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# Recognition, feelings of injustice and claim justification: a case study of deaf people's storytelling on the internet

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This paper argues that Honneth's theory of recognition opens promising venues for exploring the role of emotion in politics, particularly when issues of injustice are at stake. While endorsing Honneth's view that 'feelings of injustice' are an important source for intelligibility of injustice, and that disadvantaged individuals need to build a 'shared interpretative framework' in struggles for recognition, this article contends that a more nuanced account of discursive justification is required to deal with dissent and moral disagreement. As a response to this problem, we suggest that Honneth's approach of subjective reaction to injury as violation of conditions to practical identity can be brought together with notions of discursive justification in the Habermasian fashion. Through an empirically based analysis – using storytelling of deaf people gathered in two virtual environments: (a) the website of the main Brazilian organization for deaf persons (FENEIS), and (b) Orkut, an online social network – this paper evinces that subjects not only articulate feelings of injustice or claims for recognition in everyday experience, but also usually engage in interpretation, judgment and justification of such claims. Results show that Honneth's theory of recognition, when articulated with a notion of discursive justification, can better equip scholars concerned with practices that aim to overcome injustice.

**Keywords:** recognition; storytelling; emotion; justification; deaf people

In the recent upsurge in research on the role of emotions in politics, ranging from cognitive science to philosophy to the social sciences, several scholars have demonstrated the importance of understanding how emotion affects the cognition and reasoning capacities that underlie political behavior (Marcus *et al.*, 2000; Thompson and Hoggett, 2012). Emotion helps create group identity and mobilization (Nussbaum, 1995, 2003; Barnes, 2012) as well as engagement in deliberation (Krause, 2008; Mackuen *et al.*, 2010; Maia, 2012a; Steiner, 2012). In this paper, we draw on Axel Honneth's theory of recognition to explore the sensitive dimension of suffering and issues of injustice. We argue that his political philosophy, by reconstructing key concepts within the Frankfurt School tradition, helps to deepen

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and refine the understanding of subjective reactions to injuries, without assuming that emotions are a kind of individual ‘property’. Despite claims to contrary, we contend that Honneth’s attempt to establish a link between a normative dimension in ‘feelings of injustice’ and collective action opens promising paths through which empirical studies of emotion could be expanded and reconceptualized.

More specifically, this article will further the understanding of how ‘feelings of injustice’ enable marginalized and disrespected subjects to articulate an ‘inter-subjective framework of interpretation’ in order to generate motivation for social resistance. Following Honneth’s lead, we attempt to evince through empirically based analysis that hurt feelings are an important source of intelligibility for injustice and that disagreement often emerges among members of groups when constructing ‘a shared semantics’. We argue that Honneth’s approach is not sufficiently developed to explain either how individuals should deal with dissent in processing moral conflict or with dissent, which emerges when deciding what counts as recognition responses in a given context. As an answer to this problem, we advocate that Honneth’s understanding of the role of emotion in struggles for recognition is not incompatible with Habermasian discursive justification; both theoretical frameworks can be jointly applied in empirical research.

Our study focuses on deaf persons, subjects who have been victims of stigmatization and marginalization, who face language barriers, and who generally depend on interpreters to express themselves in spoken debates. Since dominated individuals usually feel the need to tell their own stories to make sense of suffering and to have their experiences of injustice come alive, we chose to focus on storytelling. In supporting Honneth’s argument that social suffering should be searched for not only within the context of participation in the public sphere but also in pre-political domains, we investigate how claims for recognition are articulated and eventually justified from the perspective of a social movement and also from the point of view of the individual members of that collectivity. As the Internet has become a means for deaf persons to express themselves, we gathered stories in two virtual environments: (a) the website of main Brazilian organization for deaf persons, the National Federation for the Education and Integration of Deaf Persons or FENEIS (Federação Nacional de Educação e Integração dos Surdos, 2009) and (b) the Orkut, an online social network.

The life histories expressed in these two online environments illustrate a well-known worldwide debate among deaf people who use sign language and those opting to talk – a controversy that can be traced back to the ban on the use of sign language in 1880 that opened the path for oralization until the first half of the 20th century (Lane, 1984; Dharmoon, 2009). According to World Federation of Deaf – representative of the deaf in international agencies such as the UN, UNESCO and the ILO – Brazil is one of the 25 countries in the world that legally recognized sign language. The Brazilian law that promotes sign language was created in 2002 as a result of the struggles of various local associations, led by FENEIS. Historically, the deaf Brazilian movement has been a benchmark reference in the world; it has

advocated the use of Libras through protests and continuously brings pressure to bear on elected representatives to participate in the definition and evaluation of public policies regarding sign language (Quadros, 2012). Brazil is the first country to create a national program, supported by government, which offers degree courses in public universities. Between 2010 and 2012, nearly 1000 teachers of sign language and 500 interpreters graduated (Quadros, 2012). In spite of these achievements, the use of sign language is far from consensual among deaf people themselves.

This paper is organized into two parts. In the first, we present the theoretical debate on Honneth's thesis about the relationship between feelings of injustice and the struggles for recognition, arguing that some critiques have failed to give full justice to Honneth's program. We advocate that his model can be fruitfully operationalized for empirical analysis. Then, we present our methodological choices. In the second part, we examine – in the light of stories gathered from the FENEIS website and Orkut – the tensions underlying the construction of 'a shared semantics' and the efforts of deaf persons to justify their demands for recognition in these two virtual environments. We conclude with a summary of empirical results and possible normative implications for further studies on emotion and struggles for recognition.

### **From feelings of injustice to struggles for recognition**

Several studies based on social and cognitive sciences argue that emotion is often intertwined with cognition, and is required to arouse people's attention and to provoke engagement around any issue (Nussbaum, 1995; Marcus *et al.*, 2000; Bickford, 2011; Thompson and Hoggett, 2012). Marcus and colleagues' model of affective intelligence, based on two emotional sub-systems in the brain – 'disposition' and 'surveillance' – helps to explain how people's emotional states affect political behavior. They argue that citizens' strategies for party identification, vote choice, interest to search for more information, willingness to compromise and so forth are products not of simply prior commitment and attentiveness but also of emotions that manifest situational appraisals (in states of calmness or anxiety, enthusiasm or frustration, aversion, etc.). While this model represents a major advance in explaining how citizens process politics and how emotion structures political behavior, it does not pay much attention to normative dimensions in political judgment.

