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When Microcredit Doesn't Empower Poor Women: Recognition Theory's Contribution to the Debate Over Adaptive Preferences¹

By David Ingram

Book: Gottfried Schweiger (Ed), *Poverty and Recognition* (Springer 2019)

Abstract

This essay proposes recognition theory as a preferred approach to explaining poor women's puzzling preference for patriarchal subordination even after they have accessed an ostensibly empowering asset: microfinance. Neither the standard account of adaptive preference offered by Martha Nussbaum nor the competing account of constrained rational choice offered by Harriet Baber satisfactorily explains an important variation of what Serene Khader, in discussing microfinance, dubs the *self-subordination social recognition paradox*. The variation in question involves women who, refusing to reject the combined socio-economic benefits of patriarchal recognition *and* empowering microfinance, *dissemble* their subordination to men. In this situation, women experience a genuine form of divided consciousness which recognition theory frames as an identity crisis. Understanding the pathological nature of deceit as a way of life that blurs the boundaries between rational choice and rationalization, recognition theory

¹ I would like to especially thank Gottfried Schweiger for his copious comments on an earlier draft of this essay. I am also grateful to others who read and commented on the paper, including my wife, Jennifer Parks, the Northwestern University Philosophy Department Ethics Workshop participants, and the participants of the Recognition and Poverty Workshop that was sponsored by the University of Salzburg Centre for Ethics and Poverty.

shows how dissemblance itself is constrained by conflicting recognition orders in ways that prevent women who live such a life from successfully emancipating themselves. In this respect, recognition theory provides an important ---albeit, from the standpoint of recent feminist and intersectional research on identity and autonomy, inadequately qualified---norm of personal integrity and genuine agency requisite for conceptualizing adaptive preferences.

Debating Poor Women's Submission to Patriarchy: Adaptive Preference Versus Constrained Rational Choice

The old question posed by the existence of slaves who “happily” submit to their masters arises anew when examining the case of poor women in developing countries who “happily” submit to their husbands: Are they mistaken (perhaps brainwashed) into preferring submission or do they submit because they have no better alternative? Martha Nussbaum sometimes writes as though she were endorsing the former explanation: To paraphrase Nussbaum, submission to patriarchal authority often (perhaps typically) reveals a genuine preference and one, moreover, that reflects not just a mistaken belief but a pathological form of self-mutilation, a willful, ideological adaptation to a status that falls below a minimum threshold of human dignity. Thus, she says of one of the Indian women she encountered (Jayamma) that her resignation to being paid less than men for heavier work at an Indian brick kiln was a sign that she “seemed to lack not only the concept of herself as a person with rights that could be violated, but also the sense that what was happening to her was a wrong” (Nussbaum 2000: 113). Elsewhere in the case of another woman she met (Vasanti) who eventually achieved emancipation through joining a women’s microfinance cooperative, she comments that the endurance of beatings by her husband

expressed a genuine *adaptive preference* insofar as she lacked the idea that she was a person who had rights that were being violated by her husband (Nussbaum 2001:68-69).²

² The concept of adaptive preference has been the topic of extensive scrutiny going back to John Elster's (1987) discussion referencing Aesop's fable about the fox who decides to disdain the grapes that are beyond his grasp. Elster and others influenced by him (including Nussbaum) adhere to the idea that the alteration of one's preferences based on one's perception of their low probability of fulfillment reflects an unconscious or irrational adaptation to environmental constraints. More recently Serene Khader has challenged this view by arguing that adaptive preferences can be both rational and freely held regardless of whether they are appropriate or inappropriate. She defines inappropriate adaptive preferences (IAPs) as "(1) preferences inconsistent with basic flourishing (2) that are formed under conditions nonconductive to basic flourishing and (3) that we believe people might be persuaded to transform upon normative scrutiny of their preferences and exposure to conditions more conducive to flourishing" (Khader, 2011: 42). The difference between this conception of adaptive preference and what I call constrained rational choice is its *perfectionist* assumption of an *objective* (albeit relatively undefined), cross-cultural notion of human flourishing. Both Khader and Harriet Baber, who defends the constrained rational choice view, agree that constrained choices do not *eo ipso* reveal preferences. They also agree that preferring the best among realistic options, none of which is conducive to flourishing, preferring one component of flourishing at the expense of another when confronted with an unavoidable dilemma, or having a cultural conception of flourishing that does not correspond to a liberal (or Western) conception of individual emancipation, can be autonomous and rational without being inappropriately adaptive. By contrast, for Khader, IAPs arise whenever persons exaggerate the degree to which their

In her critique of Nussbaum, H. E. Baber (Baber 2007) observes that the choices these women made to submit to patriarchy were likely not revelatory of *adaptive preferences* at all; they do not reveal what they *preferred* in any *ideal* sense but what they *chose* as the only or best (most rational) alternative realistically available to them among a set of bad alternatives. In traditional societies, social ostracism, homelessness, and unemployment without beatings and exploitation are not rationally preferable to a secure life of exploitation and submission. Therefore, Jayamma and Vasanti likely did not prefer patriarchal oppression at all, but nonetheless acted rationally in adapting to it as something they perceived to be realistically unavoidable.

One might infer that what Jayamma and Vasanti preferred was a life of noble dignity and self-esteem---the very ideal of selfhood Nussbaum says they lack. But Baber doubts this. Indeed she says that it might be better for Jayamma to submit to her lousy job “without feelings of outrage or frustration” than to do so having felt that her dignity and esteem had been wounded (Baber 2007, 112). She explains her reasoning in a footnote:

I am skeptical about the notion of “higher pleasures” and about the idea that rights, self-esteem, and dignity” are inherently good. People who are well off

circumstances and cultural beliefs are incapable of being changed in a way that might allow them to choose a more flourishing life for themselves and for this reason freely (and reasonably) prefer not to choose potentially more fulfilling life options until prompted to do so through some external intervention.

develop expensive tastes, and, when their ordinary wants are satisfied, acquire new desires for various psychological goods and intangibles. I do not see why developing such tastes is such a good thing. More importantly, I worry when privileged social reformers fuss about providing less privileged people with self-esteem, dignity, and other intangibles because these goods are cheap whereas material improvements and changes to social policies and social practices that lock people into less poverty and drudgery are expensive and difficult to achieve If consciousness-raising and other ploys for giving poor women the idea that they are “ dignified persons with rights, entitled to more than they have” is . . . “a path to a better future” ---a future in which they can get the material benefits they want---then these practices are no doubt instrumentally good” (Baber 2007, 118n18)

Baber’s last concession is revealing in what it says about the link between social recognition, empowerment, and social change. Equally revealing is Baber’s assertion that it is perfectly rational for poor women to prefer economic security over living a life of dignity and self-esteem without suffering qualms. For Baber, it is not obvious that everyone would or should ideally prefer a life of dignity and esteem-worthiness. It is not obvious that these psychological goods would in an any ideal sense be rationally preferred by everyone as intrinsic to a fully realized life, be it one of empowerment or fulfillment. The most we can say with certainty is that instilling the idea of dignity and esteem-worthiness in the minds of poor women might encourage them to change their lives for the better; so the most we are entitled to infer is that dignity and

esteem-worthiness are contingent instrumental goods desired mainly by relatively well-off people who have been socialized to think in a certain Western way.

At stake in Baber's demotion of dignity and self-esteem to the status of instrumental goods is Nussbaum's own effort to develop a universal theory of human capability wherein dignity and self-esteem are posited as essential to human functioning (at least within the context of societies that have modernized or are undergoing modernization). That theory's straddling the boundaries of philosophical anthropology and cultural anthropology exposes it to the charge of being elitist and ethnocentric. Baber accordingly offers her own counterfactual notion of rational, unconstrained subjective preference as a less prejudicial alternative to Nussbaum's objective human capability theory. But Baber's alternative is not unproblematic.

To begin with, Baber herself acknowledges that some women submit to patriarchal oppression out of a sense of moral duty, rather than out of reluctant necessity. Equating moral duty with an indoctrinated habit of mind, she concedes that submission to patriarchal authority in these circumstances is not rationally *chosen*. Such submission can nonetheless be rationally criticized, precisely because it contradicts what women would rationally *prefer*. Indeed, by definition, duty constrains and sometimes conflicts with what we prefer.

So far this account about how morality-constrained choice can conflict with rational preference seems not so different from Nussbaum's own account of adaptive preferences. Indeed, the only difference appears to be in their respective conceptions of what preferences are; for Baber, moral duties cannot be conceptualized as preferences because they are social constraints on preferences that take the form of embodied habits and coercive norms. However, insisting on Baber's nomenclature poses conceptual problems of its own. Once we concede that patriarchal

moral norms impose duties that are carried out as a matter of voluntary choice rather than as a matter of mechanical routine and habit, and that such choices *do* sometimes reveal reasonably considered preferences based on reasonably ranked and balanced values (goods), we face the problem, once again, of adequately describing the harm these “preferences” do to women. If the harm does not consist in violating a genuine *subjective* preference, then it must consist in violating an *objective* feature of our humanity.

Baber would not doubt resist this conclusion by responding that a moral duty that was rationally chosen would not contradict rationally considered subjective preferences; therefore a duty to submit to patriarchal oppression would not be morally preferable. Her understanding of what it means to be rationally chosen, however, presumes a number of counterfactual conditions.³ And this leads her to reasonably conclude that the ideal reasoner cannot be expected to have the same genuine moral sentiments (whatever they might be) as the real reasoner. Rational moral choice in this counterfactual scenario no longer respects actual subjective preference. Elitism returns with the theoretical postulation of a *divided self*: the hypothetical self *qua* rational judge of moral sentiments and the real self *qua* socially constrained actor.

³ Baber presumes that a fully rational chooser possesses complete and perfect knowledge of the entire range of options and their consequences to self and other, is free to attach appropriate weights to consequences in light of an undistorted conception of self, reasons logically in constructing an efficient rank ordering of means and ends, and so forth. Rational moral preferences, then, would be moral preferences chosen by an “ideal spectator” or sympathetic moral reasoner, to use Adam Smith’s language.

