Recognition and Domination: A Hegelian Approach to Evolving Gender and Technology Paradigms

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Abstract

This paper aims to develop a strong account of recognition. It begins with a Hegel-inspired account of recognition as a fundamental desire that drives humanity. This account establishes recognition as fundamental to the initial subject formation of independent self-consciousnesses as agents. I offer the lord-bondsman dualism to provide a critique of domination as oppositional to securing the means for recognition. This entails that, as history progresses the world ought to move towards universally adopting mutual recognition relationships without domination. I adopt this goal as an ideal form of recognition. In Chapter 2, I apply this recognitional framework to gender. Through analyzing four theories of gender, I find the recognition of identity has a significant role in shaping the self-consciousness’ self-determination. Recognitional dialogue can enable one to learn new parts of the self, but often forms of recognition dominate and constrain what identity can be. Thus, I explore three prominent methods of harmful recognition in Chapter 3: domination, intelligibility, and misrecognition. I view these harmful recognition methods as undermining mutual recognition relationships through examples such as recognizing deprecating self-images of minority groups and overwriting self-determinations through wrongful or lack of recognition. Despite these difficulties, I propose solutions such as an unintelligibility account which focuses on enabling mutual recognition relationships within group identities rather than society. In Chapter 4 I apply this robust recognitional framework to technology, which I understand as a locus for contemporary problems with recognition. I discuss technologies’ recognitional role as mirrors for humans, that often reflect yet threaten to replace us. I turn to understanding data as a technology that enables harmful recognition in the present day. I find technology is not neutral regarding recognition relationships, but can uphold mutual or harmful recognition depending on how it is
used. With my account of recognition developed, I return to the goal of universally achieving mutual recognition relationships. I employ Halberstam’s account of failure to offer hope for achieving mutual recognition despite the many forms of harmful recognition.
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Chapter 1: Hegel and Recognition

1.1 Introduction

The goal is this paper is to form a strong account for understanding and achieving recognition. In Chapter 1, I use Hegel as a tool alongside others to develop three arguments. First, in section 1.2 I develop a baseline understanding of recognition as a fundamental desire which drives humanity. Second, in section 1.3 I use Hegel’s lord-bondsman dualism to develop a critique of domination as counterproductive for achieving recognition. Therefore as recognition seekers humans ought to decrease the use of domination overtime. Third, in section 1.4 I further discuss recognition’s role in self-consciousness formation. Identifying recognition as both part of the initial formation of self-consciousnesses, and as part of a continual process of self-actualization through which self-consciousnesses redefine their identities. 1.5 serves to review Chapter 1, and forwards an isothumotic model of equal recognition as the best method of achieving recognition.

In Chapter 2 I employ gender as a tool for better understanding forms of recognition and their ties to domination. Thus I employ chapter 1’s recognition theory in tandem with theories of gender to develop more robust understandings of both gender and recognition. In 2.1 I introduce the four gender theories I discuss in sections 2.2-2.5. These theories are broadly divided based on their general understandings of sex and gender. I conclude in this chapter with section 2.6 where I reflect on the many ways recognition and domination manifest through gender.

In Chapter 3 I explore three methods of harmful recognition. Section 3.1 addresses domination, and how recognition can be granted and withheld to dehumanize certain identities and prop up ideologies. Section 3.2 explores how marginalized groups navigate societal
recognition. I develop two main camps, first those pro-intelligibility who seek to use education to spread societal recognition and make marginalized subjects recognizable. Next are those who seek to remain unintelligible avoiding societal recognition, preferring recognition within their identity community. Finally in 3.3 I explore misrecognition, a method through which recognition can be harmful by overwriting someone’s self-actualization with the other’s perception. In 3.4 I use my findings to better understand the challenges facing an isothumotic recognition model.

In Chapter 4 I apply my account of recognition to technology, a nexus for present days problems facing isothumotic recognition. After outlining my aims in Chapter 4.1, I argue in 4.2 technology serves as a mirrored other for humans. In this role it represents both a reflection of the self, yet also the threat of replacement through technological progress. In Section 4.3 I focus specifically on the role of data, and its ability to shift human recognition relationships. I apply the three methods of harmful recognition outlined in Chapter 3 to understand how data specifically manifests their problematic effects. In Chapter 4.4 I recap the numerous challenges posed to achieving isothumotic recognition. Finally I end by incorporating Halberstam’s account of failure within the recognitional framework I’ve developed to provide hope for achieving an isothumotic world.¹

¹ I choose to use the phrase “isothumotic world” as opposed to something like isothumotic society for two reasons. First I see the project as a universal worldwide project, not something particularized to a specific society or culture. Second, I discuss many methods of achieving recognition outside of a societal level. An account such as the unintelligibility account discussed in 3.2.3 could end up being the best method of achieving an isothumotic world of equal recognition, without a strong isothumotic society or state.
1.2 Hegelian Recognition Argument

Hegel argues humanity is fundamentally driven by a desire for recognition. Humans have an inherent self-esteem, *thumos*, which receives validation from recognition. Humans are aware of their thumos being externally perceived. This distinguishes human self-consciousness from animals. The desire for recognition enables humans to overcome acting on base needs, “Thymos … allows human beings to overcome their most powerful natural instincts for the sake of what they believe is right or just. People evaluate and assign worth to themselves in the first instance, and feel indignation on their own behalf.”

A human self-consciousness may initially seek to confirm its existence through recognition from the consumption of objects. By consuming an object of desire, such as food, the self-consciousness attempts to recognize its agency. However, through this process, the self-consciousness’ existence becomes dependent on the consumed object of desire. As Hegel describes, “Desire and the self-certainty obtained in its gratification, are conditioned by the object…” Thus the self-consciousness’ existence is dependent on continual consumption of the object to maintain a false semblance of recognized agency. However, the object has no reciprocal

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2 Thumos is a concept which comes from Fukuyama’s interpretation of Hegel, not Hegel directly. I use it as a helpful tool for describing a human’s internal self which strives for recognition. This is distinct from an external self which is constructed in how that human is perceived by others.

Regarding use of interpretations of Hegel, Hegel’s understanding of recognition is a means to help better understanding recognition. With my goal being developing the strongest account of recognition, I employ secondary interpretations such as Fukuyama and Butler where they help elucidate recognition. I take these interpretations to be extensions of a Hegelian understanding of recognition, understanding that they provide a looser reading of Hegel than a strict Hegelian account.

3 “Man differs fundamentally from the animals, however, because in addition he desires the desire of other men, that is, he wants to be ‘recognized.’” Fukuyama on Hegel pg. 146.

4 Fukuyama on Hegel pg. 171-172

5 Hegel pg. 175
dependence on the self-consciousness for recognition. This dependent relationship teaches the
self-consciousness that objects cannot recognize their independent agency. Realizing this lack of
recognition, the consciousness searches for another means of recognition.\(^6\) Such a form of
recognition which would allow the self-consciousness to exist purely “for a self-consciousness”,
without a dependent relationship.\(^7\) The self-consciousness learns, perhaps through the object of
desire, that can only exist for itself when it is acknowledged by an other.\(^8\) Thus, the self-
consciousness learns to seek recognition from an other which it will not be dependent upon,
another self-consciousness which shares its desire for recognition.

I will address four objections to Hegel’s argument for a “recognition drive.”\(^9\) First, some
other desire such as material greed is the real fundamental driver of human desire. While there
clearly exist desires to fulfill one’s base needs for continued living, recognition can be
understood as providing the meaning underlying other desires. The desire to amass material
possessions can be understood as meaningful for a self-consciousness because of the recognition
it seeks through wealth. I understand recognition to be a desire in of itself to be driving self-
consciousnesses actions directly, but further as an underlying source of meaning behind other
desires. While not all desires may be proxies for recognition, such as fulfilling base needs,
meaningful influence on self-consciousness formation is filtered through recognition. A theory of

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\(^6\) Hegel (§237/143) “consciousness finds itself moving about searching here and there, its object
being the pure in-itself and essence.” The consciousness itself is formed in this process of
recognition seeking Hegel (§237/143) “Consciousness, however, as essence is this whole process
itself,”

\(^7\) Hegel (§177/110)

\(^8\) Hegel (§178/110) “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so
exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.”

\(^9\) I coin “recognition drive” as a shorthand for the previously presented argument by Hegel that
recognition is a driving force for self-consciousness development and human interaction.
material greed confuses the fleeting recognition of an object of desire with a meaning inherent to that object. A recognition drive does not prevent humans from having other desires, but enables deriving meaning from them. No matter how remote the desire, it achieves meaning through recognizing the self-consciousness.

Second, humans are too complex and varied to be understood through a single desire such as recognition. Humans often respond differently to similar circumstances. Person A and B may both face academic struggles, resulting in Person A studying and engaging more in courses and Person B avoiding academics for delinquency. In this example, Person A appears to be seeking academic recognition that Person B ignores. Answering this challenge demonstrates the complexity of humans. People seek recognition in different ways and from different people. Studying for a good reputation, and misbehaving for a bad reputation are both methods of achieving recognition. In both instances the agency and decisionmaking of independent self-consciousnesses is being affirmed via recognition. Recognition seeking does not take the same form, but is present in a myriad of complex desires. Furthermore, not all recognition is the same, it can come attached to dependence relationships of domination, and attachments to associations. For instance, academic recognition may bring with it certain identity markers, social roles, and associated expectations.

Third, there is no fundamental biological desire for recognition instilled in Children from birth, but humans within society are socialized into desiring recognition and status as they grow.

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See Melton p. 150 for more detail on these dependence relationships. They develop a concept of “dispositional vulnerability” which encourages minorities adopt an isothumotic mutual recognition through dependence and vulnerability.
This conflates status and a Hegelian conception of recognition. To clarify, Hegelian recognition is the affirmation of one’s self-consciousness as an independent agent capable of freely making decisions and taking actions. Lacanian psychoanalysis, while diverging in many areas from Hegel, offers a strong complementary explanation of agency and self-consciousness formation in childhood development. Following the Lacanian account, children initially do not divide the world up into many separate agents, but rather understand it as one universal agent. However, a child eventually realizes others’ independent agency when they take actions against the child’s desires.\textsuperscript{11} Through this process the child discovers they are distinct from other independent agents.\textsuperscript{12} This explains a recognition drive which necessarily occurs prior to any societal teaching of recognition, prestige, or social value. All of these concepts are preceded by a Hegelian self-consciousness formation where the self-consciousness realizes itself as distinct from others and requires recognition. As a fundamental part of self-conscious formation, the recognition drive would be present in any society structure.

Fourth is an objection I will refer to as the self-recognition view, which attempts to avoid any conditions to receive recognition from others. This view contends that people do not require the recognition of others, but engages in a self-recognition centered around themselves and their achievements. Unfortunately self-recognition is prone to developing dependent relationships towards objects. Whether it be achievements or food consumed, the self-recognizer becomes

\textsuperscript{11} Often explained as the Mirror Stage, where a child looks at a mirror and realizes in its reflection that it is a distinct subject from its surroundings. This part of Lacanian psychoanalysis appears consistent with this part of Hegel’s account, see Hegel (§231/170). Or Tobias’ explanation here “Recognition, for Hegel, designates an act of consciousness brought about through the perception and acknowledgement of an identity between self and other, resulting in a shift in understanding of self and other.” Tobias pg. 103. But there are certainly divergences between the schools of thought.