Sociologists, such as Luc Boltanski (1999: 84), emphasize that emotions cannot be taken as a mere private reaction, but rather as a socially constructed and historical variable. From such a perspective, the explanation of the bond between individual actors' interpretative achievements and socio-structural guidelines that stem from the pre-structured normative nature of society become a major theoretical problem.

Martha Nussbaum (2003), drawing on literary description in the Greek Stoics' ideas as well as cognitive psychology, develops a cognitive/evaluative account of

emotion for understanding the relationship between different types of emotion, reasoning and morality. Focusing on ‘social construction’ in emotional life, Nussbaum makes clear that emotions involve judgments about important things, through which we can appraise an external object as salient for our own well-being; and thus make practical judgments such as what problems we have or do not have and what picture of ethical change can be adopted as plausible. According to Nussbaum, understanding emotion in this way raises a number of normative questions and offers resources for connecting sentiments to the good life (2003: 15). Sharon Krause (2008), by adopting a broad Humean approach, surveys the role of emotion concerning judgment and deliberation and, like Nussbaum, defends the idea that conceptions of the good imply affective modes of consciousness. She offers a powerful analysis that incorporates affective engagement into practical reasoning.

In such a context, Axel Honneth’s attempt to articulate feelings of injustice in everyday experience and the normative ideal of self-realization seems highly innovative. Honneth does not mean to call attention to *all* emotions, but rather those related to ‘feelings of injustice’, ‘the feeling of being unjustly treated and the experience of being disrespected’ (1995: 168). He does not delve into complex details about the specific content of emotions, but rather begins an analysis of ‘moral feelings’ as ‘the emotional raw material of social conflict’ (1995: 168). Based on a pragmatist approach to feelings – derived from Dewey – Honneth defines feelings as ‘affective reactions generated upon succeeding or failing to realize our intentions’ (Honneth, 1995: 137). By articulating a theory of psychological development with a broad social theory, incorporating Habermas’ lesson of grounding critique in the norms of communication rather than in the realm of production, Honneth argues that subjects expect specific forms of recognition as conditions for their well-being and autonomy. According to Honneth, injustice is first felt as a refusal of intersubjective recognition that violently disrupts one’s relationship to oneself: physical abuse (which corresponds to the level of recognition Honneth names ‘love’); denial of basic moral respect and legal protection (‘rights’); denigration of individual or collective ways of life and refusal to acknowledge one’s social value (‘solidarity’ or ‘achievement’).

Honneth’s work shares some points with Charles Taylor’s influential ‘The politics of recognition’ (1994), such as using Hegel’s and Mead’s writings to build the concept of recognition. However, Honneth’s endeavor, unlike Taylor’s, is not to conceive the rise of new social moments as a distinctive feature of the political landscape of the time, but rather to give critical theory’s emancipatory aspiration a more practical and empirical grounding in everyday feelings of disrespect taken as a source for collective transformative praxis. Differently from Taylor, who focuses on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, Honneth surveys Jena manuscripts in order to explain social integration in both antagonist and normative ways, reflecting the influence of Habermas. Honneth draws on Mead also as a means to explain identity as socially constituted and yet open to continuous innovation.

Numerous critics have stated that references to feelings of injustice in people do not adequately explain social struggles. Some scholars argue that feelings are not reliable sources to decide issues of justice. Simon Thompson (2006) argues that feelings of injustice may become distorted and emotional reactions may be unjustified. In Thompson's words, at times persons 'may feel that they are being mistreated when in fact they are not' (2006: 168). Furthermore, they may use resentment and promote 'false comparisons' with other individuals and groups to advance inadequate and unconvincing demands. Likewise, Susan Bickford (2011) stresses that emotion may lead one to mischaracterize a situation; how a person feels seduces into misperceiving (2011: 1027).

Other scholars are reluctant to tie the content and authority of moral norms to the psychological state of individuals (Alexander and Lara, 1996; Kalyvas, 1999; Fraser, 2003). Nancy Fraser argues that Honneth, in building an 'excessively personalized sense of injury' (2003: 204), does not set down procedures to discern which demands may be justified. Fraser is particularly dissatisfied with Honneth's treatment of recognition as a matter of self-realization because, according to her, any claim that would enhance the claimant's distinctiveness and self-esteem would be justified. Her argument is that in the absence of any principled basis for distinguishing justified from unjustified claims, even racist identities could deserve recognition (Fraser, 2003: 38). In the same vein and considering groups that nurture anger toward others, Alexander and Lara (1996: 135) point out that demands for recognition 'can easily become demands for domination'.

It is true that emotion can be capricious, excessive and may lead one to mischaracterize situations or overemphasize particulars (Thompson, 2006; Bickford, 2011). The objection that hurt feelings may not display an accurate sense of injustice can be relativized if one remembers that perception of injury does not necessarily lead to judgments of injustice or to resistance. Indeed, recognition struggles are always contingent, or even a rare possibility. According to Honneth, a negative experience can only become a motivational basis for collective resistance if: (a) 'subjects are able to articulate them [hurt feelings] within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that they can show to be typical for an entire group' (1995: 163), and (b) 'such inhibition on action is overcome through involvement in collective resistance', such that individuals may 'indirectly convince themselves of their moral or social worth' (1995: 164).

At the kernel of Honneth's program is not only the expressivist dimension of hurt feelings, but also their cognitive potential to trigger self-reflection about violations of 'well-grounded' normative expectations or principles; feelings of injustice thus help disclose unmet demands that can retrospectively be made explicit. Once it is acknowledged that hurt feelings should be understood as a 'signal' that expectations of recognition have been violated, it becomes clear that they are not some proof or some kind of justification in themselves. Here we endorse Nikolas Kompridis' argument that subjective experience is 'an irreplaceable and absolutely necessary source of intelligibility' (2007: 280) of suffering, but it does not assure any

construction of valid demands. We also agree with James Tully' that 'they [experiences of shame, anger or indignation] do not decide the issue of their moral legitimacy in advance' (2004: 328).

Honneth's reasoning might well be right for paying attention to what happens in the 'underground' of social conflicts (Honneth, 2003: 120). However, argumentation developed to this point does not explain how one can distinguish valid from invalid demands; nor does it solve the problem of recognition as a quest for domination. Honneth clearly acknowledges this problem: 'of course it is obvious that we cannot endorse every political revolt as such – that we cannot consider every demand for recognition as morally legitimate or acceptable' (Honneth, 2003: 171, see also Honneth, 2007a : 77–78; 2012: 150).

