Philosophy in Public Administration: How Recognition Theory Informs Cultural Competency

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*Cultural Competency is an emerging theory that seeks to promote more constructive and equitable interactions amongst an increasingly diverse public sector workforce and its constituency. However, previous efforts to promote cultural competency within the public sector have failed to achieve desired results. Central to the cause of these odious results is an underlying dearth of commitment to the promotion of social equity in the academy as well as the public sector. This research intersects the fields of Public Administration and Philosophy by comparing Mitchell Rice and Audrey Matthews’ proposed ‘cultural competency’ attributes to postulated characteristics of self-formation axes within Axel Honneth’s ‘recognition theory.’ The results explicate the analogous nature of these theories and illuminate the benefits of pursuing an interdisciplinary approach to promote the comprehension of, and commitment to, cultural competency amongst public administration practitioners, scholars, and students.*

Keywords: Cultural Competency, Recognition Theory, Public Administration, Philosophy

Introduction

Shelly Peffer (2012) contends, “Cultural competency is not an issue of competency, or even equity; it is an issue of understanding” (Norman-Major & Gooden, 2014 p. 32). An organization exhibiting cultural competence "acknowledges and incorporates – at all levels – the importance of culture, assessment of cross cultural relations, vigilance toward the dynamics that result from cultural differences, expansion of cultural knowledge, and adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs" (Betancourt et al, 2003, p. 294). Successful cultural competency programs critique incorrect and antiquated policies, practices, and attitudes regarding minority cultures in an attempt to offer higher quality public services.

As a modern liberal democracy, the United States must constantly seek to fight the status quo and foster the development and autonomy of its constituents (Johnson & Svara, 2011 p. 282). This fight is grounded in the theory of cultural competency. Simply put, “cultural competency is fundamental to good government” (Norman-Major & Gooden, 2012, p. 3). The first step in this endeavor is to train the American public sector to adequately administer cultural competency programs within its agencies. This knowledge will cultivate a more efficient, effective, and equitable public sector. Unfortunately, this training will require a fundamental paradigm shift within the public sector that counters long-held attitudes, policies, and practices. Honneth’s Recognition Theory can inform such a paradigm shift.

Recognition Theory, as presented in the translated works of German philosopher Axel Honneth, describes the vital human need to be thought of, and accepted as, distinctly separate individuals without being identical entities (Honneth, 1995). Furthermore, it seeks to explain why humans desire to be valued and supported by others (Iser, 2013, Taylor, 1994). This need for recognition requires more than just “the fair distribution of material goods;” a society with equitable distribution of resources, but unresolved structural deficiency, remains an unjust society (Anderson, 1995, p. x). Such injustice goes beyond deprivation of material resources; it inhabits “individuals’ negative experiences of having their broadly ‘moral’ expectations violated” (Anderson, 1995, p. xi). Thus, Honneth does not emphasize the struggle for “self-preservation, but rather the struggle for the establishment of relations of mutual recognition, as a precondition for self-realization” (Anderson, 1995, p. x).

Honneth’s Recognition Theory proposes three self-formation axes: love, respect, and esteem (Anderson, 1995; and van den Brink and Owen, 2007). These components are crucially dependent for individuals’ “sensing, interpreting, and realizing one’s needs and desires” (Anderson, 1995 p. xi). Identity-formation (self-realization) can only be acquired through the receipt of recognition from “others whom one also recognizes” (Anderson, 1995, p. xi, Honneth, 1995, p. 92). These relationships of recognition exceed simple “relations of love and friendship,” and include complex “legally institutionalized relations of universal respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons;” they also include “networks of solidarity and shared values within which the particular worth of individual members of a community can be acknowledged” (Anderson, 1995, p. xii).

These interactions, or relationships, result in varying degrees of (mis-)recognition between individuals (Iser, 2013). “That we find ourselves more frequently engaging in relations of corrupted (mis-), rather than pure, recognition, is a result of a failure to achieve those conditions – both individual and social – that are conducive to pure recognition” (Monahan, 2006, p. 393). The discord between pure and corrupt recognition parallels that between cultural competence and incompetence. The analogous and reciprocal nature of cultural awareness and love, cultural knowledge and respect, and cultural skill and esteem, is tantamount to the intersubjectively given recognition, as proposed by Honneth, between individuals. It is these dynamics that inform our assertion of a nexus between recognition theory and the theory of cultural competency, and of the concomitant benefit to be had from their conjoint study.