\textsuperscript{12} See McGowan for more.
defined only by the sum of the changes they make to the world. Achievements may sound significant in of themselves, but the reason we view acts as achievements is due to the acts being recognized. We celebrate achievements which are inherently socially-contextual and often comparative. World records are impressive because they are recognized as the peak of human achievement in a comparative context. Other achievements are weighted based on others’ inability to complete them. We find no achievement in a healthy person simply breathing, or in winning a race with one participant. Claiming achievements made without social interaction as representative of the self-consciousness only devalues the self-recognizer. Underneath a desire for improvement is the desire to have that improvement recognized. One works to become a faster runner to achieve a desired self-image in which they have become faster. Furthermore, denying a desire for external recognition denies the benefits of social recognition. The self-recognizer removing their ability to receive pleasure from a sincere compliment and the pain of their best efforts being ignored. To seek independence from others’ recognition is to stop being a social creature. This vision of humanity as isolated individuals absent mutually recognized agency is not a free paradise. Rather, it develops a dystopic state of nature defined by avoidance of others. This provides another reason to reject the self-recognition view; it does not appear to

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13 This appears similar to how the bondsman in 1.3 self-actualizes through work or changing the world, yet the crucial distinction is that the bondsman’s self-actualization is recognized by the lord. This is an alternate fate for self-recognizers besides being stuck in a dependent relationship with the object, becoming Hegelians through recognized self-actualization.

14 In this understanding, self-recognition becomes significant through projecting the self on another, often through religion. This use of projected a reflection of the self as other to gain recognition is discussed more in Chapter 4, and once more draws a self-recognition seeker into a Hegelian account. Furthermore comparative achievements are not inherently megalothumotic, but a Hegelian account would find equal recognition relationships can arise amongst competitors engaged in competition.
track human behavior accurately. Humans are not driven to be isolationist self-achievers. Furthermore, this framework has difficulty explaining why humans dominate others. After all, able individuals capable of satisfying their own needs for recognition would have no interest in dominating others. This leaves a self-recognition framework unable to contend with problematic social behaviors such as domination.

1.3 Hegel’s Lord-Bondsman Dualism and Domination

Hegel argues that, despite humans using domination, it serves to gain ineffective forms of recognition. Hegel illustrates the ineffectiveness of domination with the lord-bondsman dualism.\(^{15}\) When two self-consciousness interact seeking recognition they may engage in a battle for recognition, “the desire for recognition initially drives two primordial combatants to seek to make the other ‘recognize’ their humanness by staking their lives in a mortal battle.”\(^{16}\) The loser resigns to spare their life, and thus becomes a bondsman. Henceforth the bondsman lives to recognize the victorious independent lord consciousness. The bondsman acquires objects of desire for the lord, such as food, enabling the lord to seemingly have a truly independent existence. The lord consciousness thus believes they have achieved true independence since they have secured the means to their recognition via the bondsman. Therefore the lord believes they are no longer dependent on the object of consumption. However, the lord’s forced recognition from the bondsman is a deficient form of recognition.\(^{17}\) It is similar to forcing an object to recognize the lord. The lord has now become dependent on the bondsman for deficient recognition. They lack the true autonomy to pursue their own ends. Rather, the bondsman

\(^{15}\) Also referred to as master-slave or master-servant.
\(^{16}\) Fukuyama on Hegel pg. xvi
\(^{17}\) A deficient means of recognition is one which is ineffective means to becoming a recognized independent self-consciousness. In the way that being drowsy is a deficient means of being alert.
becomes an independent consciousness whose consciousness is freely recognized by the lord. Both as an agent capable of giving recognition and through the process of self-actualization that manifests in the bondsman’s works and status as worker.\textsuperscript{18} For instance the bondsman “rediscovers himself, by himself” by growing food and self-actualize an identity of farmer which engages with the world.\textsuperscript{19} This self-actualized identity is then recognized by the lord. Thus, the lord fails to acquire a successful form of recognition through domination, and the bondsman succeeds in receiving recognition. For a traditional Hegelian this indicates domination can only achieve deficient forms of recognition. They would find this exemplifies how domination relationships are filled with systemic internal contradictions which ultimately invert the relationships.\textsuperscript{20} This develops an optimistic account. Prideful recognition-seeking dictators would best achieve their goals without domination, since domination is against the universal self-interest of recognition. Hegel offers an optimistic projection: since humans’ desire recognition, and domination is a poor means to achieve recognition, domination ought to decrease over time. As history progresses internally contradictory, \textit{megalothumotic}, one way domination methods to achieve recognition will shift towards \textit{isothumotic} methods that seek recognition through mutual recognition relationships.

\textsuperscript{18} Self-Actualization is an important concept used in later parts of my account. I use it to refer to the action taking of an independent self-consciousness to realize an identity in the pursuit of recognition. In this example a independent self consciousness engages in the act of farmer to self-actualize an identity as a farmer with the help of a recognizing other. As I discuss later, it is significant to recognize that recognition in my account is not simply achieved in the initial state of self-actualization, but something which needs to be continually reaffirmed through external confirmation often directed at self-actualization.

\textsuperscript{19} Hegel (§196/115) discusses the bondsman’s engagement with the world and their dependence.

\textsuperscript{20} These are sometimes referred to as \textit{Hegelian Inversions}. 
I will present and address two objections to Hegel’s optimistic account of domination. First, a dominator does not directly seek recognition and approval from the dominated, but rather indirectly through indifference. Historically the dominator enjoys the ability to appear indifferent to the dominated.\textsuperscript{21} Indifference thus dangles the potential of the lord recognizing the bondsman. This framing requires the bondsman to prove their worth of receiving recognition from the lord. Thus the bondsman recognizes and endorses the lord’s control over both the lord and bondsman’s autonomy and recognition. However, this concludes similarly to the previous example. Like the initial lord-bondsman example, the dominated is being recognized by the dominator as an independent self-consciousness which can recognize. This objection provides a more complex way of arriving at a similar result. Indifference is actually a feigned indifference. The very seeking to present themselves as indifferent to the dominated is the ultimate ploy of the dominator to gain the dominated’s recognition.

Second, one can imagine a positive feudal relationship where the bondsman may freely choose to remain under a lord for their protection, and be recognized by the lord for their service.\textsuperscript{22} This description of the bondsman relationship does not prove domination achieves recognition, since domination has now been eliminated from it. This example illustrates the Hegelian progression of a megalothumotic relationship developing into an isothumotic one in which recognition is consensually and mutually given. Loyal bondsman and supportive lords are

\textsuperscript{21} A version of this idea of indifference as a path to recognition is discussed by Haslanger on Du Bois.
\textsuperscript{22} Choice is a complex subject I lack the time to delve into here. For the purpose of this example I assume that this is a “free choice” and not one required or compelled by circumstances in a manner consistent with domination.
not an impossibility, but not all who are enter servitude develop isothumotic relationships. The relationship garners recognition when it becomes freely given.

1.4 Recognition’s Role in Self-Consciousness Formation

As previously established, recognition is significant both as a driver of human action, and for the formation of an independent self-consciousness. “Recognition, for Hegel, designates an act of consciousness brought about through the perception and acknowledgement of an identity between self and other, resulting in a shift in understanding of self and other.”23 Through the act of recognition, independent self-consciousnesses are formed and changed. Recognition is not limited to the point of consciousness formation, but rather an ongoing process which shifts self-consciousnesses in relation to each other, social contexts, and the world.24 This process of continual shifts in identity occurs through self-actualization in which independent self-consciousnesses take actions which garner recognition attached to identity markers. Hegel writes “an individual cannot know what he really is until he has made himself a reality through action.”25 For instance someone who gardens, and is recognized for their gardening, is self-actualized as a gardener. Identity is continuously discovered through acts of self-actualization.26

23 Tobias pg. 103
24 Tobias pg. 113 explains the lord-bondsman relationship is not a “dialogical interaction between subjects rather than as the dialectical development of a social world through the interaction of subjects with their natural, cultural, institutional and political environments.” I understand this to be a process every independent consciousness struggles with beginning in self-consciousness formation as they engage with recognition, not something which solely occurred in a historical pre-society past.
25 Hegel (§401/217)
26 This parallels some of Butler’s ideas of gender as performative, and the notion of gender as a verb one is constantly acting with. In this model of gender, a person is not a static gendered noun such as women, but one womans or performs woman acts. A helpful analogue for understanding is gendered languages which gender verbs. Taylor expands “Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating
Yet it is important to avoid the pitfalls of the self-recognizer, and understand discovery of identity as something that is shaped through engagement with others. In many ways, identity is the grounding of a self-consciousness within social contexts, and thus meaningless outside of that society.

1.5 Reviewing Hegelian Recognition

In Chapter 1 I have developed a baseline for understanding recognition centered around three arguments. Section 1.2 “Hegelian Recognition Argument” brings the first, which outlines how self-consciousnesses need recognition and must seek out other self-consciousnesses. In section 1.3, I make use of Hegel’s Lord-Bondsman Dualism to examine struggles for recognition, presenting a critique of domination. Section 1.4 discusses how recognition plays a crucial role both in the initial formation of self-consciousnesses, but also continuously through the recognition of changing self-actualizations in dialogue between self-consciousnesses. I emerge from this section adopting a goal of isothumotic recognition relationships as the ideal it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment and self-realization in which the ideal is usually couched.” Taylor Politics of Recognition Pg. 31

27 “Thus my discovering my own identity doesn’t mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.” Taylor Politics of Recognition pg. 34 and “The monological ideal seriously underestimates the place of the dialogical in human life. It wants t- o confine it as much as possible to the genesis. It forgets how our understanding of the good things in life can be transformed by our enjoying them in common with people we love; how some goods become accessible to us only through such common enjoyment. Because of this, it would take a great deal of effort, and probably many wrenching break-ups, to prevent our identity’s being formed by the people we love.” Taylor Politics of Recognition pg. 33
model of recognition. To learn more about recognition and potential barriers to an isothumotic world, in chapter 2 I turn to analyzing recognition and gender.
Chapter 2: Gender and Recognition

2.1 Introducing Gender

Gender provides helpful insights into recognition and domination. In sections 2.2-2.5 I will develop and compare four perspectives on Gender. The sections follow a progression of gender understandings, with theories typically arising in critique of their immediate predecessor. Of course, there are many more than four theories of gender. These theories are divided based on their attitudes towards gender and sex as identity markers. Section 2.2 begins with the biological essentialist, or “sole sex”, view which denies gender and only uses biological markers of sex to categorize humans. Section 2.3 follows Beauvoir’s sex-gender distinction, which introduces a socially constructed gender alongside use of biological sex. Section 2.4 primarily follows Butler and encapsulates what I refer to as “sole gender” theory, which avoid use of biological sex in favor of exclusively using gender in identity construction. Section 2.5 discusses Gender Abolitionists which decry use of sex or gender, typically alongside identity categories generally. Finally in Section 2.6, I will synthesize and incorporate the theories’ insights on recognition and domination alongside the Hegelian recognition thesis to develop a more robust understanding of recognition.