To check whether 'signals' due to feelings of injury constitute an adequate sense of injustice (Honneth, 1995: 168), Honneth proposes the following criteria within the structure of recognition: 'for only demands that potentially contribute to the expansion of social relations of recognition can be considered normatively grounded, since they point in the direction of a rise in the moral level of social integration' (2003: 187). This statement has two important consequences.

First, reciprocal recognition requires a moral attitude of considering the other; subjects cannot be defined as independent beings seeking to promote their own wishes. Rather than a quest for domination, Honneth in describing the second sphere of recognition, has in view, like Habermas, the equalitarian–universalist normative principle that underlies modern rights; that is, mutual respect and equal treatment for every human being who deserves to see his or her fundamental freedom recognized. Honneth adds two other dependent modes of recognition (based on the principles of love and social esteem), which are seen to have specific duties in preserving the integrity of human subjects.

Second, recognition of social integration depends on the criteria of reciprocity and generality; legitimate demands for recognition in any sphere should result in the inclusion of more people into the 'circle of full members of society' (Honneth, 2003: 185). In this sense, the demands for recognition of racist or xenophobic groups, for instance, are asymmetrical and morally inadequate because they imply attitudes such as intolerance, violence, and persecution that cause harm to 'outsiders'; and therefore such demands cannot be justified from the perspective of other parties affected by them.

Even though Honneth does not deal systematically with justification, he has made specific propositions concerning this crucial issue (Forst, 2002, 2007; Deranty, 2009: 313). Honneth explicitly admits that each recognition principle provokes a 'constant struggle over its appropriate application and interpretation' (2003: 186). He states that what counts as a legitimate or fair demand emerges from the possibility 'of understanding the consequences of implementing it as a gain in individuality or inclusion' (Honneth, 2003: 187). He further recommends that – if there is moral conflict between demands based on different principles of recognition, the second principle – the claim of all subjects to equally respect their

individual autonomy – becomes an absolute priority (Honneth, 2007b: 137). Here, Honneth preserves a fundamental Kantian intuition that human beings are equal moral persons able to decide freely and to participate in public debates about collective norms and actions. However, Honneth does not make clear *how* individuals and groups negotiate competing demands for recognition and dispute their conflicting interpretations and/or values within groups or in society at large.

The attempts of a few scholars to translate aspects of mutual recognition into criteria for discursive justification are well suited to helping articulate normative analysis and empirical work further. James Tully (2000: 445) presents three criteria based on a procedural discursive approach: (a) citizens in whose name a demand (or a proposed identity) is made must support it in the first-person perspective; (b) the demand must respond to and take into account counter-proposals by other members of society; (c) the demand must be made good to others. Rainer Forst, concerned about adopting a procedural approach to establish the legitimacy of demands for recognition, states: ‘there must be no social and political relations which cannot be reciprocally and generally justified to all those who are part of a political-social context’ (2007: 295).

From this perspective, we argue that Habermas’ discourse ethics is a useful theoretical framework to deal with moral disagreement and conflicting demands for recognition: it provides extensive and theoretically grounded criteria to observe and interpret justification processes. There are a few caveats in our attempt to bring together Habermas and Honneth’s formulations on disagreement and moral conflict. To begin with, Habermas assumes a principle of mutual recognition when partners in dialogue reciprocally concede communicative freedom to exchange reasons and justifications. In Habermas’ view, recognition implies acknowledgment of individual freedom but not self-realization or self-fulfillment. Second, although Habermas is usually criticized as being rationalist, he has long admitted that emotions play an important role in practical reason (Rehg, 1994; Neblo, 2003): He further argues that violation of ‘normative expectation’<sup>1</sup> – supposedly valid not only for a subject but for the entire group – motivates argumentative engagement.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Habermas admits that certain emotions (for instance, indignation) are important for both moral perception (the ability of an agent to perceive elements in a given situation as morally relevant) and for justification of norms and actions.

<sup>1</sup> In this perspective, scholars such as Regh (1994) and Neblo (2003) have taken Habermas’ discourse ethics in new directions to show the various roles that feelings and emotions have in moral perception and argumentation.

<sup>2</sup> Habermas (1995: 48) argues that the violation of norms (in particular norms of justice) evokes emotional reactions that arise from a cognitive structure. In particular, he attempts to show that there is a moral dimension in the emotional responses of indignation and resentment ‘directed to a *specific* other person who has violated our integrity’. In Habermas’ words, ‘what makes this indignation moral is not the fact that the interaction between the two concrete individuals has been disturbed but rather the violation of an underlying *normative expectation* that is valid not only for the ego and alter but also for all members of a social group’ (1995: 48).



In our empirical study, we start with Honneth's premise that subjects' everyday affective reactions to disrespect can be taken as symptoms of violation of some normative expectation. We assume that an ethical integration of persons that suffer injustice is needed to build 'a shared semantics'; and we evince that this is a dynamic process of claim-making and claim-receiving rather than a static set of interpretations. Our analysis shows that the display of emotions is differently shaped in distinct online environments; and our findings suggest that while representative entities present a more clear-cut interpretative framework of misrecognition and possible solutions, group members refer to a 'shared value-horizon' that is often based on dissent; and they raise broader contestations about the true interests of 'deaf individuals'.

### **Storytelling and disability**

We chose to focus on storytelling because life stories told in the first-person reveal the sensitive dimension of pain or suffering. Telling stories allows people to share their stories and to share affinities with others experiencing common constraints (Dryzek, 2000; Young, 2000; Polletta, 2008). In Iris Young's words, 'those who experience the wrong and perhaps some others who sense it, may have no language for expressing the suffering as injustice, but nevertheless they can tell stories that relate a sense of wrong' (2000: 72). Furthermore, telling stories to a wider audience is a way to sensitize people who have different experiences, so that they may understand the harm and oppression that others have gone through (Polletta and Lee, 2006; Ryfe, 2006; Black, 2008).

Narratives, thus, unfold specificities that need to be recognized. There is a vast literature showing that storytelling – particularly when linked to universal principles or general issues – helps to politicize issues and to craft justifications for specific actions (Dryzek, 2000: 69; Ryfe, 2006; Black, 2008; Steiner, 2012). At times, telling stories may become a mechanism to describe, demonstrate, or explain something to others, who may then accept the relevance of certain demands or identify specific orientations as valid. In such circumstances, personal testimonies do not provide clear answers but rather show the moral complexity of some problems. Still, storytelling does not necessarily go unchallenged; and it may also be used in manipulative ways for purely strategic purposes (Dryzek, 2000: 71; Steiner, 2012: 85).