Converting cultural competency theory into practice throughout public administration has been a complex and burdensome task with limited success. Such a conversion calls for a comprehensive ‘gamma change’ in ideology amongst individuals which, according to Golembiewski (1986), involves a person shifting to a redefined or new conception of reality. In the excerpt below, a Seattle Office of Civil Rights employee chronicles the dilemma of public sector workers who are confronted with a ‘gamma change’ situation.

There’s always going to be committed radicals who want to do this (equity work); this is their passion. But I believe that nothing will change institutionally if you only catch the most radical…it can’t just rely on a handful of leaders. It’s got to be the actual mediocre person who doesn’t care about this. Ultimately, the goal is to get people to do racial equity work who don’t care about it. We shouldn’t think of ourselves as special for doing this. Rather, we should view this as regular government stuff (Gooden, 2014, p. 98).

In addition, Borins (1998) contends that successful innovation occurs when there is systematic thinking and planning for change.

Quinn and Cameron (1983) examined nine models of organizational life cycles from which they identified four common stages of organizational life-cycle development. Quinn and Cameron’s fourth stage, the ‘structural elaboration and adaptation stage,’ chronicles the period after an organization has declined to adjust – failed to make a paradigm shift – and has become stagnant in its efforts to evolve. During this fourth stage, an organization “seeks new ways to adapt, to renew itself, and expand its domain” (Rainey, 2014 p. 412). A genuine cultural competency ethos allows public agencies to evolve into Quinn and Cameron’s coveted fourth stage.

Implementation of new programs is most effective when individuals throughout the organization develop a thorough understanding of, and deep commitment to, the ideals promoted by the program (Poister, 1998; Foldy and Buckley, 2014; Rice and Mathews, 2012). The degree to which these programs succeed is linked to the number of employees that are modeling the goals of the new program (Foldy and Buckley, 2014). This individual learning and commitment imperative suggests public administration graduate programs and institutions must incorporate cultural competency training into their curricula and training (Johnson and Rivera, 2007; Hewins-Maroney and Williams, 2007; Gooden and Wooldridge, 2007; Gooden, 2014; and Rice, 2007).

Having engaged the fields of Philosophy and Public Administration by situating them within the context of furthering Public Administration practitioner, scholar, and student understanding of the human need for more constructive and equitable outcomes from the pubic sector, this paper next proceeds with explicative discussions of Recognition Theory and Cultural Competency. Then, the thesis of a nexus between these theories is presented, followed by an interpretive comparison of the characteristics of recognition theory self-formation axes and cultural competency attributes. We conclude that recognition theory self-formation axes and the cultural competency attributes considered herein are analogous and reciprocal in nature. This conclusion illuminates the benefits of further study of recognition theory – and more generally of human physiological and psychological needs – by public administration practitioners, scholars, and students to further promote their comprehension of, and commitment to, cultural competency and social equity.

Recognition Theory

Recognition theory has come to occupy “a central place in contemporary debates in social and political theory (van den Brink and Owen, 2007, p. 1).” This is in no small part due to solidarity being a task of societies, and not just of families or close friends (Iser, 2013), which hints at recognition’s applicability for studying the political (Anderson, 1995) and the public (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Indeed, recognition “is proving central to the efforts to conceptualize today’s struggles over identity and difference” (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 1; and Taylor, 1994). And, Fraser and Honneth (2003, p. 2) assert “neither recognition nor redistribution can be overlooked…political philosophers have no choice but to examine the relations between them.” It is this applicability of recognition theory to the study of the social and political – and to identity and difference – that inspires and informs its comparison to cultural competency herein. The worthiness of such a comparison is suggested by van den Brink and Owen (2007, p. 1) when they write: “The research program that Honneth has developed is widely acknowledged as both an empirically insightful way of reflecting on emancipatory struggles for greater justice within…societies and a powerful way of generating a conception of justice…” The broader framework of recognition theory is relied upon to inform this analysis, but it is the translated work of Axel Honneth that is most closely examined; specifically the three self-formation axes as detailed by van den Brink and Owen (2007) in *On Recognition and Power*, and Honneth himself in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (1995).