2.2 Biological Essentialism

Biological essentialism is a reactionary account that denies the existence of gender. It maintains the sole existence and necessity of biological sex without the need for an independent

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28 This progression of internal critique mirrors the Hegelian arc of history involving thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.
29 While biological essentialism is often framed as a traditional view of gender by its supporters, there is significant evidence that earlier cultures had less binary understandings of gender. One example is the two-spirit gender identity of significant cultural importance within some indigenous communities. See Robinson for more.
conception of gender. This account uses solely biological determinations to determine someone as male or female. The sole sex theory is primarily reactionary, denying the claims of other gender theories. For instance, sole sex theorists argue gender is not socially constructed.  

Furthermore they often argue it is damaging to believe other gender theories. At their strongest, these accounts appeal to how most of women’s existing legal protections are sex-based, and would not apply under new gender understandings. As detailed in 2.3, Sole sex theory is considered debunked both on biological evidence, as well as on the useful explanatory power of social conceptions of gender which diverge from sex. As US law has begun to catch up, their legal claims have also became obsolete in the US. Bostock v. Clayton County in 2020 applied sex-based Title VII legal protections to transgender and queer individuals. Moreover claims that laws do not apply because they use outdated understandings of sex rather then gender is not a reason to not progress understandings of gender, but to revise laws. Ultimately, this account lacks the strength to be a legitimate contender to the other three theories, but its historical prevalence elicits gender theories to build a response in their construction.

2.3 Beauvoir and the Sex-Gender Distinction

Beauvoir employs the Hegelian lord-bondsman dualism in combination with building a sex-gender distinction to develop a recognitionnal feminist theory. Beauvoir replaces Hegel’s lord and bondsman with men and women. In her account, men, as lord, desire recognition from women bondsman. Women become objects of men’s prestige. Hegel’s lord-bondsman argument grounds Beauvoir’s internal directional critique of Patriarchy, developing into her sex-gender

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30 “Denying the reality of biological sex and supplanting it with subjective “gender identity” is not merely an eccentric academic theory. It raises serious human-rights concerns for vulnerable groups including women, homosexuals and children.” Wright et al.  
31 SCOTUS Bostock v. Clayton County
distinction. Antifeminist logics berate women who do or do not perform certain actions such as having children as not women. Beauvoir adopts antifeminist logics to perform an internal critique of biological essentialism. Beauvoir argues the antifeminists show the separation of the gender women as a social construct of characteristics and actions, from the female biological sex. If someone could not be a women, on account of their actions, then that makes women socially determined. This allows her to develop an account that simultaneously argues gender is not biological, and yet gender is a real locus point for material discrimination and violence.

Analyzing Beauvoir through a Hegelian recognition account confers benefits and challenges. Beauvoir benefits from many elements of a Hegelian account. Beauvoir’s account gains directionality in its critique. It targets the dominating force of patriarchy rather than the equivocal practice of sexism. Moreover, Beauvoir accesses the Hegelian method of internal critique through using cultural and historical accounts. This enables them to describe the reality of bodily misogynistic discrimination without adopting a solely biological and essentialist view of womanhood. Finally, Beauvoir gets access to the powerful recognitional theory of human relations. However, in adopting a Hegelian framing, to maintain Beauvoir’s pessimistic outlook on progress toward women’s liberation requires arguing against orthodox Hegelian optimism’s endorsement of status quo progress.

Beyond contending with the sole sex biological essentialist, Beauvoir attempts to convince the optimistic Hegelian recognition theorist that the reality of gender is more pessimistic. An optimistic Hegelian may conclude that patriarchy’s domination fails by its own standards like the lord-bondsman. Because women are forced to recognize men, their recognition has no value and men’s recognition is deficient. Thus patriarchy is declining, and these internally
contradictory systems will be pressured over time to move towards equal recognition and
distribution of positive characteristics between men and women. First, Beauvoir disagrees with
this Hegelian framing of characteristic distribution. For Beauvoir’s sex-gender distinction, social
identities are fundamentally constructed in the comparison between what people are seen as
being (sex), and what they are seen as becoming (gender) through actions and characteristics.
Social relationships develop out of a fundamental otherness or negativity for marginalized
women relative to dominant men. Thus, subordination is fundamentally constitutive to the
relationship, to be owner is to be man, to be owned woman. Therefore, using the sex-gender
distinction combined with the Hegelian lord-bondsman, man is understood as a collection of
positive and neutral characteristics of being the Subject. Defined in contrast woman is
understood as a collection of negative characteristics, as other and object. Woman is
constitutively defined against man, where man is strong woman is frail, where man is neutral,
woman is peculiar and biased. This reframing of the fundamental relationship is problematic for
the Hegelian because it implies the impossibility of equal recognition. Woman cannot be bold, a
bold female is recognized as man. Beauvoir’s second reframing is that men aren’t seeking
recognition from women but from other men. Domination of women only exists to increase
men’s recognition from other men peers. Therefore, Patriarchy achieves exactly the recognition
it desires, men recognizing other men, and there is no internal contradiction, nor need for men or
patriarchy to change since they are receiving recognition. This addresses the Hegelian’s internal
pressure towards optimism. A final problem is that women made object in Beauvoir’s sense, are
denied the ability to struggle in the Fanonian sense. Since woman as social category is defined in
a struggle relative to the characteristics determined by the man subject, the other is forced into
struggling for an existence defined by the dominator. They are denied the ability to dance on the
tightrope of existence, or in other words the characteristics and self-actualization that allows them to define themselves as subject.\textsuperscript{32} Even in the struggle against men, or for men’s recognition, they are defined as the negative of men, the not men, as desiring access to men’s characteristics. Liberalism claims to grant recognition to those who become men. The liberal sees this lack of difference as indicative of equality. The bold female man is said to be equal for having achieved the same characteristics. Thus, liberalism conditions recognition of woman’s existence upon becoming man. Women’s struggle for recognition is patronizingly accepted into the patriarchal system of men recognizing other men. For Beauvoir, this form of recognition and domination structure persists so long as the characteristics of women are defined in opposition to men. Therefore, a pessimistic account may be appealing to move away from devising how women’s self-actualizations ought to appeal to men for recognition. Beauvoir’s pessimism rejects the traditional Hegelian goal of convincing men that their domination is an ineffective means to recognition. Ultimately Beauvoir reframes the question from whether domination is effective for men to receive recognition, to how women should live in light of the domination of patriarchy.

What emerges of Beauvoir’s account is a pessimistic Hegelianism grounded in women as the negative that maintains a defense of embracing the self-actualization of the identity women. This account struggles with two separate contradictions, which other gender theories will attempt to resolve. First being the struggle of maintaining a pessimistic Hegelian theory. Second, the tension between maintaining an identitarian theory which maintains women as a socially

\textsuperscript{32} Fanon
constructed self-actualized identity, and grounding women in anti-identitarian negativity as the non-man.

2.4 Butler and the Move to a “Sole Gender” Theory

Some contemporary gender theorists have moved beyond Beauvoir’s sex-gender distinction, to forming a sole gender theory without sex. Just as Beauvoir is not the only gender theorist who supports both biological sex and socially constructed gender, sole gender theories take a variety of forms and have disagreements with other sole gender theories. However, these accounts share the name sole gender due to either abandoning sex entirely while maintaining gender as social construct, or arguing sex and gender are identical conceptually and both social constructs.

Butler presents a popular compelling argument against the sex-gender distinction for a sole gender theory. Butler argues rather than gender being a product of sex, sex is gendered. Beauvoir’s account argues biological sex informs the socio-cultural characteristics of gender. The female, on the virtue of being female, is culturally conditioned to strive to self-actualize womanhood. Thus, the female is recognized as women or non-women based on their adherence to social conditions determined by gender. For Butler, it appears strange to understand culturally gendered characteristics such as timidity as derivable from biological elements. First, its sensible to see the formation of unexpected combinations across sex and gender such as the obnoxiously arrogant female man. Second, if culturally gendered characteristics are tied to sex how could females fail to be recognized as women? Thus, Butler wonders, “Can we refer to a “given” sex or a “given” gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given,
through what means?“ After all, the declaration of sex has developed as a cultural practice, often being performed pre-birth. It appears sex itself is the subject of much cultural construction, with historical, genealogical, scientific, and political debates which mean “this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.” Therefore, sex is itself a gendered category informed by gender, culturally interpretive. In attempting to define sex as biological theorists select biological features that are recognizable as gendered. In doing so, they explain and associate sex with existing cultural understandings of gender difference. As such the biological features we associate with gender become determined based on our understanding of gender. For Butler, there is no sex difference, we are all just undifferentiated mobs of biological features we distinguish according to gender and recognize through the method of sex. Gender is thus not the assignment of cultural meaning unto a biologically determined sex. Rather Butler’s gender is a comprehensive structure which produces and regulates gender meaning, of which the process by which sexes are determined is a small part, “gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “prediscursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts.” As such there is no body that “has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a prediscursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along.” For Butler, human beings are recognized as human and thereby enter the world as

33 Butler Gender Trouble pg. 10
34 Butler Gender Trouble pg. 11
35 Butler Gender Trouble pg. 11
36 Butler Gender Trouble pg. 13-14
self-consciousnesses through being gendered. This seems consistent with the Butler’s reframing of Beauvoir that males and females are sexes sorted by gender based on culturally defined actions and characteristics. Since sex does not define those cultural characteristics, the timid male becomes recognized as women as the bold female becomes recognized as man. Sex rather plays the binding role of expectation, the male woman becomes a female woman when no longer expected to perform as man.

Butler adopting a drive for recognition further challenges Beauvoir’s account. If sex is a natural category with any bearing on gender, why do people desire to be recognized for their sex? A common example is the TERF movement, which features trans-exclusionary feminists who exclude women based on sex. Their concerns are couched in recognition of those not recognized as female as women. As such they extoll the virtues of the female sex, and desire to be recognized as what they supposedly already are, female. The question remains, if sex is a static biological category, why do they need a self-actualized sex to be culturally recognized? It appears compelling to argue that, like gender, sex is a socially constructed identity marker to categorize and derive recognition. Moreover, recognition can explain the desire to maintain a sex-gender distinction. Female women faced with the recognitional pressure of maintaining their womanhood, desire an innate categorization such that should they culturally become non-women, they can always derive recognition as female. Butler develops this anxiety through their analysis of gender as performative. This understands gender to be a performance that is self-actualization through acts and may change over time. Butler argues that anxiety over whether someone is “occupying gender in the ‘right’ way,” offers evidence of the disconnect and efforts

37 Butler Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 41
to reconcile one’s internal sense of gender with a self-actualized identity that is recognized under norms. As such transgender people are viewed as a threat to TERFs recognition of security, by erasing female’s lingering tie to woman. Yet, their fears that transgender gender identity self-actualizations redefine sex, only furthers the argument that sex be categorized as a social construct.

