Habermas, Honneth, Critical Theory, and Ideology Critique for Transformative Mixed Methods Research

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Abstract

This article sets a theoretical foundation to transformative mixed methods research that is rooted in the critical theory of Habermas and Honneth. This addresses Habermas's knowledge-constitutive interests and communicative action for redressing societal pathologies, and Honneth's work on (mis)recognition, (dis)respect, and social justice. In doing so, the article argues for broadening the scope and embrace of mixed methods research, to go beyond being empirical research only or largely, and to include theorisation, critical theoretical discourse and its analysis, and ideology critique, as legitimate methods for (transformative) mixed methods research. The article makes a case for these methods as constituting important research methods in themselves in the portfolio of mixed methods research, moving the boundaries of mixed methods research beyond solely empirical studies, and providing emancipatory lenses and consciousness-raising in recognising that transformation takes many forms.

Keywords: transformative mixed methods research; Habermas; Honneth; critical theory; ideology critique; mixed methods research; social justice; communicative action; recognition; ideal speech situation

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Overview

This article deliberately is theoretical in nature, purpose, and content. It sets out theoretical roots of the transformative mixed methods research (TMMR) paradigm in the Frankfurt School of critical theory. It advocates ideology critique as a research method in itself in mixed methods research (MMR) and TMMR, concerning the theorisation, examination, and interrogation of ideas, values, and power operating in a situation or phenomenon, in order to expose how they reflect and embody the interests of powerful and socially dominant groups in society, and to question the legitimacy of their power in terms of how they operate to the detriment of the powerless and disempowered. Ideology critique is advocated here to be a legitimate method in the existing array of mixed methods in MMR and TMMR, and it adds an alternative, legitimate, and important method to the often-required *sine qua non* inclusion and reference to empirical research in considering and conducting MMR. Along with ideology critique, and with critical theory as its pedigree, the article advocates theorising as a legitimate method in MMR and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), analysing and interrogating the legitimacy of the role of language in constructing knowledge, decision making, values, ideology, and power. Here, critical discourse is defined as the combination of language, knowledge, and power (Bramley & Morrison, 2023; Fairclough, 1995, 2014), and ideology critique as its method. In so doing, the article draws its key features from the work of Habermas and Honneth as laying a theoretical foundation of emancipatory and transformative features of MMR.

In making the case for theorisation, critical discourse analysis, and ideology critique as methods in themselves for MMR, together with setting a clear theoretical framework for TMMR and MMR, the article addresses Habermas's knowledge-constitutive interests and communicative action for redressing societal pathologies, and to Axel Honneth's work on (mis)recognition, (dis)respect, and social justice. The article argues that adopting their critical theory advocates for broadening the scope of TMMR. This includes engaging more studies of power, with non-empirical research, theoretical analysis and development, discourse analysis, and ideology critique, reflection, and argument as legitimate research methods in TMMR and MMR. TMMR and MMR are not confined solely to empirical research but can adopt other approaches to research, as happens in many forms of social science research.

The article sets out key features and claims of TMMR, noting the centrality of issues of 'interests', emancipation, power, and resistance. From there, it moves to the work of Habermas and Honneth, arguing for their relevance and significance to the theoretical underpinning of TMMR and to engaging the adoption of critical discourse analysis and ideology critique as methods in themselves to be included in MMR and TMMR—that is, breaking out of confining mixed methods research to only or largely empirical studies. In so doing, the article teases out implications for TMMR, arguing for expanding its theoretical foundations, research methods, scope, inclusion, and diversity in meeting its emancipatory, transformative aims. Whilst accepting Mertens's (2008) view that TMMR must be grounded in practice, this does not preclude the need for, contribution of, and benefit from, contributing to theory in TMMR, with critical theoretical discourse analysis and ideology critique as legitimate methods in themselves in TMMR and MMR, which is the advocational purpose of the article.

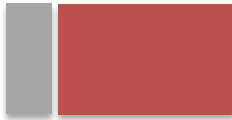**Emancipation and the Transformative Paradigm of Mixed Methods Research**

There is a compelling case for including MMR in promoting 'interested' research, in contrast to the appeal to neutrality of research (Freshwater & Fisher, 2015). Here, TMMR recognises that 'social arrangements are irremediably interest laden, power laden, and value laden' (Mertens, 2003, p. 137).

Cram and Mertens (2015) accord a privileged position to MMR in the transformative paradigm,[1] as it: can capture the diversity and complexity of the lived reality of people; is sufficiently flexible to meet the need for cultural appropriacy and sensitivity; renders research both strong and compelling by including both 'numbers and voices' (p. 94); enables justice to be undertaken to the need to contextualise research; catches the agency and voices of participants in a particular situation or phenomenon; and leads to action in promoting equity, equality, and democracy, particularly for marginalised, oppressed, subordinated, and often silenced groups in society. Examples of empirical research and action-oriented interventions in TMMR, include, example studies of "equitable and caring school systems for marginalized youth" (Garnett et al., 2019, p. 305); plant closure and its consequent unemployment of Indigenous groups in New Zealand (Cram & Mertens, 2015); a gang prevention program for children aged 9 to 14 in Halifax (Ungar et al., 2015); teaching deaf persons; and, "access to services for HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention" in Brazil (Mertens, 2010, p. 471). Many further examples are referenced throughout this article.

The transformative paradigm has an explicit agenda of addressing and eliminating inequality, inequity, injustice, misrecognition, disrespect, discrimination, violence, marginalisation and exclusion of peoples, and their vulnerability, disempowerment, domination, subordination, and oppression. It addresses emancipation, anti-discrimination, participatory action, feminism, anti-racism, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and people who work "on behalf of marginalized groups" (Mertens, 2003, p. 139) and indigenous groups (e.g. Romm, 2015a, 2015b). TMMR prioritises social justice and furthering human rights (Mertens, 2010). Examples of empirical research here include Chilisa (2005); Chilisa and Mertens (2021); Chilisa and Tsheko (2014); Cram and Mertens (2015, 2016); Goodyear-Smith and Ofanoa (2022); Hoang and Romm, (2020); Martel et al. (2022). How far TMMR can achieve its goal of emancipation is an open question (Freshwater & Fisher, 2015). Researchers must be realistic in tempering aspiration with reality in terms of what can be achieved by a single research study (Mertens, 2022).