The problem with Baber's understanding of rational choice as a purely *subjective* exercise in rational calculation is (to quote Nussbaum) that "proceduralism—even of a more complicated sort---seems insufficient without something in the way of a substantive theory" (139). Embedded in the procedure of rational choice are normative values that constrain our choice of preferences. We must assume that we are free and impartial with respect to understanding who we genuinely are and what we genuinely want; and we must extend that understanding to include others. The procedure must model something like a virtual dialog in which we sympathetically imagine our self to be the other in some relationship of autonomy and reciprocity.⁴

⁴ In an effort to mitigate the elitism implicit in setting forth an authoritative theory of supreme values, Nussbaum concedes that such values, for their part, must find ultimate justification in something like a universal democratic aggregation of subjective preferences, albeit preferences that have been critically modified by on-going, fully inclusive (cross-cultural) discussion, real or imagined, constrained by rational procedure. The circularity of this manner of reasoning, which she compares to John Rawls's understanding of practical reasoning as a process of achieving reflective equilibrium between settled moral judgements and inventive extrapolation from, generalization upon, and extension of these judgments (Nussbaum, 2000, 151), raises more questions than it answers. Settled moral judgments are easier to find within any given particular community at a given point in time than within the human community surveyed over a long stretch of history. Leaving aside the difficulty of establishing a robust set of settled moral judgments that can claim the status of universality, we might at least concede Nussbaum's conceptual point that any attempt to justify a life of reason, regardless of what procedure one

Nussbaum's own theory of universal human capability posits a conception of practical reasoning that incorporates individual dignity and social esteem into its dialogical structure. In combination with the capability to think, imagine, and sense, this conception presupposes basic freedoms, including critical reflection about planning one's life, exercising liberty of conscience, "being able to . . . *recognize* and show concern for other human beings," "exercising practical reasoning and entering into meaningful relationships of *mutual recognition* with other workers," and doing all this "in a way that involves *mutual recognition* of humanity" (Nussbaum, 2000: 80-82—my stress). In sum, acknowledging persons' universal humanity, showing concern for their particular individuality, and esteeming their social contributions and solidarity with us designate distinctive forms of mutual recognition that enable persons to engage in practical reasoning, become empowered as autonomous agents, and lead humanly fulfilled lives. Given this necessary connection between practical rationality, empowerment, fulfillment, and self-assertion, it should come as no wonder that women everywhere (and not just in the West) prioritize economic success and achieving a life of equal dignity and esteem-worthiness differently from Baber: for many of them, it is material well-being that provides the means for equal dignity and esteem-worthiness.

This takes me to the principal thesis of this paper: Recognition theory provides a better explanation for a women's choice to resist or submit to patriarchal subordination than either Nussbaum's or Baber's theories. These theories occlude the experience of divided selfhood I happens to model reason on, will require a substantive account of human nature, or flourishing human functioning (Nussbaum, 118, 130, 132, 136, 150, 154).

noted above in discussing the tension between different ways of being recognized: as one who possesses equal dignity and esteem-worthiness or as one who is subordinate and of lesser esteem. On Nussbaum's account of adaptive preferences, women identify so completely with their oppressed selves ---and so thoroughly suppress or fail to see their genuine humanity---that they experience no inner tension between what is rationally preferable for them and what they subjectively prefer. They are like happy slaves. The "cure" for this pathology is enlightenment by one who knows better. The idea that self-awareness comes about in the course of a protracted struggle for recognition that perhaps never achieves happy resolution doesn't figure in this account. The same can be said about Baber's alternative account of constrained rational choice. Women are depicted as rationally choosing the best option available to them; they might not be reconciled to their society's patriarchal norms, but their resignation to making the best of a bad situation poses no deep problem for their sense of self.

Baber's account, however, introduces an element of complexity in understanding the psychology of social adaptation. If we describe the adaptive choice in question as reluctant (or resigned) submission coupled with some manifest expressions of *resistance*, it is entirely possible that women who adapt in this fashion feel confident in their identity as emancipated women who have conscientiously rejected patriarchy. If, however, we describe the adaptive preference as feigned *affirmation* of submission coupled with no manifest expression of resistance, it is conceivable that women who adapt in this way, especially for an extended period of time, may lose confidence in who they really are. They may, accordingly, experience themselves as divided and, in the most extreme instance, begin to *deceive* themselves ---and not just others---about who they truly are. And this possibility seems to be all the more likely if their

sense of self is closely bound up with the way others recognize them, which is precisely what recognition theory teaches us.

Baber herself elsewhere appears to concede this point. She notes that poor women who choose the material security afforded by submitting to patriarchal authority often defy their preference for genuine recognition. Like the fox in Aesop's fable, they rationalize their disdain for something they truly want in order to live without it. According to Baber, these women *deceive* themselves. They know what they genuinely want --- to be treated as equals with dignity ---but have somehow forgotten this preference through the passage of time. Having suppressed or forgotten this knowledge, they now rationalize their submission to patriarchal domination as if it were something they preferred all along (Baber 2007, 112).

Baber's reference to the psychology of self-deception in characterizing how women rationalize their self-subordination is revealing on a number of levels. For one thing, it problematizes her fine-grained distinction between choices and preferences. Choosing self-subordination ceases to be merely a rational expedient once it solidifies into a characteristic preference. For another thing, the language of self-deception reveals that what is at stake, after all, is not just preference but existential choice affecting one's very identity.

Lacking the conceptual tools that only recognition theory can provide, Baber cannot, of course, conceive how a constrained rational choice to self-subordinate in the short term can evolve into a rationalization to self-subordinate over a lifetime. Only the need for social recognition explains how the choice to subordinate can be simultaneously self-affirming and self-denying. Women who dissimulate subordination accordingly experience this contradiction as an identity crisis which leaves their own sense of self uncertain. The choice to resist or

dissimulate self-subordination cannot be resolved rationally. It can only be clarified therapeutically through provocation from others.

I shall use recognition theory to argue that the conflict between preferences that women in the developing world experience in transitioning towards a more modern way of life poses something far more serious than a double-bind affecting rational choice. It is very often experienced by them as a personal identity crisis whose etiology refers to a deeper social identity crisis. This crisis pits competing social recognition orders against each other: a traditional patriarchal order that recognizes women as subordinate and a capitalist order that recognizes them as independent “entrepreneurs.” Under the impact of globalization and emerging markets, *poor* women who are especially encouraged by development agencies to take advantage of *microcredit* as one kind of economic opportunity for advancing their empowerment are especially vulnerable to the pressure to dissimulate their subordination.

I believe that lack of better economic opportunity than what microcredit provides, combined with psychological pressure to conform to patriarchal norms of affirmation and self-esteem, makes it difficult for women to fully embrace their economic identity as free and equal partners. I am especially interested in cases in which they have embraced such an identity in “theory” (as something they believe is rationally and morally preferable), while rejecting such an identity in “practice” as too costly. Using the research of Serene Khader, I propose the case of women who take advantage of microcredit because it offers some limited scope for bargaining for better treatment from husbands, but who still find the recognitive benefits of living the life of

a proper, submissive woman irresistible. Here, I suggest, we have a situation in which women feel themselves to be genuinely torn between two different social cognitive orders.

I further suggest that this latter state of divided consciousness —of pretending to be subordinate servant while believing oneself to be free and equal---poses a new moral dilemma. Unlike one who, in a state of self-critical divided consciousness, advances towards the acquisition of a “higher” stage of integrated emancipated identity, someone who, in all her social encounters, pretends to be subordinate has no independent social reason for firmly believing she is not. Her deception of others all too easily morphs into self-deception the longer the pretense is played out. The most effective way of counteracting this possibility is to provide women who seek to access microfinance with cooperative women-run enterprises and other consciousness-raising support groups. That women’s self-transformation proceeds by acquiring new social experiences as a precondition for rational choice is a point that has been repeatedly emphasized by feminist theorists (Babbitt 1993): Women who participate in microfinance must have opportunities to participate in a more emancipated and egalitarian recognition order than the patriarchal order they find themselves trapped in. Even better than providing them with microfinance for unprofitable businesses, women should have access to education and jobs that pay more than sweatshop wages and whose management structure does not replicate the patriarchal structure of the family.

In the final analysis, recognition theory’s normative postulation of a healthy identity that is at once well-integrated and autonomous must be qualified in light of feminist criticisms of an excessively unified personality (Davion 1991, Mullin, 1995). In any society people’s identities will normally be divided between different, often competing, social roles and recognition orders. The challenge for recognition theorists is establishing a norm of healthy (viz., non-dysfunctional)

identity that allows for the kind of critical self-alienation prerequisite for achieving enhanced autonomy and fulfillment without, however, uncritically endorsing the hyper-individualistic, entrepreneurial understanding of autonomy and fulfillment celebrated by today's neo-liberal economists.

Poverty and Recognition

Some of the evils associated with poverty are psychological, affecting even neuropathology.⁵ People living in poverty may judge themselves to be inadequate in comparison to others. For instance, they may blame themselves for their poverty. Although they may indeed be worthy of blame, in many cases their poverty is caused by a combination of bad luck and bad choices, factors that are constrained by circumstances, such as the familiar cyclical contractions of a capitalist economy, over which they have little or no control and for which they are not to blame. Self-blame, when taken to extremes, can lead to long-term self-abnegation and mental paralysis—or worse, escape into mind-numbing, drug-induced narcosis, suicide, or even criminal psychosis.

⁵ A study by Robert Sapolsky (Sapolsky 2015), a Stanford neuropsychologist, showed a strong correlation between poverty and higher than average, chronic, stress-induced levels of glucocorticoid hormones, which in young children, especially, can cause neurons to shrink. Children living under chronic stress also develop an atrophied hippocampus, which distorts emotional responses and reduces memory and spatial awareness. The correlation between poverty, stress, adult depression, and foregoing long-term life goals in favor of short-term gratification, is also well documented. Johannes Haushofer (Haushofer 2014), founder of the Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, has studied the link between poverty and poor financial planning and concludes that a guaranteed basic income (universal cash transfers) might be more effective in lowering stress and improving financial planning than short term microcredit, which can lead to a spiral of indebtedness. A 2015 study by Ben Fall and Miles Hewstone from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, concludes that those living in poverty lack self-esteem, self-confidence, and often blame themselves for what they perceive to be a personal failure (Fall and Hewstone 2015).