As discussed by Beauvoir, the sole sex theory is extremely flawed. However, due to maintaining a biological sex, many sole gender theorists argue Beauvoir’s halfway account does not do enough to sever from sole sex biological essentialists. For instance, Beauvoir describes early gender formation based on sex characteristics such as male strength. As Butler shows it appears perfectly possible to explain gender formation without a natural sex. This conceptualizes sex itself as a social construct formed to explain existing gender domination relationships. Following the Hegelian lord-bondsman dualism, following a struggle for recognition some people were dominated. Based on the characteristics of the dominated, social structures were formed such as gender. The bodies which were weak in physical combat were gendered as women and sexed as female, sexing females as inherently weak. This provides a story of sex as negative yet social construct which appears to better achieve Beauvoir’s goal of maximizing woman’s autonomy. For the sole gender theorist, sex as a category is a defunct categorization of gender by patriarchal structures to minimize bodily autonomy and access to recognition. Thus, we ought to understand humans as having no natural biological element of sex with specific characteristics. Something akin to understanding all people as intersex people, not categorized biologically into male or female. Moreover, the above lord-bondsman story shows the unnecessary nature of sexual differences since they are simply imbued with gendered meanings. You can cut out sex’s explicit role, and still explain social construction of gender difference.
Meaning sole gender theorists do not lose explanatory power in the move away from sex as separate, to sex as determined by gender.

Moreover, even if there were theoretical reasons to maintain a biological sex, scientific empirics lean away from binary sex. Scientific evidence presents sex as a spectrum. Beyond the biological discoveries of non-human animals, scientists have discovered a significant grey area amongst intersex humans which has proven the existence of more than two sexes.\(^{38}\) Merely analyzing deviant chromosome count and hormonal deviance displays there is much more sexual variance then female/male. A recent famous example being Christine Mboma and Beatrice Masilingi Namibian track and field super stars and female women, who were barred from the Olympics for having too high natural testosterone levels.\(^{39}\) The Olympics required they use supplements to artificially reduce their testosterone to fairly compete ‘as women.’\(^{40}\) Already individuals who find attractive both transgender women and cisgender women are being attracted to both females and non-females. Opening up sex as a spectrum entails a further corresponding opening up of sexual orientation as a spectrum even amongst heterosexual individuals. If the Namibian track superstars have a different sex composition then female, males who find them and females attractive would no longer be solely heterosexual in a traditional sense.

A common defense for maintaining the sex-gender distinction is a pragmatic one many find intuitive. Some separate categorization of sex is useful for sexual compatibility and matchmaking particularly amongst deviant sexuality groups. Absent reference to sexual organs, bait and switches meant to convince persons with deviant sexual orientations to change to more

\(^{38}\) Brusman
\(^{39}\) Granville
\(^{40}\) Granville
normative ones become impossible to distinguish. Overall, move away from sexual organs opens a pragmatic pandora’s box of issues for sexual orientation and identification. Different sole gender theorists have a variety of responses, but often believe these concerns will remain in the short-term as they are handled with shifts in language. This seems reasonable as the queer community has already shown itself capability in developing a variety of sexual orientation language.

Now I will return to Hegel to present new counterarguments against sole gender theory in favor of the sex-gender distinction. For Hegel humans are dual natured and contradictory beings who attempt to dominate their essential elements of humanity, sex, with malleable consciousness, gender. For Hegel this is a mistake because consciousness is constructed in opposition to whatever is essential and unchangeable. Thus, for Hegel, consciousness alienates humans’ ability to return to this base animal essential nature, which prevents access to an objective existence. The worst consciousness or unhappy consciousness is the consciousness that aims to expand itself, rather than remove itself, allowing subjectivity to overwhelm all aspects of the essential human condition. Thus, the expansion of human dominion over sex as a socially determined element of gender appears to be a move made by the unhappy consciousness. It promises greater autonomy, but moves humans towards greater subjectivity and away from their natural universality. Thus, the sex-gender distinction should remain. The sole gender theorist would likely criticize Hegel’s devotion to some essential element of human consciousness, instead placing value in the malleability of consciousness. One response would be framing Hegel’s desire for an essential human condition like the TERFS desire for sex, a desire for

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41 Hegel
guaranteed “objective” recognition as essential human in the face of anxiety about the whims of subjective consciousness’ recognition. Moreover Hegel’s account of the universal existence might lend itself better to the gender abolitionist, given the division of humanity introduced by sex binarisms.

Stryker poses a strong defense emerging from inverting the implications of Hegel’s consciousness argument to justify the sex-gender distinction. Stryker argues that precisely because the essential self dominates the malleable consciousness, the striving of the malleable consciousness to “war with nature” against the essential is good. “The transsexual [claims] he/she needs to change his/her body in order to be his/her “true self.” Because this “true self” requires another physical form in which to manifest itself, it must therefore war with nature.”

In other words, Stryker accepts Hegel’s framing of an essential nature overpowering the subjective consciousness, and then argues that gender as deemed unnatural by sex, is alienated from the “true self”, or self-actualization, is the best gender model. Stryker’s account requires a sex-gender distinction, an opposed nature, to continue deeming gender unnatural. This ensures a continual war with nature, which for Stryker is good, “When such beings as these tell me I war with nature, I find no more reason to mourn my opposition to them—or to the order they claim to represent—than Frankenstein’s monster felt in its enmity to the human race. I do not fall from the grace of their company—I roar gleefully away from it.”

For Stryker, gender as a refusal of sex is a means of retaking agency over the determining gendered meaning.

42 Stryker
43 Stryker
44 This is somewhat distinct from self-actualization which would be to realize oneself as fitting an identity category, since it has more to do with changing the nature of gender and how bodies are gendered.
essential nature is itself an inauthentic result of human subjectivity based on arbitrary elevation over non-human materiality. Rather Stryker finds a unique freedom and equality in recognition severed from this elevation of the human condition, “A creature, after all, in the dominant tradition of Western European culture, is nothing other than a created being, a made thing. The affront you humans take at being called a “creature” results from the threat the term poses to your status as “lords of creation,” beings elevated above mere material existence. As in the case of being called “it,” being called a “creature” suggests the lack or loss of a superior personhood. I find no shame, however, in acknowledging my egalitarian relationship with non-human material Being.”

This liberation appears precisely in a shift in burden to derive recognition. Rather than seek to self actualize a human gender category, Stryker garners recognition self-actualizing as it. In doing so, Stryker appears to better attain Hegel’s base animal nature. A sole gender theorist can intuitively respond that gender deviant persons ought not be dehumanized by their sex. Therefore Stryker’s embrace of the unnaturalness of their sex is good for her own self-actualized identity, but not a set path for others to self-actualize. Dehumanization ought not be a required feature of identity, and certainly is not a virtue of an account of gender. The gender abolitionist sympathizes with Stryker’s concerns about gender’s natural structuring and the elevation of humanity, but rather then maintaining sex they take it in the opposite direction.

2.5 Gender Abolition

Put simply, gender abolitionists see gender as a domination system that exerts controlling forces and thus ought to be abolished. For gender abolitionists, gender is an explanatory tool of ideology to shape bodies into recognizable roles within social structures. Gender is a violent

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45 Stryker
form of domination which wages war on bodies via conscripting their lives to gendered requirements for recognition such as having children to achieve womanhood “so many agents of Gender… seek to direct the flow of your transition into this-way or -that, to arrest your movement and tie you down and lock you in a cage of identity.” Like for the sole gender theorist, sex emerges as a product of gender to explain and maintain this control as ‘natural.’ However, while sole gender theorists hope to redeem genders’ positive elements absent domination as a path for recognition, gender abolitionists find such attempts futile. Rather they find these counterproductive attempts further gender’s spread and authority over truth and recognition, “politics of trans liberation have staked their claims on a redemptive understanding of identity. Whether through a doctor or psychologist’s diagnosis, or through a personal self affirmation in the form of a social utterance, we have come to believe that there is some internal truth to gender,” enabling more domination. Thus, the gender abolitionist finds no recognition of a true underlying self-actualization from the social categorization called gender, but rather “Gender is a frame, a subset of language, and set of symbols and signs, communicated between us, constructing us and being reconstructed by us constantly.” As such, as a frame of reference gender has no inherent power beyond the recognition we give it. The discourse and framing employed by other accounts of gender reproduce its position as truth and perscriptive power of recognition over bodies. Therefore, the preferred solution for the gender abolitionist sounds simple, erase gender and sex as recognized social categorizations.

46 Carmel
47 Escalante
48 Escalante
A core element of gender abolitionist accounts is adherence to non-identitarianism. As the name suggests, non-identitarian theories are known for rejection of identitarianism, or identity categories such as gender. As such, beyond gender, many gender abolitionist accounts offer arguments against social categorization and humanism more generally. Core to this is a radical rejection of any essential human identity. All existing identity categories are historically contingent symbols of recognitional meaning. Gender is no truth granted to individual bodies, but rather a superstructure of “intelligibility” under which you are externally recognized and defined within to translate the self to the other. For both Deleuze and Pascal, there is always pleasure to be found in any moment, but the excessive categorization of things locks us from the freedom of being unmediated by social categories. For Deleuze this manifests as microfascism, an element of capitalism that teaches the worker to self-police for optimal behavior. Competition compels the worker to always both self-actualize the most efficient opportunity cost to define themselves in the optimal way. They are required to stake their recognition on that self-actualization, otherwise, the worker lacks the ability to sustain their existence. Incentives for self-actualizations such as recognition thus becomes both a ruse of choice where individuals are forced down the optimal path.

Baedan articulates a recontextualized model of queerness as identity, to avoid its recognitional identitarian trappings. Baedan describes the process of self-actualizing identity as working towards becoming queer not proving we are or being recognized as queer. This is placed in stark opposition to the ‘coming out’ model of LGBTQ+ identity which focuses on the intelligible revelation of identity. To be recognized as coming out requires the adoption of static

49 Escalante
50 Escalante
identity that can be translated to others. An gender phenomenology you cannot explain is unintelligible. One’s self-actualized identity becomes repackaged as multigenderfluid, then genderfluid for short, then non-binary or finally transgender to be intelligible. Baedan quotes Foucault “if people think that they have to "uncover" their "own identity," and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence,” to establish how the process of recognition and identification develops this microfascism self-policing.\textsuperscript{51} Baedan suggests an account of queerness as a verb. Rather than a static identity to be claimed, one performs queer actions. This is a reversion of Foucault’s dreaded transition from sex acts being verbs to being constitutive of recognizable identities, such as top/bottom.

An important element of gender abolitionism is articulating the significance and inevitability of gender’s harms as illustrated by being “the trans question.” For the gender abolitionist, we are parasitically drawn to reinvest in gender due to our affective and aesthetic identity investments in our self-actualization being recognized. Yet transgender bodies, recognized as inherently transgressive of gender systems are defined as the outsider to those systems. An obvious marker being referral to transgender individuals as non-binary relative to the binary gender system. As such the transgender person is dehumanized into an object of discussion: the trans question. Not only can the transgender person not achieve assimilation or inclusion within gender, but being recognized as object defines their relative existence. The person becomes recognized as the trans question, insofar as “I am a divisive political issue… people who don’t know me as an individual or as a person, but who already have a whole set of presuppositions about me. They don’t know my name, but they do know a whole set of talking

\textsuperscript{51} Baedan 2008
points about whether or not I ought to have access to…” Transgender individuals exist as an intellectual exercise, the example in a debate. Yet, it was not transgender people who self-actualized to become recognized as object, but the system of gender which forces a defense of their existence. The sole gender theorist sympathizes, and attempts to define a recognizable role and identity for the gender abolitionist. Yet, that role requires one to repeatedly fight to maintain their recognition as subject, less you return to being recognized as object “I have to write about the political issue that I am… if I were to quit, I would be letting the people who want my life to be up for debate to win.” As such, the gender abolitionist urges gender theorists to abandon lingering attachments to gender, given its identitarian project of categorizing and withholding recognition and autonomy.