TMMR's vast advocacy agenda seeks to bring about social change, to replace pathologies of society with an empowering, emancipatory agenda including: furthering social justice; individual, communitarian, and societal empowerment and existential emancipation; recognition, mutual understanding, inclusion, and respect; human rights; dignity; equity and fairness; equality and democracy; collaboration and agency; voice and communication; diversity and difference; action-orientation and involvement; intersubjective relations and trust; and responsibility and reciprocity. Here, individuals, communities, and societies take control over their own lives and decision making within a just, fair, egalitarian, democratic, humanitarian, participatory society, involving the action-oriented practice of democracy, inclusion, involvement, engagement, and equality.

TMMR serves the realisation—making real—of such empowerment within a just society, enabling the depth and fullness of a phenomenon, situation, context, and agency to be recognised and addressed, and to involve and engage the participants, the 'researched', in decision making on the planning, conduct, and outcomes of the research, what happens in it and after it. This is so that the research is consequentially beneficial for the participants, not only for the researchers. In TMMR, the research is not something that is *done to* the researched

but is something done *with* and *for* them.

TMMR interrogates and challenges issues of power, with an agenda for promoting social justice and human rights, particularly for the marginalised, the oppressed, the subordinated, the dominated, the powerless, the unheard, and the silenced. It embraces agency, contextuality, lived experiences, struggle, and engagement. TMMR's ambitious intention here is not new; it harks back to critical theory, and this article sets out a theoretical foundation of this and advances the case for theorisation, theoretical and critical discourse analysis, and ideology critique to be methods in their own right in MMR and TMMR, i.e., moving beyond solely empirical research.

In linking participant involvement, power, research knowledge, and epistemology, knowledge of "reality" is "socially constructed" (Mertens, 2007, p. 216) with multiple facets and views of reality, and with differentials of power operating in differing participants. Leach Sankofa (2022) comments that, in the transformative paradigm, reality is "socially coconstructed" with the participants and researchers, and that "[t]hese are laden with political, social, economic, and cultural power imbalances that cause both privilege and oppression" (p. 310).

Echoing Habermas, discussed later, Mertens (2003) remarked that "knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests, reflecting power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society" (p. 139). Power and privilege are "important determinants of which reality will be privileged in a research context" (Mertens, 2007, p. 212). Similarly, Freshwater and Fisher (2015), writing on TMMR, comment that "many meanings are socially derived and … some constructs are more privileged than others" (p. 669). Different parties have different definitions of the situation; those of privileged groups have no automatic right to be voiced and heard louder than have those of the marginalised, the oppressed, the disempowered, the victims of injustice, and the *have-nots*. Here, TMMR accesses and addresses these voices and groups, recognising the complexity and multilayered nature of concerns faced by marginalised people (e.g., Cram & Mertens, 2015). In interrogating power, this article advocates for ideology critique, theorisation, theoretical analysis, and critical discourse analysis to be included as legitimate and appropriate methods in MMR and TMMR.

Social Justice, Power, Resistance, and Solidarity

In addressing theorising, and ideologically critiquing power and empowerment in TMMR, this article holds that power is not one-sided (Foucault, 2000); it is a relational force and is not solely coercive and enacted; rather it is fluid and constantly being (re)negotiated. For Foucault, "power is a phenomenon that is exercised rather than possessed" (Cooper, 1994, p. 436); power is not a thing, a possession; rather, it is a relation, an event, a process. Regarding power as relational engages the possibility of resistance, modifying its hold over people. As Foucault (1978) wrote: "where there is power there is resistance" (p. 95). This also finds its voice in TMMR's recognition of the importance of relations and relationships between the researcher and the researched (Mertens, 2010), and for TMMR to be action oriented.

Mertens (2003) commented that "critical theorists analyze power interests and how research can be used to either challenge or support the status quo" (p. 139). In TMMR, interrogating power recognises the involvement of agency and voices of all parties, both the privileged and the oppressed; it engages resistance. Power relations involve strategies, forms, and practices of resistance; TMMR seeks to investigate and to understand these. Although TMMR often focuses on the disempowered, and seeks to empower them, this is only a fraction of the whole story. Examining the powerless, oppressed, dominated, marginalised,

discriminated, excluded, and victims of illegitimate power, promoted the argument for TMMR also to include and to address the empowered, the powerful, the privileged, the perpetrators of illegitimate power—that is, not only the victims, but also the powerful groups.

TMMR frequently focuses on victims of inequality, oppression, social injustice, and the breach of human rights (e.g., Barnes, 2019; Barnhardt et al., 2018; Bletscher & Galindo, 2024; Chilisa, 2005; Cram & Mertens, 2015; Maleku et al., 2019; Wilson & Winiarczyk, 2014). The powerful and the privileged need to be included in TMMR studies, even though the voices, agency, and actions of the subordinate, marginalised groups take centre stage. Not to include those in power in TMMR research risks missing the *elephant in the room* and its proxies.

