thompson, 2019, p. 25). True change requires transforming institutions, not just individuals such as social workers separately realizing how they ought to recognize young people (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 31). Third, three forms of recognition can be used to study *contradictions (and other relations) between forms of recognition*; in other words, the messy reality in which forms of recognition cannot always be separated. Fourth, *contradictions between individually needed and institutionally offered forms of recognition* can be studied. The messy reality of recognitive relationships can flow from the discrepancy between individual expectations and institutional possibilities.

It remains an open question to what extent it is possible for individuals to demand or to offer recognition against institutional roles and expectations. In other words, to what degree do institutions define recognition in different empirical situations? As the illustrative examples in this article suggest, young people have varying levels of capability when acting in relation to institutions. Youth are not always fully aware of institutional limits, and thus they may expect recognition despite those limits (example A), in some cases trying to act against them (Ferrarese, 2009) (example B). However, this kind of resistance to institutional expectations seems to usually have negative objective outcomes, as, for example, the young woman is at risk of eviction. On the other hand, in the illustrative examples, institutions restrict adults – who offer recognition to youth – to varying degrees. In example B, letting the young client use social assistance for a tattoo would be considered univocally a mistake. In example A, the youth worker could try to offer emotional recognition, but it requires skills and sensitivity not to risk violating the emotional and physical integrity of the youth. It is difficult to say whether the adults in the two examples follow the laws and institutional guidelines only because they fear sanctions or because they also acknowledge them as normatively valid (Laitinen, 2011). In the two examples, the professionals differed in terms of their aims and statutory responsibilities to ensure the welfare of their clients. This affects the recognition that is expected from them. These kinds of differences between the professional positions of

social workers, youth workers, teachers and so on can be studied in more detail in the future.

Clearly, it is easier to struggle for recognition from individuals – for example, to demand respect for rights from a youth worker – than to struggle against institutions, for example, to demand love from him or her. When a youth worker does not respect the rights of a young client, it is easy to condemn that worker as acting against shared institutional rules, expectations, guidelines and maybe even laws. However, there are subtler forms of misrecognition, namely, situations in which an individual acts according to institutional rules but the institutions themselves cause the misrecognition, for example, when a youth worker respects the rights of a youth who expects love. In the long run, struggling against institutions would probably cause ‘crippling shame’ (Houston, 2016), alienation (Thompson, 2019, p. 24) or meaninglessness (Canivez, 2019) rather than the will to ‘struggle for recognition’ (Honneth, 1995).

However, young individuals can also try to transform institutions. ‘Socialization is not only the internalization of social roles, because this internalization goes together with an effort to transform institutions and the recognition effects they produce’ (Deranty & Renault, 2007, p. 104). There is a dialectical tension between transformation and internalisation – in other words, between creativity and rule-following or play-like and game-like characters of recognition. Although the institutional boundaries in social and youth work relationships direct recognition, young people are also able to negotiate these boundaries (see Hart, 2016). However, the dialectical relation can become unbalanced in favour of social and youth workers who determine what form of recognition is needed. ‘Young people are being left in a more vulnerable position when it is assumed workers hold all responsibility for setting and maintaining boundaries’ (Hart, 2016, p. 880). In this kind of situation, social and youth workers as professionals define the needs of young people (Fraser, 1989, pp. 161-183) who may become stigmatised as being dependent (Fraser & Gordon, 1994).

In this article, the problem is that the youth and adults arrive at the institutional encounters from very different backgrounds. These differences in people’s positions and