Gender abolition against sole gender frames much of internal discussion between contemporary gender theorists, and I’d be remiss if I did not include sole gender theorist objections. The first is that gender domination is operating at different stages in different spaces simultaneously, and different stages of gender identity understanding are helpful in handling different forms of gender domination. Gender abolition may be ideal for the experienced gender theorist who after entertaining different systems of gender decides its best to do away with categories entirely. Yet, the child discovering their transgender identity, facing a traditional family, would likely better navigate their phenomenological experiences through Beauvoir’s sex-gender distinction model. Moreover, it may be a more compelling account of gender for their reference frame than the sole gender or gender abolitionist frames. These gender systems can be viewed as sequential internal critiques of the previous gender system. The sole sex theorist

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52 Escalante
53 Escalante
typically moves to the sex-gender distinction and then on to sole gender potentially ending in gender abolition, rather than a sole sex theorist suddenly adopting sole gender or gender abolitionism. While this linear progression is by no means a requirement, the next stage often shares requires one establish large agreements with the previous theory. The split between theories emerges around a specific problem one sees unaddressed in the previous theory. For Beauvoir the unrecognized cultural construction of gender, for sole gender the biological essentialist element of sex within Beauvoir’s account, and for gender abolitionist the commitment to gender a system of domination. Since abolishing gender requires universal divestment from gender, and many are not at a stage where they would or should adopt gender abolition, its ideal is presently unrealizable.

A second major objection comes in the form of defending identitarianism. Put simply, people like their gender identifications. The term gender euphoria describes a specific form of pleasure derived from transgender gender recognition. This can be a double-edged pleasure, since the self-identification of gender identity can just as easily be violated through misrecognition as validated through recognition, resulting in gender dysphoria. A third problem of gender abolition is it homogenizes and enforces a gendered sameness. We lack gender differentiation and inevitably sexual orientation breaks down as well. Another response concedes western gender systems enforce domination and unethical practices, but defends varying accounts of non-western, typically indigenous, gender systems. Finally, Butler summarizing Irigaray outlines how a sole gender theory can capture the gender abolitionist’s concerns. In this account “women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that
cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity.”\textsuperscript{54} Women are not “one,” but multiple, a class of genders that cannot be recognized or articulated within the dominant order. This may sound similar to Beauvoir’s conception of women as negation, however Irigaray is “In opposition to Beauvoir, for whom women are designated as the Other, Irigaray argues that both the subject and the Other are masculine mainstays of a closed phallogocentric signifying economy that achieves its totalizing goal through the exclusion of the feminine altogether.”\textsuperscript{55} In other words, women are portrayed in a false dialectic of subject and other, when they are truly outside of that structure at “a point of departure for a criticism of hegemonic Western representation and of the metaphysics of substance that structures the very notion of the subject.”\textsuperscript{56} This account appears to capture much of the gender abolitionists goals within gender identity.

Gender abolitionists do not lack responses. The different stages argument could apply to Marx’s vision of communism, different countries being at different stages of economic development would not make a global communist revolution impossible, it would merely delay it until the conditions for it the occur were prepared. In a similar vein, the gender abolitionist could encourage others’ progression through the sequence of gender theories, until gender consciousness is sufficiently developed for fulfilling global abolition. Moreover, gender abolition need not only occur at the global scale, but can involve individuals or small communities divesting from seeking recognition for gender identity from dominant society. Regarding gender euphoria, the gender abolitionist argues the harms of gender are far greater than the benefits,

\textsuperscript{54} Butler summarizes Irigaray Gender Trouble pg. 14-16
\textsuperscript{55} Butler summarizes Irigaray Gender Trouble pg. 14-16
\textsuperscript{56} Butler summarizes Irigaray Gender Trouble pg. 14-16
both in the immense scale of domination and far greater violations of gender identity than validations. Moreover, the gender abolitionist argues a greater euphoria can be found in liberation from becoming an unintelligible existence, in which one is truly free to escape social definition. Rather, the freedom to both identify and disidentify exists only outside of cultural intelligibility, and this opens freedom up to the many who wish to go by no pronoun or label by others. Colonialism and alternate gender systems is a complex topic worthy of lengthy and specialized discussion to each system. To provide a general response, many gender abolitionists would frame gender abolition as only abolition of western gender systems, or argue that western gender has so conceptually dominated gender that within society under western power structures gender is conceptually irredeemable. Returning to Butler, we find the gender abolitionists answer to an unintelligible gender system “The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of “identities” cannot “exist”—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender.”\(^57\) Not only does retaining gender as a system retain controlled social systems of gendered norms which police their identitarian inhabitants, they loss access to numerous identities. This internal critique is troubling for the identitarian who desires to identify the unidentifiable within gender. As established, for the gender abolitionist such identification is intentionally impossible as “Their persistence and proliferation, however, provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility,” doing so denies the very freedom of escaping categorization-based recognition.\(^58\) This unintelligibility may appear to

\(^{57}\) Butler Gender Trouble pg. 24

\(^{58}\) Butler Gender Trouble pg. 24
mesh poorly with Hegel’s desire for recognition analysis. However, the gender abolitionist can argue we are best recognized, truly recognized, when we are unrecognizable by categorizations. We are not recognized qua woman, but recognized as our selves.

2.6 Hegelian Recognition, Gender, and Subject Formation

Gender imparts several lessons for Hegelian understandings of recognition and subject formation. I have developed four accounts of understanding gender through recognition. Section 2.2 presents a biological essentialist view which understands gender to be defined by a biological sex, absent any social or recognition effects. Section 2.3 refutes this account through internal critique built around disqualifications of females from womanhood due to actions and presents a sex-gender distinction account. Merging Beauvoir and Hegel forms a pessimistic Hegelianism grounded in women as the negative defined by the positive characteristics of man. Yet Beauvoir holds on to a self-actualized identity of women that can receive recognition within a community.59 Section 2.4 discusses the sole gender view primarily forwarded by Butler. Butler find’s Beauvoir too attached to sex as a distinct concept, arguing it is actually culturally determined like gender. From birth a child is gendered, where its humanity is already made intelligible through gender identity markers. Gender is there from the start of intelligible dialogue and governs self-consciousness formation.60 The battle for recognition of self-consciousness formation is a gendered one. TERFs anxieties of self-actualizations for gender

59 Beauvoir’s negativity model has interesting parallel’s to the Unintelligibility models in 3.2.3 and Halberstam’s failure model in 4.4
60 “Are they not also, and from the start, born into discourses— including social categories— that establish their intelligibility as human subjects? Gender, or rather the gender matrix, would be one such field of intelligibility that governs subject formation.” Butler, Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 44
changing reveal a need for recognition to affirm their sex, indicating its social determination. I present three defenses of a biological sex, the pragmatic defense, Hegelian defense, and Stryker’s defense. The Hegelian defense argues humans attempt to dominate their base instincts through social recognition, and the elimination of sex would be a poor method of attempting to dominate our natural essence. Stryker takes Hegel’s premises in a different direction, agreeing gender is an attempt to dominate the natural sex, but that such a war is desirable. Stryker believes transgender people ought to receive recognition for self-actualizing as at war with nature even if nature if defunct. If the transgender’s role is to be the monstrous outsider, then they can garner recognition by playing the part. In Section 2.5 I develop a gender abolitionist account. Following this view, gender is a tool of ideology which uses recognition to force self-actualizations adhere to certain norms. To avoid gender it suggests an abolition of gender and all identity, instead suggesting recognition arise in verb form, one may act transgender without being transgender. Otherwise the gender abolitionist finds static identity is repackaged, simplified, and falsified such that not the self-consciousness nor the self-actualization is really being recognized, but merely a required non-choice identity forced by society. Escalante discusses how the trans question encapsulates transgender individuals recognitional status as object, reduced to conversation topic. In resistance the gender abolitionist seeks for persons to be not recognized qua identity categories such as women, but as our selves devoid of identity categorization. Irigaray advances this account of women as unintelligible within the dominant society. They understand women through a negativity more extreme than Beauvoir where women is not even object, but excluded from the preconditions for self-actualizing entirely.

Ultimately chapter 2 teaches us that desiring recognition, we learn to navigate a world of identity which predates us and constrains self-actualization. From interaction with others we
develop a shifting self-actualization that is continuously informed by the recognition of those around us. Yet crucially not all recognition is the same. For the gender abolitionist this is a world of violent conformity. Yet, Butler offers us hope, that we can continually self-actualize our identities and through dialogue and recognition shift identity markers in liberatory manners.61 This is supported by Taylor’s optimistic account of Hegel on domination. Taylor argues to battle for recognition in the initial struggle is contradictory, since the acknowledgement of a need for recognition and language to enable it can only emerge in conversation between two independent self-consciousnesses.62 Yet recognition is complicated when identities are constructed around negativity, such as Beauvoir’s understanding of women as the negative object of the man subject’s position characteristics. Furthermore, gender has provided evidence that recognition has profound impacts in shaping and violating identity, as Taylor puts it “a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.”63 Or as Escalante warns, recognition can frame group identities as object. From gender, particularly the debate about the desirability of unintelligibility, comes an understanding that some forms of recognition can be harmful. Recognition as a necessary desire, appears to shape identities in ways according and

61 Butler expands on this “the sorts of creatures who desire recognition, and who come to understand ourselves in the social relations by which recognition is conferred and received. As a result, we come to understand ourselves as social creatures who are already related to those with whom we negotiate the terms of recognition. We belong to each other prior to the act of recognition that constitutes our value for each other. We do not make up those terms through which we are recognized since we are born into a language that precedes us and acts on us. But neither are we fully determined by such discourses; they can be resisted, resignified, dissolved, and new language can be wrought from and against the old.” Butler Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 44

62 Taylor, Ethics of Authenticity, pg. 72

63 Taylor, Politics of Recognition pg. 25
contrary to desirable self-actualization. In the following chapter I will discuss further three problem areas for recognition: Domination, Intelligibility, and Misrecognition. In this chapter I will discuss harmful and deficient methods of recognition, and address these barriers to achieving an isothumotic recognitional state.
Chapter 3: Harmful Recognition: Domination, Intelligibility, Misrecognition

3.1 Recognition as Domination

3.1.1 Image Subjugation

Dominance relationships built around recognition are commonplace. Titles such as Mrs. and Dr. alongside the asymmetrical use of first and last name all directly recognize different social standings. This is not always harmful. An ideal isothumotic recognition relationship between parent and child would still involve recognition of different statuses. Yet often these hierarchical relationships are manifested via identity relationships in harmful ways e.g. racism. The damaging nature of deprecating domination using recognition manifests through “Image Subjugation.” Fanon argues the most dangerous weapon of colonizers is the “imposition of their image of the colonized on the subjugated people… in order to be free, must first of all purge themselves of these deprecating self-images.” ⁶⁴ Through domination and control of identity, there emerges an additional barrier to picturing forms of self-actualization. This can be understood through a collective conception of a group thumos. In struggles for recognition and self-actualization, “Indignation on one’s own behalf then extends to the class as a whole and engenders feelings of solidarity.” ⁶⁵ Thus our thumos somewhat shares the recognition possibilities for our class. As more women enter STEM, more women can conceptualize the possibility of self-actualizing STEM identities. Image subjugation harms the dominated in being able to self-actualize their own liberatory identities in the ways Butler suggests.