Solidarity and collectivity feature in TMMR, with actions being taken to emancipate society and groups in society, and to upset existing power relations in promoting social justice, equality, recognition, and Habermas's *generalizable interests*, discussed later. Generalizable interests (purposes/agendas/powers) are those that benefit everyone rather than only some groups' interests (e.g., the powerful) at the expense, neglect, disempowerment, or exploitation of other, disempowered groups. This harks back to Habermas's view of solidarity as the *reverse side* of justice. As he commented:

> the perspective complementing that of equal treatment of individuals is not benevolence, but solidarity. … Justice conceived deontologically requires solidarity as its reverse side. … Every autonomous morality has to serve two purposes at once: it brings to bear the inviolability of socialized individuals by requiring equal treatment and thereby equal respect for the dignity of each one; and it protects intersubjective relationships of mutual recognition requiring solidarity of individual members of a community, in which they have been socialized. Justice concerns the equal freedoms of unique and self-determining individuals, while solidarity concerns the welfare of consociates who are intimately linked in an intersubjectively shared form of life ... Moral norms cannot protect one without the other.
> (Habermas, 1990b, p. 244)

Planning and Conducting Transformative Mixed Methods Research

TMMR interrogates and addresses differentials of power and the views of marginalised groups on such differentials (Cram & Mertens, 2015). It requires the active participation of the community being researched to run from the beginning to the end of the research study (Mertens, 2007, 2010). The TMMR must benefit the participants. The main question always and forever for research praxis remains, "Who benefits"' (Mertens, 2007, p. 101). Here, Cram and Mertens (2015) and Romm (2018) comment on the need for research to embody respect, responsibility, relationships, and reciprocity. Willis and Saunders (2007) report indigenous populations who had been interrogated incessantly and minutely by outside researchers and experts and then left impoverished. Mertens (2007) reports research on the Laotian community in Massachusetts, wherein researchers investigated conditions of the Laotian people, collected data, wrote reports, and then departed, leaving unchanged their conditions and a sense of disillusion amongst them.

Participatory TMMR identifies the importance of having the problem definition arise from "the community of concern" (Mertens, 2007, p. 143), being sensitive to issues of power, building trust, reducing bias, using a suitable theoretical framework, and developing research questions that might bring about "transformative answers" (p. 144). Emancipation and transformation touch all aspects of TMMR, with its research questions focusing beyond "the individual's psychological, physical, or cultural deficits" to "structural frameworks of authority and relations of power in institutions and communities" (Mertens, 2003, p. 145) (for empirical

examples, see Camacho, 2020; Draper-Rodi et al., 2024; Garnett et al., 2019; Lucero et al., 2018; Miller, 2022).

TMMR requires a strong relation of trust and involvement to exist between the researchers and the participants in the research (Cram & Mertens, 2015; Mertens, 2003, 2007). Echoing Habermas and Honneth, discussed below, this requires "respectful relationships" (Mertens, 2022, p. 74) for representing fairly the viewpoints of all groups involved. Here, building trust requires the researcher to have a deep understanding of the local culture of the participants because knowledge is located socially and historically within a complex cultural and sometimes conflictual context. Hence, the researcher must be culturally competent to work in, with, and for, the sometime diverse community in question (e.g., Ling & Pang, 2022; Mertens, 2010; Provinzano et al., 2020). This extends to involving the participants in "the methodological and programmatic decisions" of the research (Mertens, 2003, p. 141). In building on trust, TMMR addresses the hermeneutic, mutual and deep understandings of researchers and participants (e.g., in participatory action research) and "common ground and understandings" between all parties (Cram & Mertens, 2015, p. 105). This echoes Habermas (1974): "understanding, rather, is always the fusion of horizons" (p. 273), a term taken from Gadamer (1975, p. 273) in which different parties seek to understand each others' views and come to a shared understanding of a particular phenomenon, situation, or context—that is, a shared understanding of where people are coming from, and forming an agreed definition of the situation.

In TMMR, Mertens (2007) attaches significance to "relationship," arguing for there to be "an interactive link between the researcher and the participants in the definition of the problem" (p. 216), in ensuring that the research methods used can accommodate and can address cultural complexity and power issues, and in addressing oppression and discrimination (foci of critical theory, discussed later). For Cram and Mertens (2015), TMMR addresses and includes "the voices of the oppressed, authentically representing people's lives, acknowledging complexity and contradiction" (p. 95), including "the least advantaged" (p. 142). Here, data are generated by the participants themselves, including "those who have been traditionally underrepresented" (p. 142), such as with members of marginalised groups collecting the data (i.e., active participation).

In addressing involvement, there is a place for TMMR to adopt alternatives to the frequently adopted (participatory) action research, as there are many ways of acting to influence society and policy (e.g., Cole & Heinecke, 2020; Slocum & Rhoads, 2009; Van de Velde, 2020). Power has many locations and levels, suggesting that many types of mixed methods research can be transformative. Caraballo et al. (2017) note that: "[i]n order to disrupt inequality, … researchers must continue to explore alternative research (and action) paradigms that actively seek to redistribute methodological and analytical power to those who hold an intimate knowledge of the struggles of navigating systemic oppression" (p. 311). This includes, for example, understanding inequities concerning gender, socioeconomic status, immigration, possible eviction, disabilities, parenting, drug usage, geographic location, language, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and politics (e.g., Draper-Rodi et al., 2024; Mertens, 2010; Sweetman et al., 2010; Tartaglia, 2020).

When "analyzing, interpreting, reporting, and using results" (Mertens, 2003, p. 155), Mertens identifies the need to examine findings through the lens of "power relationships," and to ensure that the results "facilitate social change" (p. 155). For example, Garnett et al. (2019) report on restorative practices in a transformative mixed methods participatory action research study in a school-wide project for marginalised students, to reduce suspension, improve school climate, and to break the "school-to-prison pipeline" (p. 306). Here, the transformative paradigm involved the voices of the students and, therefore, avoided dominatory power in

"adultism" (p. 313) and recognised the legitimacy and agency of youth voice. As the authors note, "[a]ddressing power differentials at each stage of the research process is a central tenet of the transformative paradigm" (p. 308). It is also a central feature of critical theory.

Critical Theory and the Transformative Paradigm

The features of TMMR outlined earlier have a pedigree that has several roots, one of which is critical theory. Here, this article takes a deliberately theoretical turn, arguing for elements of the Frankfurt School of critical theory to provide an underpinning of TMMR, and for theorisation, ideology critique, and critical discourse analysis to be important methods in the gamut of mixed methods in MMR—that is, looking not only at empirical research, but also engaging in theoretical analysis. Critical theory can clarify and underpin central tenets of TMMR. Here, the Frankfurt School of critical theory identifies and addresses, often in abstract theoretical terms, pathologies of society, ideology critique, the interrogation of the legitimacy of power and power differentials in society, the analysis of social (in)justice and its cognates in inequality, marginalisation, and discrimination, actions for realising emancipatory democracy and equality, and the promotion of empowerment of individuals within a socially just society. The article turns to Habermas and Honneth, the second and third generation of the Frankfurt School, respectively, up to the present day, whose foundational work supports TMMR, and the forthcoming discussion provides many references to empirical research that is based on their work.