The poor may blame themselves despite what others say, but not always. Some psychological traumas the poor suffer are inflicted upon them by others. Others may blame them for their predicament, or they may simply deny them the respect that is due them as human beings. This can happen overtly, when the poor are constrained by circumstances to break the law: they are blamed for breaking the law, without others acknowledging the extent to which they have been victimized by lack of opportunities for which society as a whole should be blamed. Indeed, even undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who would otherwise request legal entry into foreign countries are often denied that opportunity by those very same countries—in violation of their human rights—and find themselves imprisoned as criminals. In less extreme cases, the poor may be recognized in their humanity and yet be denied what they need as a matter of principle (because they should be held responsible for their poverty or because satisfying their needs through government intervention violates a standard of distributive justice). They may even be recognized in their humanity and yet be denied full recognition of their civil standing as equal members of society. Refugees are often treated as second-class citizens, eligible for temporary asylum but ineligible for regular employment, freedom of movement, and other benefits. Those who are formally recognized as citizens deserving of equal treatment under the law often suffer the stigma of social ostracism and marginalization.

Finally, those who feel alienated from society may seek out alternative forms of social recognition among themselves. Criminal gangs have no difficulty recruiting such people into their ranks. Self-esteem in the company of outlaws compensates for absence of self-esteem in the company of one's wider circle of cohorts. Indeed, one hesitates to label the former kind of self-esteem as uniquely pathological when many, if not most, people living in affluent societies today define self-worth exclusively in terms of monetary gain and power status. The difference

between them and society's social outcasts is that they have learned to play by acceptable rules that are already rigged to their advantage.

In sum, there are many ways in which the poor suffer psychological trauma from being misrecognized or unrecognized by their social cohorts and not all of the substitute forms of recognition they seek out – as pathological as they might be – can be condemned as being contrary to institutional norms of recognition that (in capitalist society, say) esteem wealth and power as signs of status. That said, it would be desirable to have something like a normative theory of recognition that would enable us to condemn forms of misrecognition that stigmatize the poor as lazy or intrinsically incapable underachievers without uncritically endorsing society's norms of status recognition, which after all might strike us as no less pathological (or unhealthy) than the aberrant norms of recognition circulating among criminal societies.

Theories of recognition that descend from Hegel offer a familiar reference point for this undertaking. For the sake of brevity, I will mainly examine only one such theory, mainly with an eye toward application rather than criticism. In *The Struggle for Recognition* (1996) and *Freedom's Right* (2014) Axel Honneth has famously developed a normative philosophy of recognition that has witnessed many permutations since he first elaborated it in the late 1980s. The first version of the theory elaborates the cognitive preconditions for fully realizing the purposes embedded in three kinds of psycho-social relationships in modern society; another version, adumbrated in *Reification* (2008), delineates the cognitive conditions for relating to self and others as selves as such; and a third version articulates the cognitive norms of social action spheres that actualize a distinctive form of social freedom beyond the subjective freedom of morally reflected choice and the objective freedom of legally permitted action. All of these variants use different modalities of misrecognition or failed recognition to shed light on

unhealthy, reified, or unjust social relationships, and hence are useful as well for focusing on the psychological traumas and unfulfilling compensatory schemes for acquiring self-esteem that beset lives caught in the web of poverty.

The example of pathological recognition orders such as gangs shows that subjective feelings of resentment against the lawful recognition order do not by themselves suffice to validate normative claims of injustice and wrongful harm. As Gottfried Schweiger convincingly argues, one must show how subjective experiences of social marginalization are causally connected to objectively measurable forms of economic, political, and social exclusion. Then, one must show that the social structures that generate objectively measurable exclusion---which can be broken down further into familiar factors such as unemployment, material deprivation, political disenfranchisement, social isolation, and the like--- do so in violation of their own implicit norms. Clearly, these norms vary from society to society; conditions that persons living in developed industrial societies experience as undignified might be experienced by persons living in poorer developing societies as normal and acceptable. Globalization, of course, complicates this picture. As urbanization, industrialization, and other global market forces take hold in developing countries, previously accepted conditions will eventually be condemned as violating the *achievement* norm of a capitalist economy that promises to provide everyone with a job paying a living wage and to reward hard work and education with appropriate esteem-worthy remuneration and status. The feelings of loss of dignity and low self-esteem the poor and underemployed experience in a capitalist society thus correlate with a corresponding legitimate claim on the part of the unrecognized poor that the system has harmed them unjustly (Schweiger 2013). As Schweiger notes in criticizing Honneth's own endorsement of a social-democratic, welfarist form of capitalism (Schweiger 2013:550), and as I argue in my book

(Ingram 2018:204n50), it is far from clear whether capitalism is structurally capable of living up to its own normative recognition order; and even that order's linkage of self-esteem to monetary and status achievement is hardly immune to criticism as potentially pathological in light of more social democratic recognition orders within advanced capitalism.

To these psychological injustices I add another harm; to wit, the ontological harm suffered by those who have lost control over their agency, action, and identity. The psychological traumas and substitute forms of recognition recounted above specify an *empirical* restriction of agency as judged by an *ethical telos*, or intrinsic goal of human development. If what we mean by agency involves choosing with sufficient knowledge among a relatively unconstrained set of options in such a way that one lives out a self-chosen plan of life that is relatively coherent, stable, and does not impair, but harmonizes with, at least a modest threshold of autonomy capability development (however that is understood), then lacking agency due to suffering the effects of unnecessary and discriminatory social constraints, lack of opportunity, and under-developed capability (as indicated by ignorance, physiological unhealth, lack of empathy, absence of reflection, estrangement from others, etc.) will typically be accompanied by some sense of psychological trauma. But this psychological trauma, however, does not yet specify the peculiar psychological trauma that often (perhaps normally) accompanies an individual's struggle for human development: the identity-crisis, or *ontological* restriction on agency, that can be ethically regrettable when it accompanies an unsuccessful, or incomplete, process of human development, and that issues in an unresolvable state of divided consciousness. In other words, psychological feelings of diminished self-worth can undermine motivation and capacity to act; and status recognition acquired by participating in criminal or socially and legally unrecognized behavior can expose one to violence and coercion, which assail the poor in

any case, regardless of their recourse to illegal or socially unapproved behaviors and associations. Ontologically compromised agency, by contrast, results from uncertainty regarding the two poles of agency itself: the agent as a subject-centered locus of psychological identity and the agent's action, as an object-centered locus of meaningful normative identity. Here recognition plays both a psychological and ontological role.⁶ Without consistent, non-contradictory

⁶ The basic idea behind this conception can be articulated in terms of the necessary ontological connection between the subject-object poles of agency: the actor and her action. Action is identified as meaningful only in relationship to an actor's intention for doing the action, taken together with her possible reasons for having done it, when situated in light of her past actions and character. The intentions, reasons, past actions, and character that serve to identify an action under some intentional description are not reducible to the subjective, or psychological, beliefs of the actor. Rather, whenever the actor's action occurs within a social context in which she is accountable to others, these others interpret the action from their own perspectives. In other words, what she did is a matter of interpretation by others as well. When there is significant divergence between her account of what she did and the account(s) of her consociates, she and they may have to revise their respective understanding of what she did through an exchange of opinions. Notice, too, that what she did in the past matters in this process. To the extent that what she did in the past expresses her character, personality, and identity, the questioning of her action – and the mutual questioning of every participant's interpretation of that action—can raise further questions about who, exactly, she is. Do we judge that the action is out of character for her? If so, do we then judge that we have been mistaken about her character all along? Do we now interpret her past conduct differently? Is she the same person we thought she was? Maybe

confirmation from others, who I am and what I am doing remains uncertain. More precisely, although I may possess my name and causal history as a locus of rigid designation (to paraphrase a familiar expression by Saul Kripke) —and in that sense “have” my being empirically determined as an objective reference point in space and time—I am not the sole author of my own personhood, understood as a nexus of roles, values, and stories I tell about myself. Indeed, as feminist narrative ethicists have pointed out (Walker 2007), our identities are narrated and even “held” by others, no more so than in cases involving severe mental impairment and decline (Lindemann 2013). Likewise, although I may be the causal source of the behavior underlying my action—so that the action is empirically attributed to me as my action—its meaningfulness as an expression of my intention is partly determined by what others have to say about it. Because recognition ontologically constitutes at least part of who I am and what I am doing, and because recognition itself may be granted from multiple sources, my agency can become divided. Not only can I become alienated from myself as a person, but I can become alienated from my action, whose intended aim and rationale can become obscure to me.

No doubt, we are never fully transparent to ourselves or to others in exercising our agency —and so we are never absolutely certain about who we are and what we are doing— simply because the very being of our actions and our persons is forever up for grabs, socially speaking. In many and perhaps most cases this uncertainty is not deeply felt by us. So long as our subjective self-understanding finds confirmation from others, we feel certain about who we are and what we are doing. However, in the absence of confirmation, *uncertainty* on this score can

we decide that the question can't be definitely answered. Her identity—along with her action— remains uncertain.

occasion crisis. Such identity crises may be more common in modern societies in which we find ourselves playing multiple roles in front of different audiences. And it may be that momentary identity crisis and the accompanying diminution of agency is itself necessary for achieving a freer and more reflective sense of autonomous agency later on. Be that as it may, the state of crisis itself is not conducive to agency and indeed marks its diminution. If the crisis is severe, as it often is for women inhabiting transitional societies, and if it is left unresolved or is resolved through regression to a traditional stage of submissive agency, it becomes ethically regrettable.