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⁶⁴ Taylor, Politics of Recognition pg. 65 on Fanon
⁶⁵ Fukuyama pg. 171
3.1.2 Withholding Recognition

Accepting the Hegelian lord bondsman conclusion that one cannot gain recognition through domination, does not preclude recognitions use as a tool for domination. Following the Hegelian argument, since domination is a poor method of achieving recognition, dominations out to be declining globally over time. However, theories of gender domination explain how domination persists in contemporary societies by controlling recognition. A Hegelian may respond with the observation that rises in domination do not refute the long-term trend toward decreasing domination. They may simply indicate we are less far along in the Hegelian arc of history toward equal recognition, than often believed. Such claims are non-falsifiable, one can always stretch the Hegelian arc of history over a longer time. Regardless of these claims about the future direction of domination, the important takeaway is controlling recognition can be used as a method of domination. Control over recognition, is controlling humanity’s fundamental desire. Withholding and granting recognition from certain methods of self-actualization, rather then seeking recognition through domination, provides a powerful system of controlling self-consciousnesses. Withholding recognition as a method of control is commonplace. Giving the “cold shoulder” punishment or intentionally responding to messages slowly are methods of withholding recognition to encourage or discourage certain behaviors. Furthermore, the withholding of recognition develops hierarchical relationships of authority and dependence, “desire for recognition can also lead us into one-sided relationships of dependence. In addition, even if recognition in the fullest sense is clearly a reciprocal relation for Hegel, his account of the social-ontological significance of recognition allows for unequal ascriptions of authority.”

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66 Ikäheimo et al. pg 3-4
Battles for recognition emerge around hierarchical position and dependence in which the winner is the one who can most withhold recognition. This is reflected by dispirit zero-sum dating advice which argues romantic partners who win battles of recognition by caring less are in a privileged position since they will sacrifices less for their partner then they receive.

This use of withholding recognition as a tool of domination extends to the macropolitical level of democratic liberalism. Under democratic liberalism political issues become battles of recognition decided by voting majorities. Group thumos often described as political tribalism manifests around supporting political beliefs. Yet political movements rarely simply desire the recognition or legitimacy of their own political goals, but have a megalothumotic desire to dominate competing beliefs and achieve universal support. For example, pro-life abortion movements are not satisfied with people simply recognizing them as independent agents who would choose not to have an abortion, but view it as necessary to dominate groups with pro-choice ideologies and prevent them from being recognized as holders of legitimate beliefs. Often times influential figures play a large role in determining the Overton window, or spectrum, of legitimate beliefs and identity markers group thumos are shaped around. Even the subconscious decisions made by influential women on how to portray themselves qua women, shape how the identity women is recognized. Often, these shifts in recognition are necessary for successful political and material changes. For example following newly recognized understandings of womanhood, abortion rights and the availability of birth control increased.\(^67\)

\(^67\) Fukuyama.
3.1.3 Taking Equal Mutual Recognition Seriously: Ethics, Education, and Homogenization

To resolve recognition as a form of domination, it seems ethically preferable to adopt an isothumotic system of recognizing others as equal self-consciousnesses. Hegel’s argument concludes by saying move towards such a system is inevitable as history progresses. However, it seems we can impose an additional ethical obligation to recognize all humans as equal self-consciousnesses through isothumotic relationships of recognition. One could imagine a Kantian style of argumentation, which finds such an approach an appealing universalizable maxim. However, using ethical reasoning to equally recognize self-consciousnesses runs into problems. An ethical imperative to recognize all equally seems to either require recognition of some universal shared feature of humans, or the recognition of all traits as equal.

The former appears to lead to homogenization. Recognition of others based on a single characteristic limits self-actualization to being around those universal characteristics. We would not be recognizing what people made of our selves through self-actualization as of equal value, but merely recognizing existing self-consciousness universally. Everyone deriving recognition for the same shared characteristic from the same source appears to foster homogeneity.\textsuperscript{68} Furthermore, it implies dehumanization of those who shift away from some universal feature, as no longer recognizable as human self-consciousnesses to society. A truly liberating form of liberation seems to require recognition which is interactive and particular. The latter recognition of all traits as equal similarly struggles. Any recognition that arises from compulsion, even via ethics, seems to be false recognition. Taylor compares such a demand to a “demand that we find the earth round or flat, the temperature of the air hot or cold.”\textsuperscript{69} Ethics like domination cannot

\textsuperscript{68} Taylor pg. 42-43
\textsuperscript{69} Taylor, Politics of Recognition pg. 69
force recognition or belief. Therefore instead of pure compulsion, one could use education as a tool to shift the Overton window of recognition. Through positive examples and representation one could eliminate subjugating images of identity, shifting towards isothumotic recognition. As we have moved to liberal societies and gained more independence in self-actualization, universal methods of recognition have become more difficult and seem insufficient. Therefore as established in exploring domination, it is no longer a battle to receive a now deficient generic universal recognition, but battles over the particulars of what is recognized (domination), what can be recognized (intelligibility), and how it is recognized (misrecognition). We can see intelligibility’s influence over recognition in Taylor’s message “What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can fail.” In Section 3.1.1 I discussed how deprecating images can harm the group thumos of an entire identity group. In Section 3.1.2 I argued dominating what is recognized goes beyond identity groups, and to the macropolitical level of ideology. From these sections we can understand that domination can be used to control the allocation of recognition, and therefore human recognition-seeking behavior.

3.2 Recognition and Intelligibility

3.2.1 Intelligibility

Through analyzing the intelligibility of self-actualizations we can understand their different relationships with recognition. An intelligible person is one which can be recognized

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70 Taylor, Politics of Recognition pg. 34-35, expands on this “General recognition was built into the socially derived identity by virtue of the very fact that it was based on social categories that everyone took for granted. Yet inwardly derived, personal, original identity doesn’t enjoy this recognition a priori. It has to win it through exchange, and the attempt can fail.”

71 Taylor, Politics of Recognition pg. 34-35
and categorized within a social order. Yet certain persons or groups can be unintelligible, unable to be understood or recognized in the social order.\textsuperscript{72} Thus Butler and many sole gender theorists often seek to increase the understanding and intelligibility of marginalized people to increase their access to recognition. As more progressive understandings of gender are adopted, more complex gender identities can be understood and recognized. Through this those persons’ self-actualizations become intelligible to be recognized within a societal framework. To exemplify this we can look at the greater difficulties which come with understanding more complex gender identities. FTM or MTF transgender individuals which transition within the gender binary are more understandable and recognizable than non-binary counterparts. Some persons can recognize someone who has a different binary gender identity yet fail to understand or recognize those outside the binary. Beyond that the picture gets more complicated by people with genderfluid identities which constantly shift, or bigender people who simultaneously possess multiple gender identities, sometimes both within and outside the binary. Yet language exists to understanding much of these things, and identities which are not intelligible to society at large are intelligible in conversations within transgender communities. Thus we can imagine two forms of intelligibility, one’s intelligibility to society at large, and intelligibility to those other group members which share identity markers. While less likely, group members could lack intelligibility with regards to other group members if they lack the characteristics of recognizability for that group. This model explains how the constraints of social identities effect intelligibility at the stage of subject-formation. We self-actualize identity around certain properties, “before even entering the Intelligibility and normative horizon of mutual recognition;\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{72} Ikäheimo et al., Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 11
and it is undoubtedly the case that these classificatory acts possess a “normative” power over us that is almost completely beyond our control and not subject to our will.”

3.2.2 Unintelligibility

Unintelligibility is favored by gender abolitionists as a method of escaping recognition’s use in domination. One argument for seeking unintelligibility is that self-actualization is fundamentally undermined by people being relegated to societally recognizable traits. Becoming intelligible is to filter one’s self through limited categories, e.g. trans women accessing womanhood via cis womanhood standards. It is preferable to self-actualize a societally unrecognizable existence. Some argue certain groups are fundamentally unintelligible. These groups only appear intelligible where they assimilate or accept dominant identities. This is particularly pervasive for transgender subjects. Societies do not wish for the elimination of transgender people, but transgender people devoid of transness. The intelligible recognizable version of a transgender subject is often a reversion to a pre-transition cisgender subject. Societal recognition of this model of the self is constantly used alongside denial recognition of the self-actualized transgender self to pressure individuals towards the adoption of an intelligible yet constrained subject. With the promised reward of recognition for reversion. This thinking is commonplace in conversations surrounding transgender identity from conversion therapy to misgendering and clothing mandates. Even the well-intended cisgender recognizing self-consciousness often emphasizes the difficulty of adapting to what they see as a new actualization of a person, which is more difficult for them to recognize then the previously easily understood

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73 Honnoth, Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 56-57
74 For more see Reid-Brinkley Voice Dipped in Black, which finds recognition of black speech filtered through the lens of an alien nonrecognizable black speaker. Such speech is only recognizable to white listeners when the speech assimilates too whiteness.
cisgender identity. A pessimistic gender abolitionist would argue such a well-intended cisgender subject can never truly recognize such gender identities. The simple reason being they simply lack the experiential knowledge of that identity, e.g. being able to conceptualize feelings of genderfluidity. But furthermore cisgender subjects understand transgender subjects in relation to their cisgender pre-transition reversion. A transgender women is understood in terms of transitioning away from a cisgender pre-transition body. A “new” name is understood in opposition to a deadname etc. Thus any recognition of a transgender subject as transgender on behalf of none-transgender individuals is tied to these violent understandings. Lacking the experiential understanding, a well-intentioned recognizer can try to avoid this problem by functionally separating a transgender individual into two subjects. The pre-transition reversion which must be forgotten, and a new cisgender static subject. Thus the cisgender subject can contextualize and recognize the transgender subject as a different cisgender subject. But this does not seem to truly recognize the particularity of their self-actualized identity. Lending credence to the argument that transgender subjects are fundamentally unintelligible to society outside of intergroup recognition.

Lavender expands upon the how the societal recognition of transgender people is a structurally designed impossibility. Dominant understandings of how gender can be self-actualized “premises reality on the centrality of cisness in essence cisnormativity, in which cis

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75 This example primarily applies to understanding FTM or MTF transgender people. Non-binary and other fluid genders only introduce harder complexities for cisgender subjects. Furthermore in this example I oversimplify transgender experiences by discussing through the lens of transition. Many transgender individuals do not go through the exemplified ideal of a single transition period. There is a wide variety of different life experiences. These oversimplifications only further the point that recognizing transgender subjects without experiential similarities brings difficulty.
people are the ‘natural.’” Thus transgender subjects only have intelligibility through “proximity to the perceived naturalness of cisness,” upon which recognition is conditioned. Intelligible parts are not transgender identity at all, but cisgender properties mapped on to transgender subjects. To receive societal recognition as intelligible requires proof of the legitimacy of deviant gender identities. Yet, such proof must be done through a supposedly “neutral” understanding of gender that presumes cisgenderism. The result is deviant gender subjects being grouped under terms such as non-binary, based on the relation to a cisgender binary. Similarly, the “trans” in transgender is a misnomer for many understood as transgender whose gender identities have always been the same, but was understood later. Therefore, even a transgender subject which somehow achieves societal recognition as a neutral speaker would be unable to communicate the unintelligible transgender experiences to receive recognition. Even worse, they risk devaluing unintelligible transgender self-actualizations and upholding cisgender understandings as “objective” or “true” of gender. Thus, there is no intelligible understanding of gender which can be recognized by society which simultaneously gets at unintelligible self-actualizations of gender. Society is fundamentally separated into different languages of gender.