Knowledge-Constitutive Interests and Ideology Critique

Habermas (1972) used ideology critique in understanding, interrogating, and critiquing the interests at work in society—that is, in whose interests and powers actions and decisions are taken, a central starting point of TMMR. Initially, he roots social theory in epistemology, a key element of TMMR, in addressing the pathologies of society in terms of distorted, unjust interests in society, social injustice, exploitation, and illegitimate ideological domination. In addressing this, Habermas identified three *knowledge constitutive interests*, and MMR can draw on these in organising types of research, and in underpinning examples of empirical and non-empirical research (e.g., Chiang et al., 2024; Rensijing & Hongbiao, 2023). The three interests are set out in what follows:

(i) *A technical interest in control and prediction.* This interest is typified in the scientific, postpositivist method, empirical-analytical natural sciences with the emphasis on laws, rules, prediction, and control of behaviour and events, with passive participants and instrumental knowledge. Instrumental control in Habermas's technical interest, with its emphasis on predictability, passivity, and controllability of humans and behaviour, is attractive to the dominant ideology because it can perpetuate its hegemony (Habermas, 1974). The *techne* approach—the technical interest—resonates with the *what works*, pragmatic agenda, thereby risking, avoiding, or regarding as unproblematical, the questioning of important issues such as 'what matters,' 'for whom,' 'who gains what and who loses what,' 'based on what and whose evidence, criteria, and values, and why those,' 'in whose eyes,' 'who benefits,' 'whose views count,' 'with what side effects/fall-out,' and 'who decides' (and TMMR argues for participant involvement in this) (Bramley & Morrison, 2023; Grundy, 1987; Morrison, 2021; Zhao, 2018) use ideology critique and empirical research in identifying the limits of the technical 'what works' agenda in education.)

Further, Mertens (2003) argued against using the much-vaunted pragmatic base of MMR simply because being rooted in practical concerns neglects questions such as "practical

for whom and to what end" (p. 159), and based on whose decisions. The technical interest preserves and perpetuates, rather than challenges, the societal *status quo* of illegitimate power and its ideological purposes and foundations. It fosters compliance, which, in turn, undermines social justice. It is argued to underpin the quantitative approach in mixed methods research (Gunbayi, 2020).

(ii) *A hermeneutic, practical interest*. This interest focuses on understanding and interpreting the contextually rooted situations, perceptions, and behaviours of participants in society. The hermeneutic interest's *practical* (action-oriented) and wise interest (*phronesis*) is in facilitating consensus building and shared understandings, sense making, interpretations, and communication, to inform practical judgement and action. This interest seeks to understand the environment (widely defined; e.g., Flyvbjerg, 2001) through interactions with people, founded on a "consensual interpretation of meaning" (Grundy, 1987, p. 14), and being concerned for moral consciousness, ethics, and *the good*, thereby possessing emancipatory, empowering potential. TMMR celebrates the hermeneutic interest in its engagement of participants in setting and implementing the emancipatory, transformative agenda.

This interest is exemplified in the hermeneutic, interpretive methodologies of the qualitative component in MMR (Gunbayi, 2020). It seeks to clarify, to understand, and to interpret the communications of "speaking and acting subjects" (Habermas, 1974, p. 8) and to understand situations through the eyes of the participants. Here, participants engage in "action oriented to mutual understanding" (Habermas, 1972, p. 310) (discussed later), to achieve a consensus on meanings, involving discussion and dialogue among participants (Habermas, 1974) in arriving at a shared and agreed understanding of a situation, context, viewpoints, opinions, and definitions of the situation. Habermas (1974) regarded hermeneutic understanding as "the fusion of horizons" (p. 273). This argues for engaging both the powerful and the powerless in TMMR studies.

The hermeneutic interest, here, seeks to reveal and to understand the meanings and intentions of participants in a social context and social situations, with people bringing their own histories, biographies, autobiographies, views, and expectations to a situation; context matters (e.g., Flyvbjerg, 2001; Flyvbjerg et al., 2012). TMMR accesses such voices. For empirical examples of Habermas's work, here, in informing empirical research, see Carr and Kemmis (1986); du Plessis (2019); Flyvbjerg (2001); Flyvbjerg et al. (2012); Grundy (1987); Mavi et al. (2022); Murphy and Fleming (2010); Nastasi (2022); and Romero-Vasquez (2021).

Flyvbjerg (2001) draws attention to the *phronesis* (prudence in practical action) of hermeneutic knowledge in his comments that praxis requires attention to action, addressed in three questions: 'where are we going?'; 'is this desirable?' and 'what should be done?' (the practical intent), linking this to the "emancipatory role" (p. 62) of social sciences. TMMR recognises that, in engaging *phronesis*, hermeneutics can bring freedoms, values deliberation, and transformation; that is, this interest has the transformative potential to address social justice at both theoretical and practical levels. This argues for widening TMMR to include more non-empirical research, and to interrogate issues in theorisation, critical discourse analysis, and ideology critique. In so doing, the *action* requirement of TMMR engages changing mindsets, understandings, and values. Hermeneutics can emancipate, moving beyond understanding to transformation (the empowerment of oppressed, powerless, and marginalised groups in society, in promoting social justice, agency, and emancipation; i.e., taking existential control of their own lives) (see, for e.g., Fleming, 2014; Fleming & Finnegan, 2010; Nastasi, 2022).