backgrounds, which ensure contradictions between individually needed and institutionally offered forms of recognition, are to be studied in the future in different contexts. Indeed, as also presented in this article, the fact that the individuals in the illustrative examples are young and, therefore, in the middle of a socialisation process is an important (but not the only) reason for the contradictions between what they expect and what is offered to them. There are other possible reasons. Firstly, the young individuals are in the role of clients in the welfare services, which sets them in a position in which they have less power to demand recognition (see Sointu, 2006; Thompson, 2019, p. 16). Secondly, the young individuals are in a vulnerable position because they are not in education, employment or training (NEET). In addition, they live in a suburb that is fairly deprived and stigmatized. These reasons may cause vulnerability and almost an aching need for any form of recognition over institutional limits. For example, in some situations, vulnerable young people can expect and even receive more caring support from police or social workers than their parents (Tolonen, 2005, p. 357). A great lack of recognition may cause unreal expectations as the young people meet adults in institutional situations. On the other hand, adults arrive at the situations from different backgrounds, which might affect their understanding of the young individuals' recognition needs. They meet young people as representatives of institutions and acknowledge more widely the institutional rules they can resort to. On the other hand, youth workers and social workers are mostly in a middle-class position, living outside the stigmatized suburb, and therefore, the life situations of NEET youth is not likely familiar to them personally.

In the future, novel ways to utilise Honneth's theory as a basis for more systematic structural analysis of welfare state institutions could be outlined. First, *misrecognition caused by institutions* rather than individuals representing the welfare state could be researched. With Honneth's three forms of recognition, one could study institutional limits of recognition – for example, by analysing laws, official guidelines, policy documents and so on. Second, further research could focus on the *rationalisation of social work* (and other practices) in the context of an all-powerful 'iron cage' of welfare state bureaucracy (Jaeggi, 2014, pp. 4–5). This rationalisation or bureaucratisation happens by compelling individuals to dutifully follow institutional rules, laws and

guidelines (to ensure rights) without leaving space for emotions (love) or individual particularity and difference (solidarity) – in other words, personal engagement (Banks, 2013). The state may become the primary client of a social or youth worker, instead of the young person himself or herself (Sercombe, 2010, p. 26).⁸ This approach can direct us to examine the *alienation caused by dehumanizing institutions*. For example, young individuals may experience alienation when they feel misrecognized and wronged by social workers who follow the rules of ‘the game’, namely, laws and guidelines, and therefore do nothing wrong. On the other hand, for example, social workers may experience alienation when they are not able to help their clients with individual needs, no matter how dutifully they do what they are supposed to do.

In the practical context of social work, youth work, education, etc., a better understanding of *young people’s individual recognition needs*, which do not always follow institutional rules and roles, can help increase the tactfulness and sensitivity of youth workers, social workers, teachers and other adults working with youth. Young people may expect all-encompassing recognition beyond institutional limits. In addition, the understanding of *institutional limits of recognition* can provide possibilities for self-reflection for adults working with youth on the constraints of their work. For example, they can deliberate on the extent to which they should provide love for a young person who does not receive it in a neglectful home. An approach that emphasizes *contradictions of recognition* can help one understand the complicated and ambivalent nature of recognition and can help the providers of social services accept and endure conflicts between the needs of clients, such as youth, and what they themselves can actually offer (see Canivez, 2019). According to Webb (2006, p. 219), social work takes place in a dynamic world full of contingencies and uncertainties, and therefore, the ethics of recognition fits well within it. Recognition theory enables service providers to keep an open mind towards the client, to tolerate the ‘emotional messiness’ of not knowing and being sure and makes it possible to open themselves up to their clients’ perspectives (Turney, 2012, p. 156). This enhances sensitivity towards the clients’ diverse and changing needs that cannot all be satisfied – at least not at the same time. Paradoxes and contradictions of recognition are inevitable. According to Kompridis (2007), ‘we don’t fully know what we are doing when we are doing it, and because our motivations and our actions can never be fully transparent to us

or fully foreseeable by us, the possibility of misrecognition is built into each and every act of recognition’.