Narrative is particularly useful for *disability studies*. Several researchers stress the importance of storytelling because they suggest that impairment is not a biological, but rather a social phenomenon that is negotiated and socially constructed (Goodley and Tragaskis, 2006). Furthermore, life stories are important because bodily experience is deeply embedded in narrative. 'Narratives are projected from and inscribed into the body. The body is a storyteller, and it is partly through the tales it tells that we may interpret, give meaning to and understand bodies' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008: 19). Storytelling can provide different understanding about disability

that refuses the tragedy story, which challenges oppression and allows distinct body-self relationships. More specifically, in *deaf studies* – a current of thought that focuses not on disability but on deaf cultural and linguistic communities – storytelling is considered a deaf cultural expression that can support social mobilization and linguistic resistance (Burch and Kafer, 2010).

## Methodology

To develop our study, we chose to analyze storytelling in two different online sites: (i) one that serves the purpose of a social movement for self-presentation, education and collective claim formulation – the website of the National Federation for the Education and Integration of Deaf Persons (FENEIS); and (ii) one that is meant for internal conversations among one's own group – Orkut. The FENEIS website, being managed by a national front organization that gathers around 120 entities throughout the country, allows us to analyze claims about shared sources of injustice, collective identities and remedies publicly demanded. In contrast, Orkut, being a chat forum where deaf people engage in a relatively spontaneous way of talking, exchanging experiences and articulating their preferences, allows us to tap into sources of group internal differentiation.

The FENEIS website seeks to disseminate the Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) and presents information regarding legislation, work, education and news. Storytelling is inserted into several sections. We decided to analyze the six first-person life stories among the 25 found on the FENEIS website. Such personal stories were written by deaf people in long and detailed texts.

We chose a very popular forum that had been created in an Orkut community named 'Friends among the deaf and the non-deaf' (*Amigos entre surdos e ouvintes*) that at the time had 11,393 members. The forum was named 'DEAF Shame (Vergonha SURDO, 2005)' and had 404 postings.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of our analysis, we highlighted conversations in which storytelling played a central role. We examined the life stories and posts that preceded and that ensued from these conversations, according to the procedures set down by Polletta and Lee (2006) and Black (2008) in their studies of online discussion lists. After eliminating commercial content, divulgation of events, and other posting unrelated to the initial proposition, we ended up with 67 posts.

To duly assess virtual communicative practices, we followed scholars who defend that it is crucial to understand not only the content of online messages but also the context in which people use the web and the broader social practices in which these messages are embedded (Schrock *et al.*, 2004; Papacharissi, 2011; Della Porta, 2012). Thus, we engaged in an in-depth qualitative reading of the material and adopted more general and long-term analyses of fundamental causes and conditions to draw their consequences, thereby providing the basis for adequate

<sup>3</sup> The forum was started on 4 April 2005 and the last post that we studied was dated 27 July 2007.

critical research. On both the FENEIS website and the Orkut forum we analyzed: (a) articulations between expressive language of storytelling and demands for recognition, and (b) the interlocutors' efforts to eventually justify their claims. We studied how deaf persons stated their commitments and explained what was or was not to be done about the issues in debate.

### **Feelings of injustice and the construction of a shared semantics**

If emotion alone does not suffice to explain moral judgment and struggles that aim at overcoming existing social injustice,<sup>4</sup> we must turn our attention to such emotional/cognitive and normative resources as a collective meaning-making process. In this section, we deal with the problem posed by Honneth's thesis that such a 'framework of interpretation' needs to be 'typical for an entire group'. Our analysis attempts to explore the question of how difference is produced within groups and why it matters for recognition struggles.

We understand that groups are made up of individuals with different and complex experiences. Individuals in post-traditional society can pursue several roles and styles of living without necessarily adopting shared values in the community to which they belong, but identity issues are linked to ethical issues that arise from orientations in a communal world. They imply choices that persons make *for him or herself* but *together with* (Forst, 2002: 283). Therefore, conflicts always arise when representatives of groups attempt to frame values, beliefs, and preferences in a collective project; it is quite unlikely that any discourse will contemplate the full breadth of the diversity of the aspirations and interests involved (Maia, 2012b). Members of groups frequently engage in conflict among themselves as long as they have different views on how they should live their own lives, including ways to overcome obstacles that restrict them in unjustifiable ways. The issue at hand that we seek to explore in this section – which is at the core of Honneth's theory – is not that identities are constructed within a system of differences, but rather that differences are generally laid out on a hierarchical scale in which some are considered inferior and of lower value than others.

#### *Storytelling and demands for recognition on the FENEIS website*

The narrators of the storytelling in the FENEIS website not only 'bring to the public' the feelings of deaf persons, but they also articulate these feelings in a way as to construct a positive self-image in different spheres of human interaction. Narratives promote feelings associated with resistance and shape emotions that motivate people toward being successful, to feel strong and in control of their lives

<sup>4</sup> To be sure, at that normative level, Honneth is not concerned with sociological specifications of a wide range of factors described in the literature on social movements – opportunities, resources, incentives, strategic choices, the building of allies – that need to be taken into account when appraising the practical chances of a struggle being successful or unsuccessful.

to achieve self-realization (Whittier, 2001: 241; Schrock *et al.*, 2004: 65). Following Honneth's theoretical approach, our analysis shows that they build an 'intersubjective framework of interpretation', which enables them to persuade themselves of their own moral and social value (Honneth, 1995: 258).

This is theoretically and politically important because deaf people have been subjected to several sorts of humiliation and disrespect, and multiple negative self-images were impinged upon them in the past. The history of deaf people shows that they were seen as lacking in relation to the ideal image of God in the early modern era; as 'abnormal' or 'deviant' as opposed to a 'normal' human being within the evolutionary and scientific horizon in the 19th century; and as objects of compassion and medical cure designed to 'rehabilitate' their human potential or 'recover' their abilities as far as possible within the medical approach in the first half of the 20th century (Lane, 1984; Strobel, 2006; Arneil, 2009).

In the post-war period, policies shaped by the so-called 'integrative' model, aimed to bring deaf and disabled people who were confined by their family's shame to their houses or were segregated in asylums or hospitals as a form of 'banishment of the undesired' into society (Sacks, 1989; Strobel, 2006). In the 1980s and 1990s, a new inclusive approach – to a large extent the outcome of a series of international conventions favoring people with disabilities, and successful rights campaigns and struggles led chiefly by transnational social movements and scholars with disabilities – guided non-discriminatory norms and policies in several countries to allow equal participation of people with disabilities in systems such as education, work, social security, family life, culture, and leisure (Thomas, 2004; Calder, 2011).