(iii) *An emancipatory interest*. This key aspect of TMMR is a normative interest in empowerment and freedom for participants to be agents of their own existential self-realisation, taking control of their own lives and lifeworlds in transforming society to be premised on social justice, democracy, humanitarianism, human rights, public goods, recognition, respect, and

equality. This, therefore, promotes Habermas's *generalizable interests* (discussed later) rather than those of groups who hold power at the expense of the disempowered (i.e., a zero-sum model). The emancipatory interest, a central feature of critical theory, subsumes the previous two in TMMR; it requires the technical and hermeneutic interests but goes beyond them. As Habermas (1972) wrote: "the emancipatory interest itself is dependent on the interests in possible intersubjective action orientation and in possible technical control" (p. 211). Here, reflection is compatible with the hermeneutic interest but largely not with the technical interest, although not entirely excluding it because technical knowledge and skills can serve emancipation (e.g., Freire, 1972, 1998).

The emancipatory interest is concerned with *praxis*: "practical action that makes a difference" (Lovat, 2013, p. 73), action informed by reflection with the aim to emancipate, to take existential control over one's life decisions in an egalitarian, socially just, humanitarian, repression-free democracy, including "reflection and action" on society "in order to transform it" (Fobes & Kaufman, 2008, p. 27) (see the concrete examples of empirical research given earlier on Habermas and in the discussion later on communicative action). This also supports arguing for TMMR studies to include non-empirical research—for example, reflective and theoretical research, critical discourse analysis, and the methodology of ideology critique in addition to empirical studies as legitimate research methods in MMR. Although accepting Mertens's (2008) view that TMMR must be grounded in practice and action, there are many kinds of action in TMMR, including changing values, points of reference, understandings, views, attitudes, commitments, and purposes as well as material circumstances and lives.

The emancipatory interest, the heart of TMMR, seeks to expose and to interrogate the operation of ideology and power with regard to embodying social injustice, to question their legitimacy and to expose their illegitimacy—for example, the "suppression of generalizable interests" (Habermas, 1976, p. 113); that is to expose, to question, to critique, and to challenge what those in power are doing to perpetuate their illegitimate, socially unjust dominatory position and control of power, at the expense and disadvantage of others, and the operation of illegitimate dominating ideologies, and to remove obstructions to, and bring about, social justice. As Leach Sankofa (2022) comments, "the practices of producing research should liberate rather than oppress" (p. 310). The emancipatory interest involves making society more socially just, promoting human rights, and liberating oppressed groups (Carter & Dediwalage, 2010). It requires, but moves beyond, understanding and interpreting the world, to changing it. Emancipation celebrates the exercise of agency and responsibility in bringing about an egalitarian, socially just society. Masschelein (1991), writing on Habermas, defined emancipation as "increasing self-determination and individual autonomy within a just society" (p. 97).

The emancipatory interest engages ideology critique of ideas and practices (Habermas, 1974, 1979). Using such a research methodology in TMMR identifies the spheres in which the "suppression of generalizable interests" operates (Habermas, 1976, p. 113). Habermas contended that illegitimate power and inequality inhere in dominant ideologies that maintain their hegemony by keeping the disempowered, the oppressed, the subordinated groups in their disempowered positions, with the powerful groups in society operating with or without the (tacit) consent of all participants and by force and repression, if necessary, to keep the disempowered in their disempowered positions. Habermas's agenda in using ideology critique is premised on the promotion of social justice, equality, recognition, the creation and nurturing of generalizable interests, and the commitment to the emancipation of society towards a fair, socially just democracy. He critiqued those ideologies that are premised on the social pathogens of inequality, exploitation, and illegitimate asymmetries of power; here, ideology critique should have its place as a legitimate methodology of TMMR. Ideology critique must possess
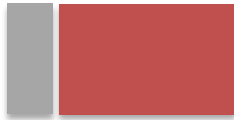
emancipatory and transformative potential; it must be consequential in promoting social justice, and it must possess rigour, such as the following:

- evidence adduced being comprehensive, inclusive, relevant to, and representative of, the field: fairness to the focus of study and the whole truth;
- depth, validity, reliability, and thoroughness of analysis;
- disclosure of its own values and foundational tenets, ideas, axioms, assumptions, and purposes;
- transparency and clarity;
- coherent, fair, complete and logical analysis, argument, and judgements;
- awareness of counter-arguments;
- understanding of the contexts of the issue(s) in question;
- avoidance of unsupported polemic;
- commitment to the promotion of social justice for all.

One task of the emancipatory interest (and TMMR) is to move beyond understanding to action. Emancipation concerns *praxis*: "action informed by reflection with an emancipatory intent" (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 177). TMMR can include reflective studies that are a spur to action. *Praxis* recognises that individuality and collective, societal emancipation are indissoluble, and that emancipation concerns both individual and societal freedom from oppression, social justice, and ideological domination; here, Habermas's generalizable interest is transformative. How easily emancipation is achieved is a moot point. For example, Outhwaite (2009) argues that Habermas overstated emancipation, taking insufficient account of the power of "the sources of distortion" (p. 33) in society.

Although Habermas's *knowledge-constitutive interests* provide a useful inroad into understanding and organising considerations and types of TMMR, and in underpinning critical discourse analysis and ideology critique, they have attracted criticism (Bramley & Morrison, 2023), such as the following:

- Habermas's three interests are reductionist and unnecessarily discrete.
- The criteria to evaluate his knowledge-constitutive interests are inconsistent, whereas his empirical-analytical and hermeneutic interests are presented non-normatively, the emancipatory interest includes a normative dimension, in arguing that society *ought* to be emancipated, introducing a different standard against which to judge his knowledge-constitutive interests. Habermas (1972, 1974) judged the first two knowledge-constitutive interests to be incomplete because they failed to meet the normative standard that only his third interest possesses, although he also acknowledged that the hermeneutic interest can be emancipatory.
- The link between ideology critique and emancipation is neither clear, nor demonstrated, nor a logical necessity (Roderick, 1986). Indeed, the rationalistic, idealistic appeal of ideology critique can obstruct action for emancipation (Flyvbjerg, 2001).
- Ideology critique hints at relativism in Habermas because ideology critique is itself, ideological (Roderick, 1986).
- Rooting social theory in epistemology, linking knowledge and society in the notion of interests, is questionable.
- The emancipatory and empowering potential of Habermas's theory is unclear because Habermas was too idealistic, unrealistic, and understates the strength and operations of power (Flyvbjerg, 2001).
- His knowledge-constitutive interests are abstract, neglecting concrete action for emancipation; they are ways of thinking, analyzing, and influencing.
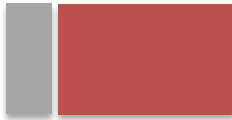
Despite these concerns, Habermas's knowledge-constitutive interests: (i) are a helpful heuristic tool for theorising, underpinning, informing, and extending TMMR; (ii) engage discussions of the sociology of knowledge, which relates closely to TMMR; (iii) identify pathologies of society, as does TMMR; (iv) indicate purposes, power, scope, and operations of ideology critique and critical theory in TMMR; (v) provide a clear approach in interrogating the legitimacy of power and power differentials in society, taking actions for realising emancipatory democracy and equality, and for addressing empowerment of individuals within a just society, all of which are central to TMMR; (vi) expose issues in equality, social justice, emancipation, and empowerment in democracies, as key foci for TMMR; (vii) open up ideology critique and emancipation as essential ingredients for understanding and addressing social justice in TMMR; (viii) make a powerful case for including theorisation and ideology critique as legitimate methodologies and methods in TMMR; and (ix) heuristically constitute a conceptually and useful theoretical framework for organising, understanding, and interrogating interests, powers, and social injustices at work in society.

Communicative Action for Social Justice

Moving away from knowledge-constitutive interests in social critique and societal emancipation, Habermas rooted his promotion of a socially just, emancipated, egalitarian democracy in his advocacy of the "ideal speech situation" (Habermas, 1970b. p. 372) and "communicative action" (Habermas, 1984, 1987a), and through rational communication, wherein participants reach an agreed understanding, non-coerced and non-coercive, based on mutual understanding, which derives from the force of the better argument alone, rather than the positional power and/or status of the participants; that is, regardless of who makes the argument. For Habermas, rational communication requires, embodies, is premised on, and enacts, social justice, a key focus of TMMR. Participation in the ideal speech situation and communicative action can serve societal empowerment and emancipation, involving both the powerful and powerless in TMMR.

This is an ambitious claim and agenda because it addresses macro-societal analysis and action, through Habermas's analysis of the negative effects of the steering media (dominant, driving forces) of money and power in colonizing the everyday lifeworlds of members of society; that is, wherein money and power (e.g., in a capitalist society) take over and dominate the everyday behaviours, values, views, and interpersonal relations of members of that society, promoting the pathologies of social injustices and dominatory powers of powerful groups at the expense of this disempowered. Habermas argued that these can be resisted by communicative action, discussed later. For Habermas, it was important to interrogate and to critique ideology, illegitimate power, inequality, social injustice, and violations of human rights. These are central tenets of TMMR. Here, Habermas addressed the emancipatory potential of communicative action to redeem society from the steering media of money and power, typically neither of which are possessed by marginalised groups.

Communication among all the parties involved is a central element of TMMR. Habermas regarded ideology as "systematically distorted communication" (Habermas, 1970a, p. 215), with social systems serving the interests of perpetuating dominant ideologies and powerful groups who seek to reinforce and to maintain their power. The pathology of society, for Habermas, resides in distorted communication; hence the task of emancipation is the restoration of the rational consensus implicit in his "ideal speech situation" (Habermas, 1970b, p. 372) and communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987a), discussed later. Communicative action and his ideal speech situation embody equality and the exercise of generalizable interests, essential for an egalitarian, democratic, socially just society in which everyone

benefits; that is, not only those in power. The message for TMMR is direct: it is important to address communication among all parties involved in the research, and work on rectifying ideologically distorted communication that obstructs emancipation and the empowerment of marginalised groups. Critical discourse analysis can feature in TMMR here.

The Ideal Speech Situation and Communicative Action

Emancipation and empowerment engage the ideal speech situation and rational arguments in which the unforced force of the argument alone prevails, rather than the positional power of the participants. Habermas's conception of the ideal speech situation developed over many years (Habermas, 1970a, 1970b, 1971, 1972, 1976, 1979, 1982, 1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1990a). Here, the argument is that, in principle, speech is unavoidably premised (if counterfactually) on consensus; without consensus on the rules of communication, it is impossible to communicate. Habermas suggested that rational communication requires the "mastery of the ideal speech situation" (Habermas, 1970b, p. 367) which is a "form of communication" that "allows for an exchange of arguments" (Habermas, 1976, p. 164) and that abide by principles of sincerity, truth, rightness, legitimacy, and comprehensibility. An agenda for TMMR is to employ and to further the ideal speech situation, in planning, focusing, and conducting TMMR and its outcomes, to identify the obstruction of the ideal speech situation (e.g., undertaking critical discourse analysis and ideology critique) and bring about its recovery, with reference to empowerment and emancipation. Here, critical discourse analysis (e.g., Fairclough, 1995) owes much to Habermas's "communicative turn" (Fleming, 2014, p. 318).

Habermas's ideal speech situation has several key features:
- freedom, wherein people and groups are included in, not excluded from: entering a discourse (here defined as a linguistic communication that engages knowledge and power) in which they can check questionable claims (e.g., for being illegitimate because of promoting the power of some groups at the expense of others; i.e., by promoting social injustice), evaluate explanations, modify given conceptual structures, assess justifications, alter norms, interrogate political will, and employ speech acts that seek to empower all parties and promote social justice;
- orientation to mutual understanding between participants in discourses; that is, being involved in a process of reaching a mutual, agreed understanding between participants in harmonising and agreeing their interpretations of the world (the fusion of horizons), and respecting participants' rights as equal and autonomous partners;
- concern to achieve in discussion a rational consensus that is based on the force of the argument alone, rather than on the positional power of the participants (in particular, that of dominating participants); that is, recognising that participants in a communication have equal status in contributing to the discussion in question, and that the focus is on the content of the communication rather than on the power of the participants;
- adherence to the speech-act validity claims of truth, rightness, legitimacy, sincerity, and comprehensibility.