3.2.3 Unintelligibility as Actualization

Following from the arguments in 3.2.2 which find intelligibility inherently restrictive of self-actualizations and impossible at the societal level, some theorists suggest liberation is found in actualizing unintelligible identities. Yet, to be unintelligible is to be unrecognized by society. One may wonder how an unintelligible self-actualization could achieve recognition. A staunch

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76 Lavender, Trans Argument, Trans Rage
77 Lavender, Trans Argument, Trans Rage
78 Trans as a latin prefix according to Merriam Webster means “across, beyond, through, so as to change,” the meanings are similar for English.
unintelligibility defender may argue such a thing is impossible.⁷⁹ Finding recognition seeking impossible or undesirable, they would challenge the foundation of a recognition framework entirely. A recognitional framework cannot help but demand recognition seeking which is unachievable and harmful. This could draw out a pessimist framework for marginalized identities who are forced to always seek a recognitional liberation which never comes. I put forward an alternative unintelligibility theory, emerging from the intelligibility distinction between being intelligible to society, and intelligible to group members. This account forwards isothumotic recognition seeking within a group identity. Unintelligible identities for society can still be intelligible within a group. Therefore Hegelian recognition of independent self-consciousnesses can still manifest through conversation and understandings between each other. Baedan uses the metaphor of a swarm of ravens to describe an unintelligible group.⁸⁰ Under this account, such a swarm would be unrecognizable, individual ravens indistinguishable for human society, yet capable of differentiation, recognition, and communication amongst the swarm. Such an account would likely encourage a society of significant negative liberties. Enabling people to find recognition within smaller communities rather than attempting to guarantee such recognition via the public. This model of actualization societally unrecognizable identities seems to get the upsides of recognition and autonomous self-determination from a micropolitical level while avoiding recognitions use as a harmful tool at the macropolitical level of society.

⁷⁹ See Baedan 2008 for more on this sort of view.
⁸⁰ Notably while I use Baedan’s metaphor this move is my own. Baedan’s path is more akin to the staunch unintelligibility view. Baedan 2008 does not directly endorse a isothumotic recognition view, although they allow for shared joy with identity groups.
3.2.4 Intelligibility as Actualization

Butler argues for a more optimistic picture of recognizability. Butler argues recognition is always partial, it does not capture all that a person is or can self-actualize. Thus it does not limit the self-actualization of identity. Rather, limiting the intelligibility of subjects limits the range of gender understandings which can be supported by societal recognition. Therefore “new vocabularies and new social understandings of gender would promise or provide a form of recognition that would be less constraining.” Therefore from expanding our understandings we can expand recognizable subjects and better strive towards an isothumotic world with universal yet particularized recognition. Such a world would “more fully honor the lived complexity of gendered experience and prove to be less restrictive and constraining for those seeking to live their lives free of discrimination and violence.”

A method of working towards such an intelligible society is passing. Passing, in this context, refers to transgender people receiving recognition via cisgender identities for their actualization from cisgender recognizers. For example, a transgender women being recognized as a cisgender women. Therefore they have achieved recognition for their gender self-actualization via the intelligible cisgender conception of womanhood. Passing is generally understood as assimilation, a necessary part of achieving recognition, but often resulting in violence for those unable to meet cisgender conceptions of their gender. However, passing can be understood as a Hegelian inversion of intelligibility. Passing signifies a transgender person has passed the societal gender recognition test. Transgender people who can pass better then

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81 Butler, Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 34
82 Butler, Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 37
83 Butler, Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 37
84 This is supported by Beauvoir’s argument in 2.3.
cisgender people, or be recognized as more emblematic of cisgender womanhood then cis women gain power. They can redefine what is recognized as woman. Moreover, by virtue of passing they undermine constraints on identity, such as the static separation of genders. Through passing transgender people can occupy the unique position of being a recognized shaper of societal understandings of gender identity, while not being beholden to those standards. The transgender women can be recognized as emblematic of cisgender womanhood, without aspiring or self-actualizing cis womanhood. Thus they are able to occupy and reshape identity standards they are not restricted by. In contrast cisgender woman, particular those emblematic of cis womanhood, would be more limited in changing their understandings of their own identity position. A transgender person passing as a man could represent masculinity through pink dresses without risking their self. A cisgender man could not take similar actions without questioning their own masculinity, since it is in part beholden to existing understandings of masculinity. Changing what cisgender society understands man as, requires a change in belief as to what they are. Thus intelligible transgender subjects have the potential to quickly make large strides in recognition, opening the doors to more forms of self-actualization.

In section 3.2 I have analyzed intelligibility as a barrier to isothumotic recognition. In section 3.2.1 I outlined intelligibility, and how different self-actualized identities have varying levels of intelligibility. I introduced a distinction between a self-actualized identity being recognizable by society, and within a group identity by other group members. In 3.2.2 I dive deeper into what makes certain identities, particularly transgender identities, unintelligible. In 3.2.3 I present an account which encourages the unintelligibility of marginalized identities as desirable. These accounts argue attempts at receiving societal recognition for marginalized identities are impossible and/or more harmful or constraining then their benefits. I develop a new
path for an unintelligibility account which reconciles with desiring isothumotic recognition by seeking recognition within a group at a micropolitical level, while evading macropolitical societal recognition. In 3.2.4 I return to a pro-intelligibility account which seeks to increase the intelligibility of marginalized identities through methods such as representation and education for societal recognition. Both intelligibility and unintelligibility as methods of self-actualization offer different paths forward for recognition. I will not endorse one’s view of recognition at the societal scale over another. Regardless of which approach one finds more convincing, both methods can forward accounts which encourage recognition at the micropolitical level within group identities. Lastly, I present passing as method of marginalized peoples using their unintelligible identities to induce misrecognition for the purpose of infiltrating dominant identity groups and reshaping those identities as activists.

3.3 Recognition as Misrecognition

3.3.1 Misrecognition and Consciousness

We’ve discussed harmful recognition through the lens of withholding recognition for domination and whether being recognizable is desirable. Misrecognition shifts the focus from whether a self-actualization is recognized to how it is recognized. The simplest examples of misrecognition deny self-actualizations and replace them with another asserted vision. Whether by misgendering or deadnaming, misrecognition diverts recognition from the self-actualized self towards a falsified self. When done intentionally, this often aims to overwrite a self-actualization with a contradictory false self through recognition. Beyond misrecognition causing harm, repeatedly facing misrecognition builds epistemic privilege. Those whose self-actualizations face challenges are forced to develop greater conscious understanding of the self. They learn to identify how others have misrecognized them, and how the falsified identity informs the others’
self-actualization as well as their own. Nolen argues this epistemic privilege is a Hegelian inversion mirroring the lord-bondsman dialectic “those who have been misrecognized, as occurs in the master/slave dialectic, are forced to discover a greater consciousness of self… which in turn allows them to discover a greater consciousness of others and of what it is about others that has similarly been misrecognized.”

This can be intuitively understood as the build up of experiences. We can imagine that a cisgender person who continually facing gender misrecognition to be capable of greater understanding and empathy towards misrecognition faced by transgender individuals.

3.3.2 All Recognition as Misrecognition; Identity Fixing by the Other

Beyond the gender abolitionists who seek to avoid societal recognition, are those who understand all recognition as misrecognition. This account forwarded by Sartre argues all recognition is identity fixing. Self-consciousness are fixed by identity determinations made by the other. Thus there are all misrecognitions, since they do not truly reflect the self-consciousness understanding of their own self-actualization. All instances of recognition therefore deny an independent self-consciousness the ability to freely self-actualize. Recognition as coming from the other is always a foreign power constraining the self. Thus recognition as a Hegelian desire is a limited fulfillment which comes at the cost of free agency.

Sartre’s account has several problems. First, it understands self-actualization as an internal process which develops a static identity, compared to a static perceived identity. This ignores how self-actualizations of identity are continuously reshaped through recognition and

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85 Gertz, Nolen pg. 150  
86 Ikäheimä et al., Recognition and Ambivalence pg. 3-4
dialogue with all self-consciousnesses. Such reshaping is often positive. Another may recognize something about you did not realize about yourself which you find deeply correct. In this way, one’s self-actualizations of the self may be altered by another, but in a way which seems to develop or elucidate rather than constrain the self. Of course as discussed in 3.3.1 some recognition is harmful misrecognition. However, it seems wrong to categorize all recognition as misrecognition, since there is no static true self the self seeks to actualize being denied in by each instance of recognition. Such inevitable misrecognition implies the break down of communication between perceiver and perceived, and threatens to fall into relativism.

3.4 Reviewing Harmful Recognition

Chapter 3 aimed to explore three main forms of harmful recognition which pose barriers to achieving the Hegelian dream of humanity with complete isothumotic recognition. In section 3.1 I explored how domination controls recognition, instilling marginalized groups with subjugating self-images, and uplifting harmful ideology. In Section 3.2 I explore how the intelligibility of self-actualizations determines what can be recognized. This section explores different strategies for minority response to lack of recognition. A pro-intelligibility approach seeks to spread understanding so that society may recognize formerly unintelligible subjects as intelligible. An unintelligibility centered approach abandons societal recognition to retreat into identity group communities for recognition by group members at the micropolitical level. While this abandons a utopic vision of a world where all recognize all others equally, perhaps that vision of a Hegelian utopia is far too simple and totalizing of the variety identities of humanity. In section 3.3 I discuss how misrecognition can overwrite self-actualizations in a way that denies autonomy and causes harm. Yet, I argue that this process builds up epistemic privilege through better understanding self-actualization. This continues in response to Sartre’s account of all
recognition as misrecognition, where I identify that understanding self-consciousnesses as growing in dialogue with each other, rather than tied to a static truth better understands recognition. Furthermore it provides a hopeful explanation for how we develop the communication and recognition between self-consciousnesses required for isothumotic relations. Through the development of self-consciousnesses and epistemic privilege through dialogue and occasional misrecognition, people can develop mutually recognitional relationships.
Chapter 4: Hegelian Recognition Theory Applied to Technology

4.1 Technology and Recognition

Now that I have developed a robust lens of recognition, and the barriers which hinder achieving isothumotic recognition, I will apply this lens to the technology which influences the particulars of recognition in our present age. In section 4.2 I will develop the concept of technology as a mirror of ourselves, which serves an reflective other. As a mirror it serves simultaneously roles as a source of recognition and self-understanding, with an underlying threat of replacement. In section 4.3 I will focus specifically on the concept of data, and how in addition to being a mirror, like other technologies, it influences recognitional relationships between humans. I then analyze the concept of data through the three harmful methods of recognition, gaining greater insight into how data represents societal issues for isothumotic recognition in the present day.