Honneth asserts that unlike the historic determination of legal order predicated solely upon an individual’s origin (familial and/or geographic), age, or function (job), modern societies have ‘split’ legal recognition and value recognition apart from one another; all persons, whether able to experience it or not, know they are said to have “legal equality vis-à-vis all others” in society (van den Brink and Owen, 2007, p. 16). Value recognition, Honneth believes, has become tied to market capitalism, and thus acquired by individuals according to how each succeeds as a productive citizen (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; and van den Brink and Owen, 2007). This ‘split’ in what was once a unitary order provides for dissonance that can result in conflicts and demands for recognition by those perceiving its lack (Benhabib, 1986; Honneth, 1995).

In their Introduction to *On Recognition and Power*, van den Brink and Owen (2007, p. 10) tell us that Honneth “argues that moral subjectivity and agency today require the formation of practical relations to self that are constituted in and through relations of recognition across three axes of self-formation.” These three axes are “love,” “respect,” and “esteem” (van den Brink and Owen, 2007, p. 10). A lack of developing or experiencing love, respect, and esteem, results in mis-, or corrupted, recognition, which can prevent the individual from adequately developing self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (van den Brink and Owen, 2007, p. 4). In social contexts, corrupted recognition is experienced as harm, or as an injustice committed by one party against another (Taylor, 1994). This harm can be seen to come from institutions if “subjects perceive institutional procedures as social injustice when they see aspects of their personality being disrespected which they believe have a right to recognition” (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 132; Taylor, 1994; van den Brink and Owen, 2007).

Recognition theory scholars such as Fraser, according to van den Brink and Owen (2007), insist “that only recognition and redistribution taken together would allow for the right kind of justice, namely the ideal “participatory parity” that guarantees each subject an equal participation in public life.” Honneth, however, sees all forms of recognition as springing from the psychological relations between people rather than from social systems, such as capitalism or governmental institutions, making grievances regarding the distribution of goods in society struggles for recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Honneth’s position was greatly informed

by his study of Hegel’s early work, from which he describes Hegel’s thought that “neither laws prescribed by the state nor the moral convictions of isolated subjects[,] but only attitudes that are actually acted out intersubjectively [between people via norms or customs in society] can provide a sound basis for the exercise of that extended freedom [that extended freedom being public life in an ideal community serving as opportunity for the fulfillment of every individual’s freedom]” (Honneth, 1995, p. 13).

It could be argued that the recognition theory variant propounded by Fraser, with its redistribution component (Fraser and Honneth, 2003), is most appropriate for the analysis conducted herein. However, as we’ve argued, it is individual public servants, and not an amorphous group of public service employees (i.e. an agency), that interact with one another and work to provide services (Foldy and Buckley, 2014). The view that recognition springs from relations between people informs the assertion that individual – rather than institutional – commitment is most paramount for effecting changes in the beliefs and behaviors that lead to constructive and equitable interactions and transactions between public administrators and their colleagues and constituents. Thus, we utilize Honneth’s recognition theory, and specifically, his self-formation axes, to conduct our comparison.

Honneth’s self-formation axes describe the pure recognition (constructive and equitable treatment) received by one party from the love, respect, and esteem shown to them by another. Conversely, corrupted recognition (destructive and inequitable treatment) results from the withholding of love, respect, and esteem by one party from another. It is the beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of the receiver that are the primary focus of recognition theory.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency is a relatively new area of study related to diversity management within Public Administration (Rice and Mathews, 2012). It seeks to change the ‘color-blind’ paradigm to one that sees, understands, and values the differences that exist amongst people, and allows public servants to act according to those differences so that their interactions and service delivery will result in better outcomes for their colleagues and constituents (Rice, 2007). Essentially, the goal of cultural competency programs is to ensure provision of socially constructive and equitable outcomes to a diverse population.

With awareness of white privilege and incidents of racial discrimination seemingly on the rise, it is more important than ever that the study and practice of cultural competency move to center stage within the public sector.Some public administration scholars, such as Rice and Mathews (2012, p. 20), advocate for “moving diversity management’s use of cultural competency in the delivery of public programs and public agency services from the conceptual and unconnected to a legitimate theoretic framework and model.” As such, Rice and Mathews (2012, p. 23) suggest that a “new kind of public service agency professional” should possess “explicit cultural competency awareness, knowledge, and skills.” The component characteristics of these specific attributes – cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills – involve understanding that people from different cultures think and act differently from one another, knowing what those differences are among the populations working in and being served by their respective organizations, and acting in a manner that respects and incorporates those differences to ensure better outcomes from the public agency’s services and programs.