Although non-discriminatory laws are prominent in Brazil and many institutions have re-organized to follow inclusion principles in a great variety of ways, many obstacles remain. Deaf persons are still often perceived as incapable, as having compromised cognition, and as being unable to advance in professions that require much study (Lane, 1984; Strobel, 2006; Garcêz and Maia, 2009). Against this current social hierarchy of values, the storytelling on the website evinces that deaf persons show a positive self-image.

The six first-person stories that we took from the FENEIS website show very different life histories. There is a deaf priest, a teacher, a systems analyst, a gastronomy student, a language and literature teacher, and a deaf and blind person that did not state a profession but who does voluntary work for deaf and blind people. These are varied paths and life histories, but there are many similarities. All narrators express motivational resistance against shame, alienation, worthlessness and powerless; they construct a politicized interpretation of their capacity for agency; and show feelings of pride in and solidarity with the larger community:

**Father Vicente** (priest): In 1950, a Holy Year, bishop Dom Justino needed to go to Rome and decided to take me so that the Pope could get to know me and think of the possibility of ordaining me a priest. [...] When I walked into the

Pope's office, I knelt and asked: 'may I be ordained a priest?' The Holy Father stood and said: 'wait and we shall see'. He then talked to Dom Justino: 'He already speaks well, but we need to study this special case and we will answer later' [Several days later the Pope allowed Father Vicente to be ordained a priest]. I was very happy. And it was on Saint Anthony's September when it all started, and here am I with much joy.

**Silvia** (language and literature teacher): During my life as a student I found it hard to read. [...] At school, most of the time, colleagues and teachers treated me as if I were a lesser being. I felt completely left out. I finished a course in Pedagogy – [...] My plans and projects now are significantly broader. I am preparing myself for entering a Master's degree course in Education. I remind everyone that I wish to be treated as a deaf person, which I am. That's it. I am deaf. And proud of it!

**Juliana** (gastronome): When I was three years old I went to school where I shared the classroom with other deaf children; I learnt to read, write, lip reading, and sign language. [...] I also took ballet lessons since I was five years old; when I reached 11 years I started horse riding, diving, and tap dancing, and I started to go to evening balls at social clubs and meeting places. Currently, I am in the fourth term of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, and I am doing very well; I am the first deaf student chef in Brazil. As expected, I cook like nobody else does and I travel frequently to participate in Gastronomy Conferences and Symposia. Prejudice and bias made it very difficult to get the school to hire a sign language interpreter, but with effort I overcame this problem.

All narrators express that they enjoyed success after facing hurdles and overcoming exclusion and social stigma ('to be treated as a lesser being', 'be left completely out', 'to have resources and services denied because of prejudice'). They perceive themselves as persons with self-confidence that can pursue and be able in many careers, and each of them can contribute in their own way to fulfill social goals. In a context of denied recognition, the narratives challenge several distorted socio-cultural representations. First, they break down the view that deafness is a personal tragedy and show that deaf people can find joy, fulfillment, and happiness through an active and dignified life. Second, they deconstruct the view of deafness as a deficit that limits personal relationships in physical, social and political environments, since narrators show that they can 'dance ballet', 'ride a horse', 'dive', 'go to balls and social clubs' as well as earn high degrees and pursue their chosen carriers. Third, by reconstructing deafness as one dimension of human diversity, their narratives problematize stigma and discrimination entrenched in existing institutions and in the behavior of hearing people (Cole, 2007; Arneil, 2009; Calder, 2011). João, the systems analyst, says: 'Often those who are able to hear do not understand the culture of deaf persons and do not offer respect'. The narrators on the FENEIS website demand to be seen as competent and cognitively autonomous subjects, who can make decisions on their own and responsibly win control over their lives.

Let us consider this latter point – the production of difference of the deaf as a means to contest hegemonic hearing norms. Several narrators in the FENEIS website employ the adjective 'normal' to characterize self-confidence in their own

abilities, a sense of belonging to a collectivity, and freedom to live in valid and dignified ways:

**João** (systems analyst): I am able and I live a common life like the rest of humankind. I communicate, by means of Libras and lip reading, with my parents, siblings, friends, and work colleagues, etc., but I have to face hurdles and difficulties in several ways.

**Juliana** (gastronome): My adolescence was very ordinary, I was given attention and orientation, especially by my mother, who also explained sexuality to me and gave me the freedom to ask, so that I could avoid being caught unaware.

Sonia's story is the most surprising among these cases; she is blind and deaf – she lost her hearing at 6 and her eyesight at 19 years of age. Her report underlines the common nature of her daily life:

My days are ordinary... I do the household chores such as: cooking, washing up, ironing clothes. I am able to do handicraft well, including crochet. And I like to swim. However, I depend on someone to pass me information given on television or on the streets – everywhere, in fact. But I don't think of this situation as a barrier in my life.

In showing their pride at being deaf, using sign language and enjoying 'a common life like the rest of humankind', the narrators do not regard deafness as a 'problem'. Very much in tune with the 'social relational model of disability' and the 'social model of disability',<sup>5</sup> they stress that obstacles are born out of relational and social context, since both institutional arrangements and those who hear treat deaf persons in limiting, depreciating, and disabling ways. In turn, to use Honneth's term, this is profoundly damaging to their practical self-relation.

On the social movement website, which is meant to influence external institutions and the broader Brazilian public, it seems no coincidence that the emotions displayed by storytellers convey not shame but pride, not fear but strength, not helplessness or submission but transformative agency. By portraying themselves as subjects with the capacity for self-determination, narrators can evoke feelings of potency and efficacy in others. This perception seems particularly conducive to the mobilization of deaf people and to sympathy-winning in society. Furthermore, the stories on the FENEIS website support the argumentation for Libras, since all the narrators attained successful inclusion in society and a positive self-understanding through the use of sign language.

<sup>5</sup> The rise of the 'social relational understanding of disability' in the mid 1970s and the 'social model' in the 1990s – promoted by organizations of disabled people and activist scholars of disability studies – with the 'explicit commitment to assist disabled people in their fight for full equality and social inclusion' (Thomas, 2004: 570; see also Goodley and Tragaskis, 2006; Calder, 2011). Challenging the medical view, some scholars seek to understand disability from a relational perspective to explain social exclusions experienced by disabled people (Thomas, 2004), while others hold, in a more radical fashion, that disability is socially caused and has nothing to do with the body (Cole, 2007).