4.2 Technology: Reflecting Human Struggles With Recognition

Technology, from AI and social media to facial recognition, is a contemporary focal point for recognition. Technology is often an other which we project a mirror of ourselves onto. Technology is both a site for dreaming of a utopic future, and a threatening source of apocalyptic anxieties.\(^87\) Butler interprets Hegel’s description of the process of recognition of self-consciousnesses to be recognizing the reflection of ones’ self in another, ““Self-consciousness . . . has come out of itself . . . it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other”… He is suggesting that whatever consciousness is, whatever the self is, it will find itself only through a reflection of itself in another.”\(^88\) As technology advances, its closeness as a mirror grows. People are

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\(^87\) Gertz, Nolen pg. 146
\(^88\) Butler, Judith. Longing for recognition commentary on the work of Jessica Benjamin pg. 286
frightened by the near indistinguishable realism of AI generated video and audio. Whether via consciousness uploading or training AI on significant amounts of speech and text technology can quite literally generate mirror personas. The rise of strong generative textual AI has resulted in the rise of AI dating apps to substitute for human romantic connection. All of this technology serves two roles as a mirror. First, it is the other we can project our reflection on, serving a way to better understand our domination, alienation, or misrecognition. Second, it serves as a replacement of humans performing similar functions or recognition. In this role it is the other we engage in a struggle of recognition with. Technologies represent the potential for replacement, by the nameless other of automation. Thus, “To see technologies that we recognize as functionally equivalent to ourselves be destroyed and replaced is thus to be offered a positive proof of the value, or, to be more specific, the valuelessness, of our rights and responsibilities.”

“To see technologies that we recognize as functionally equivalent to ourselves be destroyed and replaced is thus to be offered a positive proof of the value… of our rights and responsibilities.”

This anxiety of mirrors as replacements, parallels our understandings of gender discrimination. Transgender people as others are feared as replacements of cisgender people, encouraging forced reversion to cisgender identity.

4.3 Data: Changing Recognition Relationships

Like other technologies data serves as a mirror which reflects and replaces, but it plays a further role in influencing interaction and recognition between humans. Data constantly informs our evaluations and therefore how we recognize other self-consciousnesses. A student with high-grade evaluations is more likely to be recognized as an academic. In this way, data as a mirror

89 Gertz, Nolen pg. 152
can serve as a proxy source of recognition by reflecting a hypothetical other. A 95th percentile performance on some task symbolizes relative success in a struggle for recognition. The data serves as a proxy for the recognition or admiration of others. A widespread example of this is the human benchmark test, a popular online test used in cognitive science research. The test evaluates you on a variety of cognitive tasks, showing your percentile performance against other test takers. What began as a simple source of psychological data has become a battleground for recognition. Many people retake the exam many times, training to improve their times and developing pride in some sort of proxy recognition arising from their relative performance. This behavior seems to imply understanding of data providing a proxy for recognizing humans.

As a mirror, data similarly contains harmful recognition patterns. Data and human users seem to have differing domination relationships mirroring the lord-bondsman. Of course a dataset does not have a consciousness, but it confers a recognition via its status as a mirrored proxy human. Data initially appears to be dominated by humans, who set the parameters of research questions and investigative methods. And yet, data appears similar to an object of desire, something that humans seek yet cannot determine and develop a dependence on for recognition and decision-making, without any reciprocal recognitional need. In this vein it seems possible to picture an isothumotic recognition relationship. This would be a researcher who uses data as an equal lab partner to help guide their conclusions without dominating or being dominated by it. The megalothumotic relationship also seems possible, one could imagine a researcher yielding to the domination of a super AI, or one who dominates and manipulates data

to affirm their desired conclusions. Yielding to the dominance of data threatens to replicate past results. Thus in a world with significant inequality, this would serve to continue or exacerbate these statistical inequalities.\(^91\) For instance, a person dominated by data would be disproportionately more likely to recognize black defendants as guilty based on past data.\(^92\) Furthermore, data seems also able to serve as an object of recognition, something humans desire the recognition of, without any reciprocal burden. All of these relationships seem possible, since ultimately as reflective mirror, it’s about what the humans project.

Beyond domination, data introduces questions of intelligibility and misrecognition. A common problem with data is non-inclusion, which takes the form of lacking representation. This can manifest in the form of a census which lacks options which people identify with. This is often a reality on forms asking for race and gender. Such lacking representation can serve as a loss of recognition for the self. Or, it can force misrecognition as the self-consciousness decides the most accurate alternative, somewhat legitimating a false actualization. Data misrecognition can occur through wrongful categorization or inclusion. For instance, a transgender man is categorized as a women and thereby rejected under an affirmative action program for college admissions. First this wrongs the transgender man in the way all misrecognition does, by endorsing a harmful falsehood as truth. This wronging is similar to finding someone guilty of a crime they did not commit, known as a false positive. But the additional greater wrong of misrecognition illustrated through data is the denial of a person’s stated identity. A false positive may happen due to incomplete information and negligence, but it does not involve directly receiving and then denying self-actualization. When a college chooses to reject a trans man for

\(^91\) See discussion of ProPublica in Johnson for more.
\(^92\) See discussion of ProPublica in Johnson for more.
cisgender men they recognize as man, they are affirming a falsehood, but also denying a communicated self-actualization in favor of a false self. In this case their self-image is being received, denied, and forcibly rewritten. Thus, misrecognition exploits these moments of vulnerability where recognition results in the self being “given over.” The preservation of agency and self-actualization seems a crucial factor here. A trans man being sorted to receive a scholarship for woman seems to be a similar wrong of misrecognition, even if it results in their material benefit. Yet, if the trans man consensually applied for that scholarship on account of facing similar conditions and socializations in their upbringing and seeing himself in the mission, it seems to be a furthering of their own self-actualization.

4.4 Conclusion

My project has been to develop the strongest account of understanding recognition and the barriers to achieving the Hegelian goal of mutual isothumotic recognition. In Chapter 1 I began by establishing a baseline theory of recognition and self-consciousness formation. Using the lord-bondsman dualism to offer a Hegelian critique of domination as being deficient in fulfilling the desire for recognition. Thus, society ought to progress towards more equal isothumotic recognition. In Chapter 2 I challenged that assumption by looking to theories of gender, which offer strong understandings of the domination of recognition. Through the process

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93 Butler, Judith Longing for Recognition pg. 287 “relationship to the Other is to be found in this fundamental and reciprocal state of being ‘given over.’”
94 Ripstein provides an account of harmless wrongdoing where one can be benefited yet still wronged. Often this manifests where someone is made materially better off, yet their fundamental rights and liberties were violated. In this case even if someone is benefited by a scholarship they are wronged by being entered without their consent. Admittedly the example given is not entirely harmless, as there is psychic harm from the misgendering.
of gender to understand recognition better, I used Chapter 1’s theory of recognition to better understand gender. Gender itself is understood in many ways, from a liberatory performance for sole gender theorists to an imposed constraint for gender abolitionists. Chapter 2 showcases through gender a myriad ways recognition can manifest, and understanding the how, whom, why, and for what of recognition shapes identity groups and self-actualization. Thus, gender brought me to further explore three types of harmful recognition I identified as barriers to an isothumotic world in Chapter 3. First, in exploring domination I found controlling the allocation of recognition can be used to replicate ideology and subjugating images which influence self-actualization. Intelligibility prompted thinking about whether identities could even be recognized, and whether they ought too. I answered this question by developing two traditions, those who seek to increase intelligibility for societal recognition, and those who wish to avoid societal recognition through unintelligibility preferring micropolitical recognition within identity communities. Through misrecognition I explored how recognition itself can harm a harm, yet through repeated exposure it is one which develops epistemic privilege. With this epistemic privilege one can better understand self-actualizations, which shift over time in dialogue with each other. In Chapter 4 I have applied these enriched understandings of recognition to present day issues of technology. I argued technology serves a role as a mirroring other, the reflection of the self-consciousness that also serves as competition which threatens replacement. I specifically explored data as a type of technology I find as greatly influential in influencing the recognitional relationships developed between humans. Thus I analyzed data’s use in the three harmful methods of recognition. I explored the consequences of people dominated by data, making decisions that reproduce existing trends and structural inequalities. Intelligibility is reflected in the research questions asked, and who is included in the data set. Lack of inclusion may appear
harmless, but it can have a whole host of harms. For example, historical focus on cis white men for drug testing has resulted in minorities facing untested side effects. Data misrecognition like most misrecognition poses a harmful denial of agency and self-actualization. However in many cases outside of data misrecognition comes from ignorance or unintended mistake. In these cases often misrecognition arises from an other erroneously recognizing a harmful self-actualization without knowledge. Often data manifests a more malicious form of misrecognition where a subject communicates a self-actualization that is then denied and overwritten by an other. This intentional denial of a self-actualization and a replacement with another elevates the wrongdoing, and with the ubiquitous nature of data manifests as a common recognitional problem faced by marginalized individuals. The takeaway from Chapter 4 is not anti-technology. Yet, I seek to display the importance of understanding its recognitional effects in determining the outcome of how it is used. Technology is not a neutral mirror when projected upon, but something which plays a large role in upholding societal recognition both harmful and isothumotic. While technology can help provoke realizations for self-actualization or enable communication between humans, it can further domination, problems with intelligibility, and misrecognition in a variety of respects that need to be considered when it is used.

As our understanding of recognition grows the path to isothumotic recognition may appear more daunting. To show this does not need to be the case, I wish to end by looking to Halberstam’s hopeful approach for the future. Halberstam’s account shares similarities to previous accounts built around negativity. Rather than avoiding failure to achieve recognition,

95 See Dresser
96 such as Beauvoir’s negative account in 2.3, the negativity account of Irigaray in 2.5, and Stryker’s argument for the sex-gender distinction presented in 2.4.
Halberstam encourages a proactive resignation to failure.\textsuperscript{97} This is not a pessimist move, but rather a method of self-actualization which finds recognition precisely in moments of recognitional failure. We can illustrate this by looking at the lord-bondsman dualism through gender. Where the lord represents hegemonic societal understandings of gender, the bondsman is recognized precisely in their self-actualized failure to adhere to those standards. This could manifest as unintelligibility, that of one whose gender cannot be recognized. Yet, it is not limited to only being expressed through unintelligibility. For instance, it could be understood as being recognized for failing to achieve the intelligible category of man. This hybrid model of Hegelian recognition through failure provides four attractive benefits over the typical lord-bondsman which finds recognition through the self-actualization of works. First, this model grants the bondsman recognition without maintaining a relationship as dominated with the lord or society. Unlike passing, the transgender subject gains recognition through failure marking an independence from assimilating to gender standards. Second, this offers a path of self-actualization to those who cannot be figures which reshape group identity. The least productive gardener may struggle to garner the recognition to redefine gardening, under a traditional model. Focusing recognition around failure gives opportunities to those who fail to achieve status as symbols of their self-actualized identities. While we must continue to understand methods of recognition as we seek a more isothumotic world, we can find solace that recognition is afforded even to those who fail.

\textsuperscript{97} See Halberstam particularly pg. 1 and pg. 96.
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