Rice and Mathews’ cultural competency attributes describe the cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills that must be exercised by public sector employees in the delivery of equitable treatment (pure recognition) to another. Conversely, not exercising cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills can result in the delivery of inequitable treatment (corrupted recognition) to another. It is the beliefs, behaviors, and experiences of the provider that are the primary focus of cultural competency.

Thesis

We contend that the belief and behavior characteristics of the love, respect, and esteem self-formation axes identified by Honneth in recognition theory are analogous – and reciprocal – to the cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skill attributes of culturally competent public administration professionals as defined by Rice and Mathews (2012). Specifically, we’re suggesting that the ways in which one comes to obtain and express awareness of one’s behaviors and their impact on others (cultural awareness), the knowledge and valuation of how others obtain and express their beliefs (cultural knowledge), and the beliefs and behaviors that spring from a resultant ability to empathize with others (cultural skills) constitutes a phenomenon analogous to *granting* recognition – that is, “a manifestation of one’s own agency in the world, by having it ‘given back’ (or affirmed) by another” (Monahan, 2006, p. 393). In essence, a public administrator’s provision of equitable treatment to a colleague or constituent (through the public administrator exercising his/her cultural competency) represents the ‘giving back’ (or affirmation) of the colleague or constituent’s agency by the public administrator (through the public administrator granting recognition). That both recognition theory and cultural competency require ‘providers’ and ‘receivers’ demonstrates their analogousness to one another. The intersubjective interactions manifest in each theory elucidates their reciprocal nature.

Love and Cultural Awareness

Love, according to Honneth, is “an affirmation of independence” of one person “that is guided – indeed, supported – by care” from another. Broadly, this process, most often attributed to mother-infant relations (Honneth, 1995, p. 95), prepares the ground for basic self-confidence as a practical relation to self (Anderson, 1995; van den brink and Owen, 2007). Honneth, according to van den Brink and Owen (2007, p. 12), argues that the (establishment and maintenance of this) basic self-confidence, born of this love, “is an on-going activity.” So *love*, initially required from the primary caregiver, *must continue to be received from ongoing interactions with others throughout life*. Further, the love axis of self-formation must be exercised according to a principle of loving care and friendship *for the* *concrete needs and desires of others* that fosters their self-confidence (van den Brink and Owen, 2007).

Cultural awareness takes into account the values, attitudes, and assumptions of others in the provision of public services (Rice and Mathews 2012, p. 27). They note that self-awareness – having an understanding of our own particular beliefs and attitudes, and that “we are the products of our own cultural conditioning” – is critical for developing cultural awareness. We see these characteristics in some of the attributes of cultural awareness as identified by Rice and Mathews (2012, p. 27). Specifically, these attributes are: awareness that one’s own cultural heritage and background affects one’s worldview, values, and assumptions; a belief in the value and significance of their own cultural heritage and worldview as a starting place for understanding others who are culturally different from them; awareness of their own behavior and its impact on others; a belief that differences are valuable and that learning about others who are culturally different is necessary and rewarding; an acceptance of other worldviews and perspectives…; and, a strong commitment to justice, social change, and social equity.

These attributes essentially describe some of the beliefs and behaviors involved in granting recognition to another. To wit, one’s background, how one’s background affects one’s thoughts and behaviors, and the self-valuing of one’s personal background, constitutes *one’s concrete needs and desires*. Furthermore, one’s awareness of their behavior and its impact on others, and the belief that cultural differences are valuable and should be understood and accepted from others, represents awareness that others have their own set of needs and desires informed by their particular background. Finally, a strong commitment to justice and social equity demands that one demonstrate acceptance and appreciation of others’ differences, which is emblematic of the *mutual and reciprocal provision* (here, specifically, between public sector colleagues, and to their constituents) *of love* (as defined by Honneth) in *ongoing interactions*. The preceding interpretation narrative has been reconstructed in an analysis matrix and appears in Table 1.

Table 1 here

From this comparative interpretation we determined that the recognition theory self-formation axis of love could be stated as: *Love* for the *concrete needs and desires of others, which* *must continue to be given and received* from *ongoing interactions.* And, cultural awareness can be stated as: *Ongoing interactions* (between public sector colleagues, and to their constituents) for the *mutual and reciprocal provision* of *others’ concrete needs and desires* through *love.* Hence, our assertion of the analogous and reciprocal nature of the self-formation axis of love and the cultural competency attribute of cultural awareness. Figure 1 is a visual depiction of this analogousness and reciprocity.