*Storytelling and demands for recognition in Orkut*

Feelings of injustice assume a different shape in the struggle for recognition in the Orkut forum. Some deaf participants feel that they are not being treated as they believe they deserve, so long as their value, needs or rights are denied by others within the deaf collectivity. Tensions around building a ‘shared interpretative framework’ are particularly acute in this environment, because deaf persons, in order to reaffirm their autonomy and agency to individuate themselves in a discrimination-free environment, need to be recognized by others as moral persons with an inherent value; as citizens with equal and inalienable rights; and as people who have abilities or achievements ‘valuable for society’ (Honneth, 1995: 130; 2003: 140).

Conflict emerges in the Orkut forum when one member suggests that deaf persons do not use sign language because of shame: ‘why is it that the deaf are ashamed to learn Libras? Do oralized deaf persons know little about Libras? This cannot happen’. According to Honneth, shame – among other feelings such as guilt, vexation, or humiliation – is ‘the most open of our feelings’ in the sense that it shows a ‘kind of lowering of one’s own feeling of self-worth’ (Honneth, 1995: 137). In Suzanne Retzinger’s words, ‘in shame the self feels helpless, not in control; the reaction in a shame experience is to hide’ (1991: 41).

Two stories in the forum illustrate emotional reactions arising from the attack on individuals’ expectations and their conditions for autonomous living. Juan understands deafness as a “disability”, speech is a rehabilitating device for inclusion in society; he is proud of being able to speak without gestures. Robson regards deafness as a way of living centered on sign language; Libras has enabled him to fully engage in communication with others, whereas oral speech made him feel humiliated (‘behind’ hearing people) and marginalized (‘the hearing did not understand him’ and had no ‘patience to listen’):

**Juan:** I find it very strange when someone states with full certainty that those who do not understand Libras do not accept themselves as deaf. I do not understand Libras, but I am aware of my deafness and my difficulties [...]. I don’t need to live in ghettos; I favor inclusion. Think of the trauma that a deaf person would have by not being able to speak? Going to the market and not knowing how to say what you want, having to depend on interpreters next to you, to depend on your father or mother to work out your things... [...] Fortunately I have reached a stage in which deafness is a mere detail, rather than a feature of mine.

**Robson:** I have been deaf since birth. I tried to learn to speak from 1 year and 6 months until 17 years of age, but I gave up, I got tired of trying. I wasted my time... It is impossible because at times I do not understand and cannot lip read. When I used to speak with my hearing friends they did not understand me. I tried to speak slowly, to repeat myself, until they could understand, but sometimes they had no patience. In a school for hearing kids I was way behind and hardly ever could learn. [...] I went crazy when I learnt Libras. My life changed and now I have fun with my deaf and hearing friends who understand Libras.

While both persons reveal that they experienced the pain of exclusion, devaluation, and ostracism in Brazilian society, they express conflicting perceptions about their identity, experiences and means – oralism and sign language – to overcome suffering. A critical analysis of these two modes of structuring differences and identification – deafness as disability or anomaly and deafness as culture (Dhamoon, 2009; Burch and Kafer, 2010) – helps explain how feelings of injustice operate as *clues* of moral violations. When noticing a disruption in their own expectations of ‘who they are’ or sensing that an affront to dignity or social value has taken place, both participants in Orkut seek to explain their life choices in light of values that are important to them. It is a perception of one’s own value, rights or achievements that participants want to confirm by gaining recognition from the other.

In this debate, Juan, who regards deafness as ‘abnormality’ and ‘physical impairment’ (‘it is not part of my essence’) says that learning oral language is the best way to work toward normalcy. He asserts that ‘this talk of “deaf pride” is silly’: ‘Should I tell someone who needs a wheelchair not to use it or a short-sighted person not to use glasses in the name of pride about their handicaps? I am not the type of person that uses deafness as an excuse for everything, or being a victim because a hearing person mistreats me’.

In order to refute the allegation that deaf persons who use sign language are accommodated, dependent, and confined to ghettos, Diana fleshes out her identity, which is to be seen as a resistance against hearing norms: ‘Silly???? Dear colleague, I am deaf and I have never used any type of blackmail because of my condition’. She reiterates that deafness should be seen as a dimension of human diversity, rather than an abnormality or a deficit: ‘I just think that you should distinguish what it is like to live without hiding behind something that society imposes as a deficiency and what I call a different way to live’.

In the sequence, Elaine, also challenging Juan’s view, uses community-driven discourse to demand collective resistance against enduring humiliation: ‘We should not forget that deaf persons have historically been viewed as inferior to hearing individuals, as handicapped persons that needed to adapt, to walk toward “normalcy”. For this they needed to oralize’. This participant seeks to frame individualized negative social experience (‘of being oppressed to “conform” to the standard of the hearing people’) as ‘typical of the entire group’, to use Honneth’s term. She calls for collective resistance: ‘This deeply affected the community of deaf persons, a linguistic minority that has its own non-oral language! Deaf persons who are ashamed to use Libras have been unable to free themselves from a socially imposed view of deafness’.

While storytelling on the social movement website reinforces feelings of pride, harmony and strength, and storytellers manage their own feelings, in the chat forum participants express different interpretations of their identities, relations to society and ways to overcome obstacles and storytellers cannot find validations of their own experiences. Emotional components within the FENEIS website context are modulated according to the norms of the movement, which is aimed at a



broader hearing public that had been the reason for all the suffering. In contrast, participants in the Orkut forum face misrecognition not only from outsiders but also from insiders. In this, ‘the battleground for signifying difference’ to use Rita Dhamoon’s (2009: 104) words, what recognition means in a given context is far from clear. What needs to be highlighted here is that when the subjects make demands for recognition, they raise many controversial issues that require constant explanation and justification.

### **Justification of claim**

Despite our emphasis on emotion underpinning the construction of a ‘shared interpretative framework’ by disadvantaged collectivities, we understand that justification mechanisms are important as well. We contend that feelings of injustice not only help persons to take notice of their unmet expectations (Honneth, 1995: 137), but also energize struggle over competing interpretations and the validity of different orders of justification. Although Honneth is never sufficiently clear about what should be done about moral disagreement, it is important to acknowledge at this point that emotions also provide the motivational basis for discursive exchange.