Studies (Haushofer 2014) show that poverty as such increases the likelihood that people who feel constrained by it are overwhelmed by the challenges of day-to-day survival and seek immediate satisfaction of needs over long term planning about their lives. That said, the poor often face difficult life choices about what social roles, values, and identifying narratives to embrace. In today's global gendered workforce, marked by patriarchy and sexist discrimination, women who are heads of households, especially if they are poor, might have to choose between being good economic providers for their families or being good stay-at home mothers. In general, desperate parents who travel abroad seeking employment and leaving their children behind not only feel psychological guilt but may come to question whether or not they are still good parents. Finally, as we shall see, women in developing countries who take advantage of microcredit might find themselves divided over whether to seek their own empowerment as autonomous agents or to seek recognition as subordinate agents within traditionally recognized roles.

Before I discuss how the self-subordination/social recognition dilemma specifically bedevils women who access microcredit, let me briefly say a few things about the normative dimensions of recognition that come into play.⁷ If recognition marks an historical achievement whose meaning is captured by the idea of self-actualization (human development), then it will also designate a *normative standard* against which social injustices and social pathologies can be measured. Roughly, this standard privileges social relationships, in which all persons are recognized as free and equally esteem-worthy contributors to a society that encourages wide-ranging democratic decision-making and mutual caring. The transition from a traditional society in which only persons of noble rank and male gender are accorded recognition based on their dignified status and honorable distinction to a modern society in which even the humblest individual is respected for the dignity of her humanity and esteemed for her social contribution, marks out the historical trajectory of this struggle.

⁷ I will not here trace the genealogy of recognition as an ontological and normative category, which extends back to Fichte and Hegel. Nor will I explore its elaboration under different but allied philosophies of action and interpretation developed by Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida, and many feminist and intersectional philosophers who write on relational autonomy (Meyers 2004) and narrative identity (Walker 2007; Lindemann 2013; Crenshaw 2017).

Merely recognizing someone as an agent like oneself who merits equal respect, what many have thought to be definitive of the moral point of view, however, leaves out other dimensions of recognition that are just as vital to the exercise of agency. Also important is moral recognition of what makes us different and unique: our individuality (or as Charles Taylor [1994], following Rousseau and Herder puts it, our authenticity). Because our individuality is interpolated though the particular social statuses we occupy, the particular social roles we play, and the particular social values we embody, basic trust in who we are, viz., *confidence* in ourselves as persons with a stable character and identity, requires recognition of these social markers by others, beginning with the loving emotional support provided by our parents.⁸ These markers become sources of positive social esteem based on acquired attributes and accomplishments rather than on inherited statuses. Being recognized as a good citizen, good mother, good Muslim, and good person enables one to act with confidence and assurance from peers. Stigma associated with unemployment, poverty, social deviance, and social marginalization inhibits social interaction and can undermine opportunities for living a free and worthwhile life with others. Struggles for racial, gender, religious, and economic recognition overlap the struggle for moral recognition, insofar as they counteract forms of discrimination that deny equal human rights to members of subaltern groups. However, such struggles go beyond the struggle for human rights insofar as they seek recognition of the particular social value (merit) of persons within society, struggles including, but not exclusive to, so-called multicultural identity politics. Indeed, these are personal and inter-personal struggles that each

⁸ “In becoming sure of the mother’s love, [children] come to trust themselves, which makes it possible for them to be alone without anxiety” (Honneth 1996: 104).

of us---some more than others—must undertake in balancing our competing (sometimes conflicting) roles and identities from one situation to the next.

Finally, as noted above, loving recognition from parents, friends, and loved ones enables adults as well as children to acquire the self-confidence necessary to master the multiple moral and social roles that they will be expected to play while retaining a strong and relatively stable sense of who they are. Because our personal identities are embodied, showing disrespect to another's body by raping, torturing, or otherwise abusing them violates their psychological as well as physical integrity. Absence of emotional support produces pathologies of self-abnegation and delinquency that can undermine social agency, not only by diminishing self-confidence, but by stunting the cognitive and empathetic capacity to recognize others as human beings and to imagine what it is like to be in their particular situation.⁹

⁹ Honneth (2008) distinguishes emotional recognition necessary for forming healthy personal identity from antecedent recognition, or “spontaneous non-rational recognition of others as fellow human beings.” Whereas antecedent recognition identifies persons as selves with unique needs (as opposed to things), emotional or loving recognition nourishes others' cultivation of their own needs. That said, Honneth observes that autism and other psychopathologies associated with failed antecedent recognition also stem from failures or incapacities to emotionally bond with others. Such failures (or incapacities) to identify with (recognize) others as selves have cognitive as well as affective consequences. Although the capacity to assume the perspective of others is essential for grasping an objective world, forgetfulness and/or suppression of our primal emotional bonding with persons, Honneth submits, can lead to reifying ourselves, other human beings, and our natural environment. Of course, the capacity to emotionally bond with others can itself assume healthy or unhealthy, morally acceptable or

The preceding account adopts the simplified tripartite taxonomy of levels of recognition suggested by Axel Honneth in his early theory, whose somewhat different elaboration in *Freedom's Right* (2014) follows Hegel's tripartite scheme developed in the *Philosophy of Right*. This most recent scheme begins by analyzing the abstract determinations of modern legal and moral agency and then proceeds to ground these *individual-centered* forms of negative and positive freedom in three formative levels of *social* agency (ethical life, *Sittlichkeit*): intimate personal relationships between friends, lovers, and family members; economic relationships of mutual need satisfaction and interdependency between producers and consumers; and political relationships between citizens bound by ties of patriotic solidarity.¹⁰

morally unacceptable, forms; scam artists and torturers are highly capable of "empathizing" with their victims, albeit for purposes of psychological manipulation and coercion. So what Honneth calls 'primary' (or precognitive) recognition is normatively neutral; upon this elemental product of infant/mother bonding develops a complicated psycho-sexual network of object-relations involving primary caretakers. Such relations can embody norms of love that engender a learning trajectory culminating in higher levels of care, empathy, and solidarity for others along an expanding arc of concern; but they need not (Honneth 2008: 152). See the concluding comments by Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, and Jonathan Lear, who question the adequacy of Honneth's attempt to conceptualize reification as a forgetfulness or suppression of primary recognition.

¹⁰ This scheme excludes Honneth's discussion of "antecedent" recognition (see note 6). Early on Honneth (Honneth 1996) drew almost exclusively from Hegel's Jena period writings from 1801-1806. However, recently Honneth (Honneth 2014) has based his theory of recognition on the *Philosophy of Right* (1820), where Hegel argues that *abstract rights* that ground negative (external) freedom from interference and *moral duties* that ground reflective

(inner) freedom presuppose more concrete *ethical relations* of family, civil society (economic life), and state (political life) for their full *social* realization. This essay incorporates the ideas of both early and late Honneth without examining their interconnection. For a brief comment on their mutual coherence, see Ingram (2018: 68n25).

Honneth's Theory of Recognition¹¹

	Antecedent Recognition	Love Recognition	Respect Recognition	Esteem Recognition
Practical relation To self	Antecedent self-affirmation	Self- confidence	Self-respect	Self-esteem
Type of Relationship	Social interaction	Love and friendship	Moral/legal relations and rights	Solidarity
Mode of regard	Primordial engagement	Emotional	Cognitive	Esteem
Object of recognition	My own self as agent/actor); others as agents/actors	Needs and emotions	Moral autonomy and authentic existence Legal autonomy	Traits, abilities contributions, and achievements
Aspect of Personhood Acknowledg	Human existence; intentional agency	Particular Desiring, feeling, and needy	Universal humanity; personal and	Individual life of accomplishment,

¹¹ The table below modifies similar diagrams found in Honneth (1996: 129) and Zurn (2015: 46) by combining taxonomies of recognition developed in both early and late Honneth.

ed		individual	group identity Abstract legal personality	merit, and social value
Community of recognition	Interaction partners	Intimates	Fellow moral subjects Fellow legal subjects	Members of communities of value and cooperation
Paradigms of dehumanization or disrespect	Reification [regarding oneself and others as things]	Physical and emotional abuse and/or neglect	Denial of moral rights, equal consideration of interests Denial of legal rights, legal exclusion and discrimination	Cultural denigration, refusal to acknowledge partnership, share of social contribution
Primary social action spheres	All	Romantic attachments, friendships, and families	Moral deliberation and dialog Legal transactions and proceedings	Economic transactions political public spheres, socio-cultural associations
Type of freedom	X	Social	Positive Negative	Social

Combining the early and later theory, we might paraphrase a Honneth-inspired normative, account of recognition accordingly: Prior to acquiring role competencies necessary for engaging

in rationally accountable forms of speech action, children must first bond emotionally and identify with the perspective of their primary care takers. Development toward adulthood takes the form of an emotional struggle for recognition between parent and child in which each comes to accept the other as an individual with independent needs that merit satisfaction. Mature interpersonal relationships embody this mutual form of emotional self-realization at a higher, more conscious level. Entering civil society, the young adult further assumes responsibility as an impersonal bearer of rights who is at once legally independent from others while remaining morally accountable to them for her choices. The resulting struggle for recognition (*Kampf um Anerkennung*) between self-asserting rights-holders who possess different traits, abilities, and claims to social contribution¹² must be resolved on a different social stage in which, for example, each should (according to one, and by no means dominate, norm of socio-economic recognition) acknowledge that the satisfaction of her own needs and, therewith, the realization of her own economic freedom, depends on the reciprocal satisfaction of others' needs and the realization of their economic freedom. Indeed, from this perspective each should recognize others as esteem-

¹² Honneth singles out traits and abilities as markers of esteem in his earlier work on recognition, while emphasizing social (civic, economic, etc.) achievements as markers of esteem in his later work on social freedom.

worthy contributors to both the economic *and* legal-political reproduction of society.¹³ Citizens, for instance, not only assert their rights but they recognize their fellow citizens as loyal compatriots joined together in a cooperative enterprise in which questions of fairness and social justice come to the fore.