For example, imagine that a research-based colloquium is taking place to decide how to improve inclusive education, with people present from all age group levels of education, senior staff in schools, parents, and experts in the field. Here, participants highlight issues derived from their research on different approaches, best practices, and areas for improvement in inclusive education, with question-and-answer sessions for encouraging open dialogue and clarification. Sharing their views, they come to an agreed set of decisions, not by who said

what, but by what was said. The decision comes out of the discussion (communicative rationality and the ideal speech situation), rather than having been decided by some of the (powerful) parties before the colloquium starts.

Here, such communication "presupposes a universalistic commitment to the potential equality, autonomy, and rationality of individuals" (Habermas, 1982, p. 252). For Habermas, these were essential ingredients of emancipation. The ideal speech situation operates socially and dialogically, between people and groups, just as TMMR is an intersubjective, participatory, social, relational encounter (e.g., Mertens, 2003). The ideal speech situation requires rational argument, discussion, deliberation, weighing and evaluating evidence, questioning and testing assumptions, and interrogating values and powers, in pursuing convincing arguments that possess the power to effect social change for social justice.

The characteristics of the ideal speech situation are those of the just and free society which, for Habermas, human activity should strive to achieve, in which everyone has freedom to speak and which promotes social justice, and the achievement of a rational consensus marks the evolution of society towards social justice and its freedoms. Here, Habermas argued for the need to chart and to interrogate the repressive forces and factors that frustrate both the ideal speech situation and concrete achievements of the socially just society (i.e., harking back to his ideology critique). This sets an agenda for TMMR to focus on the ideal speech situation embodying generalizable interests, and their existing frustration and emancipatory realisation in practice. Emancipation is wrought through engaging in, and accomplishing, communication that is free from illegitimate domination. TMMR celebrates such emancipation. Communication includes and engages the voices of the oppressed and marginalised.

A task for TMMR for social justice becomes the ideology critical interrogation of communication, and critical discourse analysis for the presence or distortion of the principles of the ideal speech situation, and for open communicative action to promote social justice and democracy, arguing for TMMR to include and to engage with those with and without power and privilege.

Habermas also identified the pathology of society as the colonization (intrusion into, and takeover) of the everyday lifeworlds[2] of people by steering media (driving forces) of society: money and power. Money, Habermas (1987a) argued, reinforces the power of dominant groups in society to promote self-serving, inegalitarian, exploitative, socially unjust agendas, determining and sustaining almost automatically and unquestioningly, "normative goals and individual responses" (p. 268). This is pertinent to marginalised groups who often have little or no money and power. Engaging in communicative action, Habermas (1984, 1987a) argued, can resist this colonization and can move towards a society that operates the ideal speech situation: rational consensus, equality, recognition, voice, democracy, freedoms, legitimacy, and generalizable interests. Communicative action, for Habermas, was emancipatory because it exposes how power and money distort fair and egalitarian communication, and it can break the stranglehold of instrumental, control agendas (his technical knowledge-constitutive interest) and restore the lifeworlds of groups, in which they take decisions on, and control of, their own lives. This is individual existential self-realisation within an emancipated, democratic, socially just society. How this can and does happen is a central focus of TMMR.

Recovering the power of participants to appropriate their own existential futures through communicative action collectively realised in a socially just democracy, sets a clear foundation and agenda for TMMR in using and promoting the ideal speech situation and communicative action to bring about an emancipated society, with social justice, democracy, and equality. This involves theorisation, ideology critique, critical discourse analysis, communicative action, solidarity, collaboration, consensus, generalizable interests, and social praxis, all of which are central foci of TMMR. How this happens in concrete practice is a feature that Habermas

understated because his work is theoretical rather than practical. That stated, his theory of communicative action has been referenced in much mixed methods empirical research in areas such as social justice, voice, equality, aboriginal groups, HIV-prevention, power plants, and cyberbullying (e.g., Bonell & Melendez-Torres, 2023; Flecha, 2014; Kolenick, 2021; Lubis et al., 2022; Puigvert et al., 2019; Naga et al., 2024; Urquhart et al., 2020; Yahya et al., 2021).

Limitations of Habermas's Ideal Speech Situation and Communicative Action

For Habermas, much depends on communicative action. How realistic it is to expect so much from this in transforming society to a socially just democracy and human rights is an open question.

Habermas's appeal to communicative action and the ideal speech situation has attracted criticism at many levels (e.g., Bramley & Morrison, 2023; Outhwaite, 2009). For example, questions are raised against the realism and practicality of Habermas's views, arguing that there is a wide gulf between its abstract, utopian idealism and concrete, real life (Bubner, 1982; Fleming & Finnegan, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Keat, 1981; Larrain, 1994; Outhwaite, 2009; Thompson, 1982; Thompson & Held, 1982). Achieving consensus based on the force of the better argument is only a hope. The ideal speech situation risks not catching the lived experiences of cultural traditions and the uneven distribution of material resources and power, and its effects might be minimal (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Van der Burg, 1990). Communicative action and the privileging of the ideal speech situation offer little solace to those struggling for power, recognition, rights, and freedoms in the face of suppression and force (Boudon, 1989; Thompson, 1982); Habermas's ethereal theory of communicative action overlooks context and the real, concrete operations of oppression and struggle. It neglects concrete action of social praxis and emancipation (Nielsen, 1992); theory is not enough for emancipation to be achieved.[3] Habermas appealed to communicative rationality, but he provided little information as to how to do it and to reach it, and he under-addresses power, showing "little understanding of power" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 97). Echoing Mertens's (2008) point that TMMR must be grounded in practice, this argues for TMMR to engage with real, practical issues, which has been a required constituent since its inception, and, further, to include theorisation and theoretical research, of which ideology critique and critical discourse analysis are examples.