Since participants usually use their personal experiences as a basis upon which to reason, affective engagement involves testing presumptions about things important things for wellbeing. In this sense, justification is needed for one to engage with others’ claims and with other persons who have their own interpretations and life story. As we attempt to demonstrate in this section, what counts as ‘a legitimate demand’ – or in Honneth’s terms, ‘the possibility of understanding the consequences of implementing it as a gain in individuality or inclusion’ (1995: 187) – often becomes highly controversial. As long as people need to respond in some way to controversial demands, the display of certain emotions contributes to argumentation while others hinder communication altogether. While disrespect frequently reduces the possibilities of an intersubjective negotiation of meanings, moments of discursive engagement help to clarify important differences among people and to search for mutually acceptable solutions.

#### *Claim justification on the FENEIS website*

Storytelling on the FENEIS website cannot be contested because this platform is not interactive. Still, the website organizers always assume that there will be indirect interlocution with potential users. For complex issues, ordinary people and indeed political representatives and policy-makers may not have clear answers. Given such limits, narratives may provide relevant information to help others analyze a given situation and appreciate the demands at stake (Polletta and Lee, 2006; Black, 2008: 109; Steiner, 2012: 86).

Miriam’s personal story on the FENEIS website – she teaches sign language in a public university – helps her to connect the specificities of her personal experiences with more general principles that are morally recognizable (Dryzek, 2000: 68;

Forst, 2002: 283). She exposes institutional and social obstacles to her autonomy to individuate herself and fully participate in society. She claims that a lack of Libras interpreters hinders her education ('it makes following the classes very difficult as well as any participation in forums, meetings, conferences, and current debates in universities'). This lack of interpreters also affects her insertion at work ('I have often paid myself for FENEIS interpreters to help me in my opening classes for the Libras class in undergraduate courses'). What we want to highlight here is that 'naming something as injustice', as Schrock *et al.* have pointed out, 'simultaneously instructs others that anger is appropriate and social change is necessary' (2004: 64). Instead of providing clear answers or clear-cut alternatives to solve problems, testimonies about personal stories in this case emphasize the moral complexity of the situation (Steiner, 2012: 72).

While we acknowledge that stories' openness to interpretation may elicit ambiguous normative conclusions (Polletta and Lee, 2006: 718), it seems correct to state that Miriam's story provides elements that fulfill the *generality* requirement for legitimate recognition (Forst, 2007: 295). She defends her demands on the grounds of the equal status of citizens (not so much recognition of identity, as is too often assumed). She claims that sign language is valuable not because it is different but because it is an integral part of deaf culture and is conducive to human development. She also attempts to clarify and give general reasons for Libras to be fully incorporated into social systems:

It was only in 2002, after much effort and struggle, that sign language was recognized as the official language of the deaf – in Law of Libras no. 10,436. In spite of this victory, there are still many goals to be met in public schools and universities so that there may be deaf professors with Master's degrees and PhDs; and Libras interpreters, bilingual teachers in classrooms of all subjects, so that deaf persons may feel comfortable to study. The mother tongue of deaf persons is Libras.

Elsewhere, Honneth claims that the political dimension of recognition considers subjects as citizens who have to respect one another as free and equal persons and co-legislators within a political community. This dimension creates expectations that citizens have the right to debate and propose amendments to existing rules, especially those about rights, policies, duties, or powers that in some way affect them. In some cases, claimants also seek to introduce a new principle, a value, or a good that can also be defended and mutually recognized (Tully, 2000: 474–475).

Within the movement website context, it is worth noting that life stories usually 'do not tend to antagonize other participants' (Steiner, 2012: 85). Miriam's testimony helps her to present unfamiliar perspectives or unpopular demands in order to request *mutual* recognition (Polletta and Lee, 2006: 703; Ryfe, 2006: 75). Consonant with the principle of rights there is the assumption of moral accountability of all members of the political community. Miriam thus apparently

understands that it is justified to direct a set of demands to formal political representatives. She ends her story challenging the neglect of political representatives and asking for immediate practical measures to ensure conditions for deaf persons achieving self-realization: ‘How long will Brazilian deaf persons have to wait until gaining the right of having Libras as their natural language and interpreter services for Libras? Is what we ask absurd? We want answers and action’. Since FENEIS has a tradition of defending the use of Libras and the culture of deaf people (Perlin, 1998), narratives on the website invite deaf persons to stand up for their rights as well as hearing persons to understand spatial–visual communication as a valuable language with a similar status to and deserving of respect as other languages. Leaders of this movement claim that sign language constitutes a concrete good since it enables expressivity and communication and thus fosters self-realization for deaf persons; it is a legally supported right and should therefore be taken into account in public policy decision making.

### *Claim justification on Orkut*

In contrast to the FENEIS website, which is not interactive, participants in the Orkut forum may exchange opinions, endorse, or contest recognition demands and problematize the use of life stories to demonstrate the validity of certain claims, all of which contribute directly or indirectly to justification. When facing the issue of ‘what to do’ about decisions that affect them all, the requirement that deaf persons, as situated subjects, should justify their position becomes more evident:

**Rubens:** What is the future of a deaf person that has Libras as L1 and Portuguese as L2 in a society that is predominantly hearing? You should know that every deaf person that I know who has Libras as L1 runs into very serious problems with their vocabulary and writing (as we can see by reading the debates in this community). What about the essays in university entrance tests, what then? And what about the Portuguese tests in public competitions? The fact is: either you try to adapt to society by speaking its language or you become marginalized.

**Michele:** Rubens, deaf people do not learn oral language the same way that hearing people do; it takes much longer, which could delay language development, what you call abstraction ability... which could be developed if he has acquired sign language.

**Fernando:** I... argue that deaf persons should have the opportunity to learn Libras at school and to study the subjects in Libras. If a deaf person, because of technical difficulties, learns NO language by the age of four, for instance, they will find it very difficult to learn any language for the rest of their lives.

Dialogic exchanges in Orkut reveal differences among deaf individuals and the formation of shared opinions within sub-groups. Those holding strong positions tend to engage in anger and partisan processing (Mackuen *et al.*, 2010: 443). The question that interests us here is the link between subjective emotional reaction to injury and attempts to construct justifications, when expectations of recognition

are not confirmed or one's claim fails to be accepted by others (Rehg, 1994; Habermas, 1995, 1996; Neblo, 2003). Rubens, while perceiving deafness as pathological, contests the imposition of an alleged group identity: 'My identity is Rubens de Oliveira and I am Brazilian, this is more than my deafness'. Regarding himself as a citizen, as the bearer of the right to language self-determination, he appeals to the universal norm of non-domination: 'why should I be forced to learn Libras?'