Honneth here reminds us that the moral autonomy (reflexive, positive freedom) and legal independence (negative freedom) that individuals assert against society emerge out of society.¹⁴ Both *negative* freedom from external interference and *positive (reflexive)* freedom to

¹³ Here I follow Honneth in distinguishing strategic conflicts of material (self-) interest from moral conflicts of self-recognition, wherein one or more parties feel disrespect on the basis of having their legitimate, socially recognized, expectations regarding the value of some aspect of their agency (needs, autonomy, traits, or contributions) ignored or misrecognized. For further clarification of this point, see Zurn (2015: 55-9).

¹⁴ A familiar objection to recognition theory as a normative undertaking is that it counsels social conformism. I believe my presentation of Honneth's account of recognition—which would also apply *mutatis mutandis* to Hegel's and Taylor's accounts—is that individual empowerment, at least within the ambit of complex modern society, is itself one of the recognized aims of socialization. Amy Allen (Allen 2016) and others of Foucauldian (or Adornoian) bent have criticized teleological accounts of so-called progressive forms of modern socialization of the sort proposed by Honneth for concealing the implicit power relations conditioning the recognitive dynamics of individuation. However, given that she herself endorses a thin understanding of social progress revolving around individual autonomy, I fail to see the point of her critique. Certainly, Honneth himself has not been remiss in criticizing the power relations that prevent existing social institutions from realizing the emancipatory expectations for recognition they

inner self-determination remain but abstract potentials for developing real freedom. As we have seen, negative freedom without reflexive freedom remains in thrall to external sources of desire and motivation; conversely, reflexive freedom without negative freedom remains objectively impotent. Each of these one-sided conceptions of individual freedom achieves satisfactory realization only in higher forms of institutionalized *social* freedom. Legal institutions that protect negative freedom reliably function only when democratically legitimated in ways that reflect the moral and ethical consensus achieved in public discourse. Moral discourses that

promise. Turning to a different objection, Patchen Markell (Markell 2003) and Lois McNay (McNay 2008) have argued that the very concept of recognition straddles contradictory aims: that of *discovering* authentic properties of persons that have been present in them all along, albeit perhaps in repressed form, and that of *constituting* properties of persons through an original act of second- or third-person attribution. For his part, Honneth acknowledges the unavoidable ambiguity of recognition as straddling these senses. For example, recognizing a former slave's dignity might be said to simultaneously disclose and further realize a capability for empowerment. Finally, Nancy Fraser (Fraser and Honneth 2003) has famously criticized Honneth for reductively characterizing all injustices and pathologies as primarily symptomatic of distorted or absent recognition. I think Honneth is more charitably understood to be defending a weaker claim, namely, that social, cultural, economic, and political institutions imply cognitive expectations which they often fail to satisfy. Whether it is lack of proper recognition or lack of economic resources or some combination of both that explains why women in developing countries choose to submit to patriarchal norms can only be determined empirically.

engender reflexive freedom reliably function only when institutionalized throughout civil society in various legally protected private and public spheres.¹⁵

What makes these institutional spheres of personal, economic, and political life essential for developing individual freedom is that individuals bound together by love, economic cooperation, and democratic self-determination self-consciously recognize the freedom of the other as a precondition for, rather than as a limit to, their own freedom. Although the ethical sphere of personal relationships represents the most intuitive *ideal* of living freely without inhibition in the presence of another who emancipates one's personality and allows one to fully be oneself, it also remains subject to most the oppressive forms of domination and violence. By contrast, the ethical sphere of shared deliberation represents the most reflexive level of collectively determining the very institutional (legal, economic, political, and social) parameters that define one's freedom in general.¹⁶ Here personal self-realization and collective self-actualization converge around the shared aim of maximizing equal freedom for all.¹⁷

¹⁵ Honneth (2014: 38-43), however, regards reflexive freedom-- exemplified in three moral modalities of rational self-legislation (of universalizable norms), personal self-realization (of authentic desires), and collective self-actualization (of socio-political identity)—as a higher form of freedom than negative freedom, insofar as it can only be effectively exercised through a social procedure of rational discourse. As he notes, in the writings of Habermas and Apel this ideal of discourse anticipates an ideal, unlimited community, although in practice it presupposes a real, finite community.

¹⁶ Honneth argues that moral, legal, economic, and socio-political relationships not only build upon the ethical care that originates in parent-child relationships but also incorporate such care into their underlying norms. Honneth's thinking here arguably conflicts with the stronger

Recognition as a Normative Category in Assessing the Divided Agency of Women in Societies Transitioning toward Modernizing Development

Honneth's theory of recognition provides a provisional taxonomy of the kinds of recognition that should be considered when assessing microcredit as a poverty reducing policy. Although evidence that microloans improve the material well-being of their beneficiaries remains inconclusive (see note 24 below and Banerjee 2015), the argument has been made

Hegelian structural differentiations in his Parsonian account of social action spheres that inform his late theory of social freedom. I thank Todd Hedrick for this observation (Honneth 2012: 205).

¹⁷ In addition to social justice, something similar to the solidarity found among intimates re-emerges here: Duties of civic friendship in a liberal democracy extend beyond duties of reciprocity; like a family whose members are willing to make unreciprocated sacrifices for the most vulnerable among them, the modern state is properly perceived by its members as a collective project of self-determination in which the protection and enhancement of each citizen's agency ethically requires that those who are privileged contribute more of their income to improving the lives of the worst off in the name of solidarity.

(Cheston 2002; Kabeer 1998, 2001) that over time, despite some counter indications, microfinance empowers women by altering their understanding of themselves as independent agents and improving their dignity and self-esteem.¹⁸ This argument correctly observes that empowerment — an important and multifaceted aim of poverty reducing development schemes--presupposes more than the possession of economic wellbeing. Clearly, some of the goods necessary for empowerment are subjective, or psychological. By underscoring the agential importance of dignity and self-esteem, the following argument draws particular attention to the role of *social recognition* in hindering or promoting empowerment.

Following Hegel and Honneth, I have argued that social recognition contributes more to empowerment than facilitating a sense of psychological wholeness and subjective well-being. It also provides a necessary condition for the objective and, for lack of a better word, *ontological* constitution of human *agency* (what Hegel refers to as self-certainty [*die Gewissheit seiner Selbst*]) and meaningful *action*. Whereas the absence of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem caused by lack of proper recognition stifles a person's motivation to act freely in her social world, absence of objective (or intersubjective) recognition of who one is and what one is doing undermines a person's certainty regarding his or her own agency. In the latter case, one's subjective loss of self-confidence as an agent is caused by something besides having suffered a diminished sense of what one can do in one's otherwise certain capacity as a person with a well-defined identity and role; it is caused by an ontological crisis in how one understands that identity and role. Here, loss of agency is suffered in a deeper way, not because another has failed

¹⁸ Some data show that participation in microfinance can sometimes make women more—not less-- vulnerable to spousal abuse (IWDA 2018; also see note 24).

to (subjectively) recognize and affirm you for being, say, a good mother, but because another has failed to (objectively) recognize you consistently as a mother (simply) or as an equal, autonomous member of society (simply) or as both a mother and an equal, autonomous member of civil society.

This becomes especially clear when we examine the identity crisis that women who live in traditional societies that are transitioning toward modern market economies sometimes face. As odd as it may sound, women sometimes participate in entrepreneurial microcredit schemes in order to be confirmed in their traditional patriarchal social roles. Like dowry, accessing loans can attach value to women simply as property. Microcredit can enable women to work within the “proper” domestic confines of their households instead of seeking less “respectable” forms of employment outside the home. In the words of Serene Khader (2014), it can reinforce the *subordination* of women to their husbands instead of providing a pathway toward empowerment as an equal and autonomous decision-maker within the household and the broader community.

In sum, one kind of social freedom, characterized by feelings of social acceptance in performing traditional female roles mandating subordination, can co-exist with the suppression of another kind of social freedom, characterized by exercising autonomous initiative through participating in a more modern entrepreneurial venture. This tension, combined with the suspicion that entrepreneurial agency holds less promise for genuine emancipation and empowerment than neo-liberal economists think it does, demands a *normative* conception of recognition that can provide an ideal standard for criticizing regressive, unreciprocated, unequal, distorted or partial forms of recognition that undercut agency and empowerment. Such a conception is needed to explain why even affirmative forms of (subjective) recognition of one’s role as a domestic caregiver that do not diminish one’s self-confidence and agency as mother

can still diminish one's (objective) self-confidence and agency by denying one a more expansive self-understanding of one's opportunities for playing out the role and identity of equal autonomous member of civil society. However, in addition to specifying objective opportunities for enhanced self-understanding and social recognition across multiple social roles and social identities, a normative theory of recognition helps to clarify the distinctive loss of agency that occurs when these objective opportunities are incompletely or confusingly realized, when (in other words), social recognition of who one is and what one is doing becomes so divided, so that one's very identity and agency become imperiled.

The Hegelian concept of agency is often invoked by Honneth and other contemporary recognition theorists as providing one such conception. Not the least of its attractions is its insistence that normative standards of recognition must be embedded in socially recognized role expectations grounded in concrete practices, or forms of interaction that are themselves structured by commonly shared norms and goals. More so than in traditional societies, in which occupational mobility and hierarchical social statuses are strongly constrained by gender and birth and regulated in accordance with relatively less flexible norms and goals, in modern societies permitting vocational freedom and initiative, these practices will likely give greater play to the more reciprocal and robust role of rationally accountable agent, requiring that each person assume greater responsiveness to others' concerns while at the same time authorizing the expression of one's own concerns as an equal participant in social interaction. To the extent that women in developing societies have been exposed to practices of this non-traditional, non-hierarchical type, they can take advantage of microcredit programs to reveal their newly found bargaining power to leverage their demands to speak and be heard and be treated more equally against their husbands' wishes to silence and dominate them. In so doing, they may well achieve

greater individual self-determination and a fuller sense of social freedom than they had before. Indeed, as the pressures of globalization encourage more women to enter the public workforce, such modernizing social transformations can probably be anticipated.¹⁹

Despite opening up new opportunities for social recognition, in the short term these transformations will likely produce an identity crisis affecting both men and women, and perhaps most of all non-heterosexual, non-binary persons. Women who have partially reconstituted their social identities may be uncertain about who they are and what precisely they are doing. Their agency will be divided. Although divided agency might well be the unavoidable condition for anyone living in any society, and perhaps more so in modern, dynamic societies, extreme conflict between the social roles with which one identifies will very often occasion a corresponding reduction in subjective well-being and objective agency. Women may achieve greater economic independence or greater social equality (sometimes both) than they had before but still encounter a “glass ceiling” in becoming fully empowered agents within their family and community.