Figure 1 here

Respect and Cultural Knowledge

Respect, and the “normative expectation of being treated with” it, according to Anderson (1995, p. xiv) and Iser (2013), “is most obvious when we look at *extreme forms of humiliation* in which specific (groups of) humans are symbolically,” consequently, or materially *excluded from humanity*. Sadly, Iser (2013) informs us, “even if the victims know that their degradation is unjustified, they cannot but feel humiliated all the same.” Yet, it is not only through severe humiliation that respect can be withheld. The *denial of moral or legal standing* can also manifest disrespect, according to Iser (2013), who goes on to quote Honneth as saying that this “refers to those forms of personal disrespect to which an individual is subjected by being structurally excluded from the possession of certain rights *within a society*.” “Only *equal positive rights institutionalize recognition* in a publicly manifest way, and thus make it easier for the individual *to develop self-respect*” (Iser, 2013). Here, ‘positive’ rights oblige action to be enjoyed, where ‘negative’ rights would oblige inaction to avoid their infringement.

Honneth sees self-respect claims as “*grounded in legal relations*… that is, in our reciprocal recognition of ourselves and of others as bearers of legal (and moral) rights” (van den Brink and Owen, 2007, p. 12). Importantly, possessing rights permits one to raise claims of infringement of those rights *which society accepts as valid*. These rights empower the bearer to engage in action that is perceived by interaction partners. The option of legal recourse to an infringed upon right provides a symbolic means of social expression that demonstrates the possessor is universally recognized as a moral person.

Cultural knowledge, according to Rice and Mathews (2012, p. 27), requires understanding the worldview of various cultural groups and the possession of “expertise relevant to persons in those groups.” The behaviors and beliefs one must possess to have the understanding and expertise in some of the cultural knowledge attributes described by Rice and Mathews are: knowledge about the nature of institutional power in other cultures, knowledge and understanding of discrimination and its impact on identity and self-esteem, and, knowledge about identity development models and the acculturation process for members of oppressed or underserved groups and their impact on individuals, groups, intergroup relations, and society.

These attributes also describe some of the beliefs and behaviors inherent in granting recognition to another. Specifically, knowing about the nature of institutional power in other cultures is correlative to knowing that only *equal positive rights institutionalize recognition.* Furthermore, one’s knowledge and understanding of discrimination and its impact on identity and self-esteem is analogous to the understanding that *extreme forms of humiliation,* which have *excluded* others *from humanity,* results in corrupted recognition – which is essentially a *denial of moral or legal standing* or alienation (Honneth, 1995), *within a society*. And, knowledge about identity development and acculturation of oppressed or underserved groups (and their impact on individuals, groups, intergroup relations, and society), represents cognizance of the phenomenon that is corrupted recognition – the denial of ones’ ability *to develop self-respect* *which society accepts as valid*. Society’s acceptance of the validity of the need to develop self-respect (which has been denied) constitutes its being *grounded in legal relations*. The preceding interpretation narrative has been reconstructed in an analysis matrix and appears in Table 2.

Table 2 here

From this comparative interpretation we determined that the recognition theory self-formation axis of respect is *grounded in legal regulations*, creating *equal positive rights,* through the *institutionalization of recognition* which allows others to *develop self-respect* *which is valid to society* and stops the *denial of moral or legal standing within a society,* thereby preventing the *exclusion of others from humanity* through *extreme forms of humiliation*. And, cultural knowledge was determined to require that *extreme forms of humiliation* that *exclude* *others* *from humanity* must be stopped to prevent *denial of moral or legal standing within a society* so others may *develop self-respect which is valid to society*, thus promoting the *institutionalization of recognition* through creation of *equal positive rights* that are *grounded in legal relations*. Hence, our assertion of the analogous and reciprocal nature of the self-formation axis of respect and the cultural competency attribute of cultural knowledge. Figure 2 is a visual depiction of this analogousness and reciprocity.

Figure 2 here

Esteem and Cultural Skills

Esteem, or, rather, what or who should be given esteem, is contested within Philosophy. Iser (2013) notes that the question generally comes down to whether recognition should be provided to subjects on the basis of their possessing equal moral status or for their possessing specific properties or characteristics. We assert that esteem should be granted on the basis of equal moral status because cultural competency seeks to deliver more equitable outcomes through the development and use of understanding, accepting, and valuing of difference, thereby supporting distinct individual or group properties or characteristics.  Indeed, it is for these differences, or, specific *identity aspects* (Iser, 2013), that, having been heretofore “neglected or *demeaned by the dominant value and norm system* of their society,” individuals and groups have sought recognition and esteem.