On the other hand, Diana and Elaine contest the notion of identities as individual choices and state that such identities result from historical processes 'that have imposed a set of beliefs about the value and behavior of deaf persons – the deaf as "inferior" and deafness as a handicap, for instance'. By seeing deafness as the culture of a linguistic minority, they claim that their specific way of life is a dimension of human diversity (Arneil, 2009) and, therefore, the use of Libras is not to be universally shared. However, they demand, like narrators on the FENEIS website, recognition not only for the right to speak as they please, but also for the value of sign language as a concrete good.

When Orkut participants' angry responses result in aggression, offense, or mistrust (Alexander and Lara, 1996; Thompson, 2006; Mackuen *et al.*, 2010: 454), dialogic and discursive engagement is often blocked:

**Diozival:** For me this topic is over. After reading 'in their little world', in their 'ignorance', I refuse to answer anything.

**Rubens:** Diozival, if it is for lack of goodbyes, adiós amigo.

Similarly, disrespect may reduce the potential for criticism and the possibilities of questioning and disputing meanings in order to understand the alleged value of beliefs and preferences which one disagrees with:

**Ana:** let us not waste time with this Robson, because it is clear that he does not know how to abstract a text well, as he alters the information. And you know that people with writing problems will never be able to debate with sufficient and well-grounded arguments simply because they understand something different from what we write.

Nevertheless, some participants show respect to others' claims and empathy helps subjects to better understand the perspectives of others, or to place themselves in the other's place (Rehg, 1994: 14; Krause, 2008: 162–165; Barnes, 2012: 36). Even if opinions remain polarized and forum members continue to disagree, many of them are aware that there are various ways of seeing things; deaf persons have different needs and may choose to live differently:

**Fernando:** not everyone finds it easy to become oralized. Insisting on oralization without providing any choice for communication implies delaying or hampering the child's learning both at school and emotionally as a person.

**Anonymous 1:** I am not against using Libras, but we also need to speak. I am a speaker. When I was a child, I was ashamed of who I was; today I accept myself much more and am happy with life.

Throughout the ongoing debate, Orkut participants provide justification for many demands that respect the rules of reciprocity and generality and evince that recognition should be provided in many different ways. This has far-reaching consequences for understanding claim justification from a recognition-theoretical approach.

Here we clarify four advantages of discursive engagement in recognition struggles. First, while contestation and disagreement with externally imposed roles and attributes (by society or by community projects) are at the heart of recognition struggles, justification helps increase self-awareness of one's own claims. Second, conflict between different claims within a group reveals the abilities of subjects to articulate their own identity and engage in ways they have chosen to reach self-realization. Justification, in this case, contributes to unravel dominant frames, clarify true differences within groups and why they matter. Third, the give and take of reasons concerning controversial needs, rights and achievements within groups and among all affected people in society contributes to critically examine what counts as 'a gain' in individuality or in inclusion in the circle of individuals that recognize each other. Since the legitimacy of claims for recognition should not be conferred *a priori*, justification helps to process the goods envisioned and the judgments entailed in them. Fourth and finally, justification has an educative power to accommodate diversity of values and multiple concepts of good. Moral judgment – even that resulting from wide deliberative exchange – is often mixed in nature (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996: 74).

The struggle for legitimate recognition carries with it the promise of a greater opening for the fulfillment of individuality (the *I*) of deaf persons as well as a broader inclusion of this collectivity (the *us*) in society. Policy-makers and whoever makes collective decisions are thus pressed to acknowledge the diversity of dignified ways of life and the variety of legitimate demands; and they should shape institutional arrangements so as to offer a greater range of choices, opportunities, and resources in order to enable deaf people to pursue self-realization in multiple ways.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we raised the general claim that Honneth's theory opens promising venues for research on the role of emotion in politics, particularly when issues of injustice are at stake. We analyzed deaf people's expression of feelings of injustice and the construction of 'a shared semantics' as an ongoing process of claim-making and claim-receiving, which is often intermeshed with justification. Following Honneth's theoretical concerns, we investigated meaning construction in life stories at two levels – not only from the perspective of those who claim to represent and act on behalf of the group, but also from the point of view of those who perceive themselves as part of that collectivity. Our study points to three main conclusions.

First, focusing on Honneth's account of emotion as a deeply social and intersubjective experience, our study evidences the display of hurt feelings as source of

intelligibility of suffering in different contexts. Our analysis of life stories on the FENEIS website illustrates more agented and empowering emotions: narratives project successful Libras stories and they demonstrate relatively coherent origins of shared injuries and solutions needed for the entire group to gain social recognition. In contrast, when reacting against disrespect – seen as attacks on the conditions of their practical identity – participants in the Orkut forum differ on (i) what causes suffering; (ii) the content of positive recognition; (iii) how to overcome suffering or what solutions are best. Thus, our study contributes to showing that the construction of a ‘collective interpretative framework’ by disadvantaged groups is fraught with tensions, and there is often confrontation between conflicting demands for recognition among their members.

Second, while endorsing Honneth’s agonistic approach, we contend that it does not offer an adequate explanation of what should be done about moral disagreement. Our study showed that deaf people, within a horizon of concerns that they share in some measure within a given social and political context, appealed to conflicting needs and rights – encompassing both demands for recognizing that something is valuable for everyone and that something is valuable for just some people or groups.

To deal with this problem, we argued that Honneth’s approach can be complemented with theories of discursive justification in the fashion of Habermas. Whereas Habermas appeals to abstract standards for rational justification, as participants want their validity claims to have an impact in discursive responses to, and negotiation of conflict, Honneth instructs us to look at feelings of injustice, subjective reactions to damage to practical identity and conditions for self-realization. Therefore, a theoretical-recognition approach seems to clarify why participants attempt to check the general acceptability of their claims. In this sense, our study suggests that Honneth’s theory of recognition, when properly articulated with a notion of discursive justification, can equip scholars and social observers concerned with practices that aim to overcome injustice.

Third, our study contributes to show that problems submerged in the context of daily life as well as group tensions may not be fully visible on sites that enjoy notoriety and broad visibility – as in the case at stake, on sites of representative entities. Thus, spaces such as social media sites with far less visibility, where ordinary individuals engage in relatively spontaneous conversation, can be relevant for exposing the full diversity of identity claims, interests and disputes at play, including contestation of representative claims publicly advanced by leaders, advocacy agents, and moral entrepreneurs. These sites can thus contribute to broadening and deepening critical analyses of struggles for recognition and social conditions for justice.

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