I draw several conclusions from this observation regarding microcredit, recognition, and women’s empowerment. First, the evidence I cite below shows that microcredit is unlikely to

¹⁹ Globalization is an ambivalent force for emancipating and empowering women. Exposure to new ideas about one’s opportunities for self-understanding and self-fulfillment can be the first step toward emancipation and empowerment. The expansion of market economies, in particular the form of market economy associated with global capitalism, might be a factor in this. But global capitalism threatens subsistence farming (the occupation of most women in the developing world) and often “emancipates” them by forcing them into exploitative factory work, where patterns of male domination remain intact.

empower women significantly unless it is used (as it very often is) as part of a cooperative business venture uniting women within a support group who are exposed to job training in higher skills, including literacy and financial planning, full healthcare, including access to contraception, and—above all—consciousness-raising education regarding their own oppression. Although coops have both downsides and upsides as sharers of collective financial risk (see note 19) their capacity for supporting women's empowerment cannot be underestimated. Second, as Baber notes, failure to perceive their own oppression is probably not the main obstacle preventing women from being empowered; evidence suggests that women who choose patriarchal submission over empowerment know they are oppressed but resign themselves to the best of several bad alternatives that are available to them. Increased bargaining power does not mean empowerment as full agents. Third, following a line of thought developed by Nussbaum, cases in which women do not perceive their oppression might well lead an impartial observer to conclude that they lack *proper* self-esteem according to an *egalitarian* norm of recognition. This conclusion is problematic, because it is hardly evident how women who do not perceive their oppression can experience low self-esteem for being treated unequally. Certainly, it might well be that a minimum level of individual self-esteem is necessary for the functioning of any society and that therefore social recognition of one's esteem-worthiness is universally expected by anyone, no matter what society they live in. Indeed, equal recognition and equal esteem-worthiness might be accorded to both men and women in certain contexts, for instance, in the manner of spoken address minors must use in speaking to adults, or in the equal condemnation of bodily assault inflicted on one by a stranger, regardless of gender. But the context in which bodily assault is regarded as wrongful misrecognition (indeed, as criminal disrespect) according to an egalitarian norm is highly variable. Traditional Zambian women, for example, generally

approve of their husbands beating them if they leave their home unattended, and a large percentage believe that it is right to suffer this punishment if a woman refuses to have sex with her husband or cooks a bad meal for him.²⁰ However, there is little doubt that they would feel disrespected if their husbands beat them excessively or for trivial reasons that were not sanctioned by the patriarchal norm they honor. In light of globalization and its modernizing impulses, which are now being felt virtually everywhere, it is not unreasonable to assume that enterprising women who, for example, take advantage of microcredit to earn extra family income by setting up coops to sell their goods on the street, will feel empowered to renegotiate the rules regarding leaving home without their husband's permission, as well as rules about having sex whenever called upon to do so or cooking all-day family meals. Economic opportunity *may* be one factor that can lead to women's empowerment and a corresponding belief that it is wrong (disrespectful) to suffer spousal abuse. As norms of recognition become increasingly egalitarian, expectations regarding esteem-worthy recognition and corresponding heightened sensitivity to displays of disrespect can be expected to rise, along with positive assessments of individual self-determination.

²⁰ "About 80% of Zambian wives find it acceptable to be beaten by their husbands 'as a form of chastisement, according to the latest Zambia Demographic Health Survey. Out of 5,029 women interviewed countrywide, 79% said they should be beaten if they went out without their husband's permission. 61% said a beating was acceptable if they denied their husband sex, while 45% said a beating was in order if they cooked 'bad' food." Anonymous staff report, "Wife-beating in Zambia a Natural Consequence," *East African Mail and Guardian*, 3 (December 3, 2003:11/37).

In transitional societies the tension between individual self-determination and patriarchal submission will likely be experienced by some women as an agency-threatening identity crisis. If Hegel is right, some reflective alienation from self might be necessary in order to develop a more integrated and freer personality in the long run. This last point, I shall argue, suggests that the modernizing process by which societies become more complex and individuals assume multiple and conflicting roles poses both opportunity and risk for the achievement of recognitive empowerment.²¹

²¹ The socially recognized norms of recognition that a modern society upholds, for example those mandating equal respect as citizens and human beings, on one side, and unequal social esteem as contributors and achievers, on the other, may contradict each other, thereby causing people to doubt who they are (citizens in solidarity or self-promoters in a zero-sum game of competition). Not only may different groups in society appeal to competing norms of recognition embedded, for example, in the action sphere demarcated by economic cooperation—a possibility I noted with respect to how the competitive, status achievement norm of capitalism may contradict the solidaristic egalitarianism of social democracy—but whole societies in process of change, for example, from traditional to modern society, experience a tension between hierarchical and egalitarian norms of recognition. This tension is most keenly felt in the family, the *locus classicus* of colliding civil rights and customary duties. Perhaps within modern societies we observe a similar tension that impacts the family, between norms of recognition that interpret conjugal relationships according to either a hierarchy of economic contribution/dependency or a purely formal norm of civil equality and independence; or between this latter norm and a norm of reciprocal care and a sense of duty toward the other.

How Microfinance Engenders Women's Self-subordination Through Social Recognition

We assess identity crises differently depending on whether we see them tending toward progressive resolution in which a person becomes free to express all aspects of her identity, autonomously balancing multiple social roles without threatening dysfunctional disintegration, or tending toward a regressive suppression, in which a person feels compelled to deny some aspect of her identity. Identity crisis and self-alienation are not inherently bad within a context in which they function to continually develop and enhance a person's identity and agency. However, when this is not the case, and the crisis is imposed by coercive circumstances such as poverty or patriarchal domination, then crisis manifests itself as an injustice and regrettable social pathology.

Both of the above points, I think, are well illustrated when discussing the various advantages and disadvantages that divided consciousness affords to socially marginalized people. Lacking integral self-recognition, persons marginalized by race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, religious orientation, legal status, and poverty are at once stigmatized and denied agency while at the same time being oddly privileged in their capacity to reflect critically

on society's injustices and pathologies.²² The example of anti-poverty policy I highlight in this chapter, female-targeted microcredit, illustrates this very point. Women living in developing countries that are undergoing the throes of transitioning toward modern capitalism must sometimes choose between recognition, welfare, and empowerment. Prohibited from working outside the home to feed their children and having an equal voice in decision-making, women, who seek to be economically and politically empowered, sometimes suffer stigma and ostracism from family and community. As a consequence, they may suffer from a diminished sense of what is possible and proper for them to do. Although resignation to what is realistically possible or probable doesn't always betray an "ideologically distorted" understanding of one's agency or an "adaptive preference" that blinds one to one's true desires, blind submission to patriarchal norms of propriety very likely does (Babbitt 1993). Alternatively, women who possess a robust sense of their own agency might still choose to subordinate themselves to their husbands and the patriarchal norms of their community for the sake of securing welfare and social recognition in the most rationally efficient way they know how. Because they retain a high degree of autonomy agency and self-esteem, they often possess an epistemic advantage in perceiving the injustice and

²² For the iconic treatment of double consciousness in North American race studies, see W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Du Bois discusses African Americans' experience of "always looking at one's self through the eyes" of a white racist society and "measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looked back in contempt." More recent race and gender theorists (see, for example Frantz Fanon and Francis M. Beale) emphasize both the self-deprecating and self-empowering potential of a divided (double- or triple-) consciousness, which can achieve a privileged epistemic social distance needed to perceive and criticize racist, ethnic, and patriarchal forms of society.

hypocrisy of the de facto recognition order to which they insincerely submit. However, as I argue below, the price they pay for pretending to be a good, self-effacing housewife can lead them to rationalize their conformism to the point, perhaps, of preferring submission to emancipation as their ideal goal.²³

The dilemma recounted above— the modern-day equivalent of Antigone’s – shows how poverty-remediation tools such as micro-credit comport with forms of social recognition that can simultaneously distort and realize women’s development.²⁴ Often women in the

²³ I use the expression “preferring submission to emancipation as their ideal goal” qualifiedly, in the sense that an ideal moral commitment can only be described as one’s highest preference with certain conceptual misgiving. As I note in the introduction, the problem with this formulation is that it cannot make sense of how our moral commitments impose sacrifices on what we would prefer to do. The alternative, however, is to detach morality and higher-order value commitment strivings from preferences as such, thereby turning them into social constraints rather than enabling conditions.

²⁴ Only about a third of households studied prefer micro-finance institutions (MFIs) to other, more flexible, sources of loans, such as local moneylenders and extended family. The vast majority of the more than 137 million who participate globally—an 18-fold increase since 1997-- are women (they compose 97 percent of Mohammed Yunus’s Grameen Bank’s clientele). MFIs were heralded as an innovative anti-poverty program and driver of development, providing liquid assets to meet a variety of needs and encouraging savings. However, recent studies on the short- and long-term effects of MFIs suggest that MFIs may have little impact on development, as measured by increases in welfare, health, education, consumption and women’s empowerment.