It is the fight for recognition of these differences that has led to “identity politics” (Iser, 2013). The goal of identity politics is to demonstrate that the ‘neutral’ state is actually based on a system that favors the ‘norm,’ which results in citizens not falling within that norm being discriminated against. *It is actions taken* (Honneth, 2007a) *to correct these injustices* (mis-recognition) – affirmative action, for example – that can serve to improve the equitable results for these non-normative groups. It is important to note that the *full inclusion* of “the affected groups into the process of democratic decision-making, for example, through a vitalized public sphere and formal hearings,” must occur “*to arrive at the desired context-sensitive laws* and regulations” (Iser, 2013). Finally, Honneth, (1995, p. 128), considers self-esteem to be a practical relation-to-self, in which “*one’s distinct traits* and abilities *are valued*.”

Cultural skills, note Rice and Mathews (2012, p. 27-28), “consist of those attributes that allow public administrators to effectively apply their cultural awareness and cultural knowledge,” both of which are necessary if the public administrator is to be able to successfully identify or develop culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions. The behaviors one must exhibit in order to be considered as having some of the cultural skill attributes described by Rice and Mathews are: the ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues, the ability to gain the trust and respect of individuals who are culturally different from themselves, the ability to support individuals and systems that identify oppression issues in a manner that optimizes multicultural interventions, and, the ability to use culture to undertake culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions.

These attributes describe some of the beliefs and behaviors inherent in granting recognition to another. Specifically, the ability of a public administrator to identify and discuss cultural differences and issues, and gain the trust and respect of individuals who are culturally different from themselves, demonstrates both an acceptance and *valuing of one’s distinct traits* andabilities, and the *full inclusion* of those possessing *identity aspects demeaned by the dominant value and norm system* of their society*.* Furthermore, the ability to support individuals and systems that identify oppression issues in a manner that optimizes multicultural interventions, and to use culture to undertake culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions, is representative of the capability to *devise desired context-sensitive laws and enact them to correct injustices* so that *distinct traits are valued*. The preceding interpretation narrative has been reconstructed in an analysis matrix and appears in table 3 below.

Table 3 here

From this comparative interpretation we determined that the recognition theory self-formation axis of esteem requires *action to be taken to correct injustices* *by devising context-sensitive laws* to protect those *demeaned by the dominant value and norm system* due to their possession of *identity aspects* which work against their *full inclusion* and *the valuing of their distinct traits*. And, cultural competency skills were determined to require that *one value their distinct traits* and work to provide *full inclusion* of those possessing *identity aspects* that are *demeaned by the dominant value and norm system* by *devising context-sensitive laws* and *enacting them to correct injustices.* Hence, our assertion of the analogous and reciprocal nature of the self-formation axis of esteem and the cultural competency attribute of cultural skill. Figure 3 is a visual depiction of this analogousness and reciprocity.

Figure 3 here

Conclusion

The attitudes and behaviors of public administrators inform current expressions of recognition between themselves and their colleagues and constituents. The continuing propensity for oppression and humiliation demonstrates an ongoing refusal to embrace or incorporate the beliefs and behaviors characterized by the self-formation axes of recognition theory and the attributes of cultural competency examined throughout this paper. These conditions represent a breach in the social contract between citizens and their government that must be remedied.

Despite their dichotomy of focus – recognition theory on the recipient and cultural competency on the provider – our thesis that recognition theory’s three axes of self-formation are analogous to the attributes in the three areas of cultural competency has been shown to be valid. The illumination of the nexus between these theories elucidates the educational benefit that the study of both can provide to public sector scholars, practitioners, and students. This examination also suggests further comparison between recognition theory and cultural competency could prove fruitful.

Recognition theory’s self-formation axes juxtaposed against the cultural competency attributes revealed a reciprocal dynamic at play between them which is clearly identified throughout this paper. However, a more granular exploration of the self-formation axes and cultural competency attributes should be undertaken by public administration scholars to tease out possible nuances that could further enhance the understanding of, and commitment to, cultural competency by students and practitioners within public administration. With the identification of the nexus between self-formation axes and cultural competency’s attributes, educators and practitioners involved in cultural competency work within the public sector should set about conducting deeper exploration into how these respective fields might further inform their practice and improve their results. There most certainly is need of the latter.

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