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Notes

1. Social workers have organizational roles that are institutionalized. This means that the legitimacy of the organizations is based not only on efficiency and functionality but also on shared, taken for granted, and habitualized beliefs, rules and symbolic elements (Berger & Luckmann, 1987; Scott, 1991, p. 165). The institutionalization of organizations increases their predictability and stability. However, institutions are not fixed; institutions are not always clear-cut entities and can also overlap. In this study, I consider social work with young people and youth work to be parts of the same institutional entity, although, for example, youth workers are not always formally social workers in the Finnish context.
2. For example, discourse that emphasizes the possibility of cure (the cure discourse) helps to confront some negative stereotypes and enhances self-esteem, as the ill are represented as individuals who are capable of becoming healthy (solidarity). However, because the largest amounts of resources are targeted at curing people, the basic rights of all the ill to the better basic health care that helps them cope with the disease are diminished. Mendonça (2014) does not study who uses the discourses, in other words, what institutional roles they are used in. One can ask whether the cure discourse – in other words, the emphasis on the ability to be cured (solidarity) – is used by professionals. Moreover, one can speculate whether the right to basic health care is emphasized mostly by the ill themselves or by their close relatives without formal institutional positions. Contradictions between forms of recognition stem not only from tensions within or between discourses but also from tensions between people in different and often unequal institutional roles.

3. Although there is a contradiction between individual needs and institutional possibilities, this does not mean that individual needs exist independently of institutions. Individuals act and encounter one another in institutional roles and spheres.
4. Hegel, from whom Honneth derives the idea of three forms of recognition, states that different forms of recognition are provided in different institutional entities. In Hegel's terms, love is provided in the family, rights in civil society and solidarity in the state. The movement from family – via civil society – to state is 'a process of moral development or learning both in on the social and the personal level' (Huttunen, 2012, p. 344). Hegel's central idea, which Honneth has also adopted, is that 'our recognitive needs are qualitatively multiple' (love, rights and solidarity) (Freola, 2010, p. 576). The multiple forms of recognition should not, however, be treated as separate in order to create 'artificially sanitized divisions into the rather more messy business of social life, characterized by overlapping allegiances, mixed identities, and clashing obligations' (Freola, 2010, p. 578). Instead, Hegel's idea can be used to study the messiness of social life and the contradictions of recognition in particular. 'Hegel acknowledged that the homo duplex nature of human morality [...] is not fiction but a real antinomy in society. A man can be at the same time a loving father in his family and a cold-hearted businessman in civil society.' (Huttunen, 2012, p. 341.) In this article, the contradiction that emerges between roles is different, namely, it is a tension between simultaneously being a professional social or youth worker and a friend-like person.
5. In this article, I point out that in the context of social work research, recognition is present in varied ways (love, rights and solidarity) (see Paulsen & Thomas, 2018). In another context, Schaub and Odigbo (2019) have an opposite goal. They criticize the understanding that economic relations are based only on recognizing the skills and attributes of individuals; in other words, solidarity (also called esteem). They 'argue that recognition is present in more varied ways in economic relations'; in other words, they want to expand 'the taxonomy of (mis-)recognition in the economic sphere', arguing that love and rights also have to be paid attention to in this context. In this article, I suggest that although many forms of recognition can be present, in contexts such as economic relations or social work some forms are usually more imperative than others. For example, the recognition of rights is the form that most strongly limits and directs social workers.
6. Contradictions between family (love) and civil society (rights) emerge easily because 'the idea of the family as an institution is strong in the Nordic region, and the same goes for the will to include children and young people in decisions concerning their own lives'. Therefore, 'the principle of children's individual rights can conflict with the principle of involvement by the family' (Follesø & Mevik, 2009, pp. 98, 108).

7. According to Ikäheimo (2015, p. 36), in highly formalized bureaucratic settings such as penal institutions, ‘institutional roles or functional demands [...] may be such that individuals have little room to attend to each other in ways that would elicit in them the affect of genuine respect for one another’. I suggest that this can also happen in less extreme contexts such as social work.
8. Applying Honneth’s theory in the analysis of welfare state institutions could provide a common ground between the approaches of Nancy Fraser and Honneth (2003). Fraser criticised Honneth for focusing on individual ethics and misrecognition in interpersonal relations rather than structural misrecognition caused by welfare state institutions.

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