These results partly reflect the small size of loans, which on average must be repaid within a year at an APR of 37 percent, running as high as 100 percent, mainly due to transaction costs. Very few MFI loans enable the hiring of employees for larger enterprises. Indeed, because loan recipients are often required to begin paying back their loans in weekly installments within a week of taking out their loans, they cannot invest in longer term projects that promise greater returns down the road. Emphasizing efficient small-scale enterprises that offer quick but small returns, micro-financed start-ups face the additional challenge of having to compete in saturated, highly competitive, local markets. The hope that women loan recipients engaged in cooperative ventures will pool their capital to set up more lucrative businesses seems to have been frustrated by a cruel irony: in lieu of front end collateral that is normally needed to take out loans, the entire group stands as guarantor of each member's loan, so that not only draconian debt collection agents ---who have been known to "repossess" everything from houses to eating utensils---but also the entire group of co-guarantors acts as a coercive enforcement arm of the microlender. The result is that most loans are repaid, but individuals in the cooperative sometimes have to pay other's installments in order to avoid collective default, which can result in recriminations and shame. In general, given the impact of adverse weather and uncertain health, which always impact the poor more than the rich, it is not unusual for loan recipients to take out secondary loans to repay primary loans, thereby locking themselves into a spiral of indebtedness. MFIs, however, encourage positive changes in consumption, from non-essential goods to durable, business-related goods (Banerjee 2015). Furthermore, restructuring microcredit around cooperative savings and lending that dispense with outside creditors, as Oxfam has done, mitigates the problem of indebtedness. For a critical assessment of the potential of microfinance to lift poor people out of poverty, including a controversial accusation of tax fraud and

developing world have access to welfare and status recognition, in the form of respect (for being a “proper” woman) and self-esteem (for being attached to familial sources of wealth and privilege), only through their husbands. Poor families lack the collateral needed to access standard bank loans and only men are allowed to access small loans from extended family or neighborhood lenders. According to Naila Kabeer, women who become self-employed through microcredit can become empowered independently of their husbands while enhancing both recognition as an independent bread winner and personal welfare (Kabeer, 1998, 2001). Here it should be noted that, although there is no consensus in the development field about what “empowerment” means in this context and even less consensus regarding how to measure it, there are some recurring expectations. High on the list of empowerment factors are increased control over and access to family assets, increased participation in and control over family planning; increased *respect* from husbands leading to lower spousal abuse and increased social *self-esteem* within the community; increased freedom to leave the home and travel to coops, job-training centers, support groups, and health clinics, and increased participation in the social and political life of the community. Given that 70 percent of the poor are women (Khan and Noreen 2012), self-employment and employment outside the home do sometimes empower women (however modestly) and, as surveys confirm, increase their sense of dignity and self-worth.²⁵

profiteering against Yunus and the Grameen Bank, see Tom Heinemann’s 2010 documentary, *The Micro-Debt*.

²⁵ Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2000) discusses the case of a woman (Vasanti) who participated in a SEWA loan: “Her sense of dignity increased as she paid off her loan” (107) and her self-confidence grew as her “potential to become capable of ...human functions” through increased nutrition, education, and support increased (Nussbaum 2000: 110). Other studies

Although some women who receive microcredit sometimes do so in order to work at home in compliance with patriarchal norms of domestic seclusion, these women can at least acquire bargaining leverage to exact some concessions from their husbands. Furthermore, their sense of self-esteem is likely to increase to the extent that they are valued by their husbands and community for contributing to their family's upkeep. So, even though microcredit interventions do not immediately emancipate women from the weight of material oppression and patriarchal domination, they set in motion a chain of events that appear predestined to do so.

We cannot conclude, however, that microcredit unequivocally develops women's agency by increasing economic opportunity, social esteem, and autonomous choice all at once, and without trade-offs. No doubt, women's capacity to bargain and the expanded opportunities (Sarumathi and Mohan 2011; Ali 2016; and Norwood 2015) confirm the positive impact of micro-credit on women's empowerment. However, in a survey of research studies conducted in Bangladesh, Mohammad Rahman (Rahman 2017) notes that the overall positive impact on women's empowerment these studies show must be qualified by the lack of control groups and baseline data incorporated into these studies (viz., women who choose micro-credit might already exhibit signs of substantial empowerment). The biggest gain in empowerment concerns decision-making regarding children's education (especially beyond two years after participating in a micro-credit program). Only some groups of women experienced greater freedom to visit relatives, access their own medical treatment and contraception, and decide on the purchase of personal and household items as well as matters relating to recreation. No significant improvement was seen in decisions regarding borrowing, buying assets, freedom of movement, voting, children's marriage, which are either made jointly with husbands or by husbands alone.

for choice afforded to them by accessing microcredit have enhanced their welfare and social status. Some can receive loans of \$100 or more to defray household expenses (including paying for their children's education) but also to set up little businesses, either on their own or with other women in cooperatives. Some can even acquire the freedom to leave their menial jobs outside the home, which they might deem to be demeaning or improper for themselves as women. They can, for instance, use the loan to help their husband's business, and by increasing family income that way, they can return to the home, feed their families, and live a "proper" life of domestic seclusion according to custom.

Here we see that enhanced self-esteem according to customary, gendered norms of recognition comes at a price. Serene Khader observes that the price in question involves "opportunity costs" in the form of diminished *autonomy* agency and, more specifically, diminished *feminist* agency, or freedom from restrictive and self-subordinating gender roles that deny women an *equal* voice at home and in their community. Even their heightened self-esteem as microcredit beneficiaries comes at the cost of further entrenching patriarchal domination. Indeed, instead of being respected as a moral equal, some of these women appeared to have increased their value to family and community by being reduced to property, or mere collateral – in fact, reduced to a status not so different from that of a slave or source of dowry (Khader 2014). Indeed, recent studies (IWDA 2018) show that women who assert their economic independence sometimes suffer an increase in domestic violence from men who feel that their economic dominance is being challenged.

This dilemma—and the temptation to renounce genuine agential development for the immediate fulfillment promised by heightened self-esteem that has been reflected through the

distorting mirror of patriarchal recognition---leads Khader to question two assumptions about the agency-empowering impact of microcredit that have been made by Kabeer and others. The “cumulative assumption” holds that agency is all of a piece: expanding options through increased welfare implies expanding options with respect to self-determination as a woman and as an autonomous individual. The “substantive assumption” links enhanced agency to the acquisition of substantive moral beliefs about one’s right to self-determination (Khader 2014: 229). In line with this thinking, Susy Cheston and Lisa Kuhn (2002: 71) argue that self-efficacy implies greater self-esteem, which in turn implies belief in the right to self-determination as resistance to patriarchy. Kabeer adds that bringing income into a household implies a belief that one is entitled by *moral* right to a fair or equal portion of what one brings in (Khader 2014: 230; Kabeer 2001: 71).

Khader questions both assumptions by observing that the dilemma faced by poor women in traditional developing societies --- to resist patriarchal subordination or increase their welfare agency by acceding to subordination --- is at root a dilemma about which social roles to identify with, whose social recognition matters, and what kind of rationally accountable agency is most desirable. Khader dubs this classical Hegelian dilemma the “Self-Subordination Social Recognition Paradox”: Access to opportunities and goods that may be essential to the exercise of *autonomy agency* depend upon conformity to socially recognized patriarchal gender roles, which effectively require limiting autonomy agency to meet the demands of *collective identity agency*. In the absence of consciousness-raising support from other women (and men) that recognize women loan recipients according to more modern (egalitarian and emancipatory) norms of the sort postulated by Honneth as a developmental ideal, antipoverty interventions such as microcredit may incentivize not only *compliance* with sexist norms but even their

internalization. The latter happens when rewards for compliance such as increased familial love, social esteem, and material benefits align with one another in a way that encourages strong personal identification with sexist norms (Meyers 2004).

Although autonomous women who have acquired a belief in their feminist agency can outwardly comply with sexist norms out of mere expediency, the psychological costs of acting against their conviction can be great.²⁶ Rationalizing a repeated violation of a deeply held conviction in an effort to mitigate one's sense of having acted against one's genuine preference for autonomy reduces one risk of agency-threatening *cognitive dissonance* by increasing another: *self-deception*. Put simply, fooling others into thinking that one is sincerely committed to the subservient role one is playing instead of going through the motions of servile servant in a begrudging manner, which might still invite recrimination from others, rationalizes *faux* subservience to the point of being indistinguishable from genuine subservience.

The path from deceiving others into believing that one is a servile subject, when one is in fact not, to deceiving oneself that one is not a servile subject, when one in fact is, is a common

²⁶ Martha Nussbaum (2000: 236-39) mentions the intriguing case of Hamida Khala, an educated Indian woman who autonomously chooses as her life plan – against her husband's initial enlightened protestations to the contrary – a life of moderate domestic seclusion permitting some outside activities in modest full-body covering. In this instance there is no contradiction between asserting one's right to autonomy and reflectively accepting restrictive gender- roles. The reflective submission to gender roles (sometimes undertaken as an expression of female empowerment) must be distinguished from uncritical submission to gender roles in deference to patriarchal norms that one has internalized as a function of one's identity agency.

trope among theorists writing on de-colonialization struggles of resistance. Homi Bhabha's reference to a "sly civility, a mimicry that was the same but not quite" practiced by seemingly servile subjects under colonial rule (Bhabha 1994: 86ff) follows a line of thinking found in Hegel's allusion to Diderot's unforgettable portrait of Rameau's nephew in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (para 522): "this deceit is just on that account the greatest truth [of Spirit's self-conscious reconciliation of opposites]."

Pretending to be servile when one "knows" oneself to be free – exemplified by the flattering *faux*-submission of low-level Indian civil servants employed under British indirect rule—captures an important truth about self-reflective, self-critical agency: it's divided nature. But if such an ironic expression of agency is intended as a form of subversive mockery that hints at the agent's un-submissive agency—thereby forcing those in dominant positions to question their own self-certainty as dominant agents---then it expresses at best a very limited, *solitary* form of agential resistance.

Worse, as Pratap Bhanu Mehta (Mehta 2011: 151-52) points out, it might be indistinguishable from affirmation:

[M]imicry can be seen as exactly the kind of existential estrangement that colonialism entailed: the need for permanent dissimulation. . . . The following analogy is a good example of the confusion that can arise when observing one's own behavior: When Groucho Marx, as Rufus T. Firefly in *Duck Soup*, addresses the court, he explains "Chicolini here may talk like an idiot, and look like an idiot, but don't let that fool you. He really is an idiot." What protestations will ease our anxiety about whether he is really an idiot to rest?

When the example of dissimulating submission is extended to women who participate in micro-finance, we might likewise wonder—along with a woman who observes her own servile behavior—whether she is in fact no longer just pretending to be servile. As Rameau’s nephew says “I would either have been virtuous or pretended to be so like others; I was expected to play the fool, and a fool I turned myself into.” Contrary to Hegel’s positive assessment of Rameau’s nephew, the divided moments (or social roles) that Rameau’s nephew play acts before his different audiences have not, to Rameau’s or the critical spectator’s mind, been reconciled into the highest form of agency. Instead, it reflects a self-critical adaptation that wavers between self-deceit and social deceit. It thus represents precisely the kind of pathological adaptation that neither Nussbaum’s theory of ideological false consciousness (unreflective pathological adaptive preference) nor Baber’s theory of constrained rational choice (reflective non-pathological adaptive preference) can account for.

In order for their theories to account for the rationally calculated dissimulation of subservience recounted above—which connotes a pathological state of mind that is simultaneously aware and unaware of its own self-deception---they would need to reframe their respective theories in a manner which indelibly links self-identity to social recognition. More precisely they would have to link a *divided* self-identity to an ambiguous and ambivalent fusion of two contradictory recognition orders. Instead, their theories posit conceptions of rational identity agency that are presumed to be capable of functioning fully independent of social recognition. They therefore underestimate the pathological pull toward servility even among relatively enlightened women who in other respects regard themselves as emancipated.

To sum up: The existential double-bind of having to choose either welfare or autonomy—the two conditions of agency—and having to choose either patriarchal recognition or entrepreneurial recognition can be reformulated as an identity crisis, or lack of self-certainty, about which kind of recognition (respect, self-esteem) is most valuable to one’s exercise of agency (Khader 2014: 231). Honneth links genuine self-respect to a personal belief that one’s life plans are respected and valued by others as worthy undertakings; he links genuine self-esteem to a personal belief that one’s social contributions are esteemed and valued by them as well. In both cases of self-recognition, one’s being certain of one’s worth as an individual and as a member of society depends on others recognizing oneself as such. Although one might think that a *reflective* moral commitment to unpopular values may be strong enough to withstand widespread social disapproval, the ambiguities played out in being a “good woman” as judged against conflicting standards of social responsibility and agency are a recipe for feelings of moral failing, guilt, self-denial, and self-deceit---in short, diminished (divided) agency (Khader 2014: 233).

To be sure, the self-subordination social recognition paradox discussed above depends on the viability of patriarchal norms in the face of powerful economic forces. Bucking patriarchy and risking social ostracism – which studies show to be among the worst evils cited by poor women, since it results in denying them the social pathways for acquiring all other goods (Kabeer 2001; Narayan 2000) --- might be worth it if globalization itself should render male control over household income more precarious (Khader 2014: 234). As Honneth points out, social crisis can be fertile ground for struggles for recognition that can nurture more abstract (autonomous) and more inclusive (cosmopolitan and humanitarian) communities of social

recognition and agency.²⁷ Of course, it remains an open question whether the conflicting recognition orders within capitalist society can fully make good the promise for universal

²⁷ Khader's conception of freedom-respecting (non-paternalistic) and culturally sensitive development intervention (what she calls deliberative perfectionism) seeks, correctly in my mind, to promote persons' ability to reflectively reconsider both the degree to which their social reality is as resistant to offering potential for human fulfillment as they perceive it to be *and* the degree to which their own initial preferences might be reconsidered as inappropriate in light of reconsidering their perception of reality. My own reservations with Khader's position lie in her conceptual understanding of this intervention. If the main cause of IAPs is a resistant reality that still needs to be changed in order to allow for fulfilling preferences, then the choice to adapt before this change has occurred is simply rational and is not, *pace* Khader, inappropriate; however, if the reality already permits acting on appropriate preferences, Khader has not convincingly explained why deliberative, dialogical intervention is needed in the first place, unless it forestalls a deficit in self-critical rationality and autonomy, thereby contradicting her view that IAPs do not imply shortfalls in procedural autonomy (due to ignorance of options, unreflective mentality, etc.) or substantive autonomy (due to overvaluing the goodness of dependency, social conformity, submission to authority, self-abnegation, etc.). Likewise, her dismissal of the "adaptive self view of IAP," held by Nussbaum and others, that links IAPs to lack of self-confidence, self-respect, or self-esteem, while surely correct, downplays the extent to which a preference to submit, *even while retaining a healthy sense of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem*, can reflect a *pathological rationalization*. However rational submission might be when done out of necessity and for the short term, when done over an extended period of time under less constraining conditions, dissimulating submission can become

emancipation they harbor. In today's neoliberal economic jungle, entrepreneurial recognition orders increasingly link self-esteem to social estimates of comparative success and contribution, thereby also increasing the psychological burden borne by boot-strapping individuals.

Conclusion

Recognition theory is needed to illuminate the psychological harms (and moral wrongs) that poor women living in the developing world suffer. These norms, of course, must be supplemented by similar accounts proposed by feminist theorists, among others, for whom psychic health need not issue in a fully harmonious, integrated personality, let alone one that exercises autonomous choice free from social identity constraints and their ambivalent effects. Qualified in this way, I believe that norms of autonomous identity also apply to developing countries that are transitioning toward modern society under the impact of global capitalism. Poor women in these societies likely experience the psychological harms and moral wrongs of misrecognition that the

indistinguishable from submission *even to the dissimulator*; in short (to use Sartre's memorable description of an inauthentic self-understanding that denies the truth of its own action) it can become a form of *bad faith* that has existential implications for choosing (and preferring) not just this or that action but for choosing (and preferring) this or that self.

poor everywhere experience. As women, they likely experience the psychological harms and moral wrongs that *women* almost everywhere experience.²⁸

In addition to these unremarkable psychological harms, poor women in the developing world experience an additional psychological harm that has ontological implications: the harm of suffering a profound identity crisis that, as intersectional theory again reminds us, is unique to them, however much it resembles similar crises suffered by women in the developed world.²⁹

²⁸ These socially (mis)recognized statuses and identities are, as one intersectional theorist tells us (Crenshaw 2017), more than the sum of their parts: a poor Bangladeshi woman experiences being a woman, being poor, etc. differently than a poor African American woman does.

²⁹ More research needs to be done exploring the conceptual and empirical links between ontological and empirical forms of distorted or disturbed recognition. However, my discussion of the different ways women can adapt to patriarchy suggests that the relationship between psychological and ontological aspects of recognition as it bears on the question of agency appears to be more complicated than some philosophers of recognition realize. Although it might seem that ontological recognition of agency can be achieved without being accompanied by psychological recognition, as Robert Pippin seems to argue in his account of Hegel's recognitive ethics (Pippin 2008), I would suggest, in keeping with Honneth and Charles Taylor (1994), that this possibility is rather remote. Conceivably, one can be recognized as a rationally accountable agent in the abstract, with all the rights accorded to one who enjoys equal status as a formal

rights holder in both legal and moral senses of the term, and still be denied a sense of psychological integrity that is free from guilt and self-abnegation. A recipient of micro-credit might suddenly find herself catapulted into civil society as an independent, legally empowered contractor with a new-found moral freedom to decide how to invest her capital but still be shunned by her husband and members of her community. She may be relatively certain of herself as a free agent but still suffer the anguish of non-recognition from family members and community. Conversely she could hand over her newly acquired assets to her husband and live the secure identity of an obedient wife to her husband while simultaneously playing a risky game of deception or suffering the shame of having abdicated an opportunity for empowerment that she knows other women have seized.

Both of these scenarios, with their respective uncoupling of ontological and psychological recognition--certainty of who one is, on one side, and feeling (and being) loved, respected, and esteemed, on the other -- are conceivable. However, in most cases, a woman who asserts her identity as a fully empowered legal and moral agent will need the psychological support of a community of like-minded women with whom she can share and manage her assets within a cooperative setting. Women living in urban areas avail themselves of this opportunity more than women in rural areas. These women will more likely have access to other supports as well, such as nearby medical and family planning clinics, job-training centers, literacy programs, and schools providing on-going adult education. Given how ideologically entrenched patriarchal subordination is in some areas, permanent, long-term, consciousness-raising education about women's oppression will also be needed in order for micro-finance to effectively empower women. Politically enlightened women who continue to perform a subordinate domestic role out of practical necessity will be reminded of their suppressed humanity whenever they suffer abuse

Women are vulnerable to suffering this crisis in any modernizing society where patriarchy persists, and as my discussion of the competing recognitive norms governing capitalist society suggests, people in that society, both men and women, are vulnerable to suffering forms of recognition that can have profound implications for how they identify themselves (e.g., as entrepreneurs or as citizens).

Nor is this harm ethically regrettable in all cases. An identity crisis may provoke self-reflection and social critique, and it may provoke struggle for social change that will in turn advance recognitive conditions necessary for development as an integral agent (Babbitt 1993). However, the identity crisis suffered by many poor women in transitional developing societies poses a dilemma that makes this last trajectory especially improbable: either these poor women can access the welfare necessary for limited agency by subordinating themselves to their husbands or they can risk even that limited welfare by seeking empowerment as autonomous agents according to the more egalitarian and emancipated norms of capitalist society. Leaving aside the normative contradictions that plague capitalist society, the expectation that providing these women with access to microcredit alone will solve the dilemma, by providing both welfare and empowerment, is questionable. Implemented in conjunction with cooperative enterprises and

and indignity at the hands of their husbands, but hopefully this divided consciousness, with the support of other women, will enable them to resist their oppression without affirming it insincerely, in transitioning toward a less conflicted identity and a freer and more fulfilling life.

consciousness-raising support groups, it may do so. Such supplements to microcredit interventions, however, can magnify, rather than diminish the identity crisis these women experience. This state of divided consciousness and divided agency rises to the stature of a regrettable injustice and pathology only when it is prolonged, aggravated, and severe enough to frustrate growth, thereby compelling regression to partial forms of social recognition in which self-deception becomes adaptive and some dimensions of agency are affirmed at the expense of others.

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