Domination is not only distorted communication, and there are real needs for economic and material conditions of power and oppression to be addressed (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Flyvbjerg et al., 2012; Giddens, 1979). Here, "action oriented to mutual understanding" (Habermas, 1982, p. 227) is not confined to communicative action. Indeed, there are occasions wherein force must be used, not simply argumentation and discourse. Communication might be powerless in promoting social justice, human rights, equality, recognition, empowerment, and emancipation, and TMMR argues for action and activism (Mertens, 2008). Further, communicative action's emphasis on the rational "unforced force of the better argument" (Habermas, 1987b, p. 130) is too genteel for the realities of oppression, suppression, and struggle in society. Moreover, the ideal speech situation risks being, in practice an empty concept because people have different rational desires and wishes (Bernstein, 1992).

The austerity of Habermas's rational argument loses sight of the sentient, emotional, affective, and social side of human nature. People have feelings, needs, and wants (Heller, 1982; Thompson & Held, 1982). Human activity is not as antiseptic as cool rationality, and Habermas overplayed the rational at the expense of the practical and of people *qua* sentient humans. It is unclear how the ideal speech situation assists in facing powerful ideological struggles and competing systems (e.g., religious, political, economic), which all claim to be reasonable and rational (Lukes, 1977). Here, Flyvbjerg (2001) and Outhwaite (2009) question

whether communicative action and action oriented to mutual understanding actually exist in practice, however well they might exist in theory. Further, Habermas's linkage of macro and micro social theory is weak because he did not make clear how "individual preferences and opinions" scale up to become "collective preferences and opinions" (Boudon, 1989, p. 82).

How far Habermas's recommendations can bring democracy, freedoms, social justice, human rights, equality, and recognition, is an open question. However, although this suggests that TMMR fundamentally is action oriented, Habermas's theories argued that action can take many forms. Although TMMR can indicate how best to promote communicative action in specific concrete situations, Habermas's theories argued for theorisation, reflection, argument, critical discourse analysis, and ideology critique as legitimate methods in TMMR—that is, mentalistic action on understandings, values, and analytical lenses in social (in)justice. This provides an argument for TMMR to open its doors wider to include non-empirical, theoretical research; there are many paths to transformation and emancipation, not only empirical approaches and data. For example, policy analysis, politics, power analysis, values research, arguments, interests, law, theory development, and decision making are foci for theorisation, critical discourse analysis, and ideology critique as research methods (e.g., Bramley & Morrison, 2023; Giroux, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2020), which, for example, include document analysis, printed texts, and written discussions.

Honneth and the Transformative Paradigm

A generation after Habermas in the Frankfurt School, Honneth's critical theory provides a strong foundation of TMMR. He replaces Habermas's pathology of society as distorted, irrational communication and the colonization of people's lifeworlds by the steering media of power and money, by a pathology of society as distorted recognition of, and disrespect for, individuals, groups, communities, and society, and their exclusion from identity, rights, status, and self-esteem.

For social justice, emancipation, and critical theory, the move is from Habermas's "undistorted communication" to Honneth's "undistorted recognition" (Flynn, 2008, p. 553). For Honneth (and TMMR), emancipation is rooted in recognition (Honneth, 1995), and the overcoming of "damaged recognition" (Fleming, 2016a, p. 68). Habermas's "communicative turn" has become Honneth's "recognition turn" in critical theory (Fleming, 2014, p. 318). Recognition, for Honneth, concerns individual and groups, in which they are acknowledged positively, affirmed, respected, and integrated in practice in society, having identities, rights, status, and achievements in an inclusive, socially just, mutually respectful society. Honneth's pathology of society is its misrecognition of, and disrespect for, marginalised and oppressed groups, the discriminated against, the have-nots in society. Bramley and Morrison (2023) argue that Honneth:

> identifies the failure to recognize individuals and subaltern groups, i.e. to disrespect them, as one of the disordering, distorting pathologies of society and its effects on social justice. This failure is evidenced in the marginalization of those individual and subaltern groups, their lack of social value and voice, their lack of recognition as moral persons with rights to live a good life and self-realization in an ethical context, and lack of power to emancipate themselves. … [Social injustice is] disrespect for, and the violation, denial, and misrecognition of, the legitimate social recognition of the rights of oppressed and disempowered groups in society to be recognized as having dignity, identity, rights, status, esteem, to be socially and individually respected, and to have the power and opportunity to lead a fulfilling life in an ethical, egalitarian, democratic society. (p. 81)

For Honneth, engagement in 'the struggle for recognition' (the title of his 1995 book) is the heart of moral and ethical life, for people surviving under appalling social conditions, and for treating people humanely and as persons rather than instrumentally and as objects (Habermas's technical interest). Moving beyond Habermas's austere rationality, Honneth (1995) remarks that societal development comes out of the human and societal *need* for self-esteem and stems from experiences of disrespect in the struggle for recognition. People need, not simply desire, recognition, with "respect in the political sphere; esteem in the social sphere; and care in the intimate sphere of the family" (Kompridis, 2007, p. 278).

Honneth argues that when disrespect is experienced *collectively* by individuals, this can lead to resisting the structures of society that deny such recognition; that is, the individual experience of recognition becomes a social feature through solidarity (Zurn, 2005); this harks back to Habermas's view of solidarity as the "reverse side of justice," quoted earlier (Habermas, 1990b, p. 244). Echoing Foucault's argument earlier, power is not a property but a relation that is endlessly fluid and negotiated, and which inherently includes resistance. For Honneth, resistance is more than a personal, psychological, or cultural matter; rather, it is a societal matter (Zurn, 2003). TMMR has a clear agenda for combining research and action here, which moves from the micro level to the macro level of society.

Emancipation, for Honneth, has its foundations in the everyday, concrete realities of struggles for recognition by sentient humans, reinforcing Mertens's (2008) view on TMMR as being grounded in practice. He argues that emancipation, social justice, equality, and democracy, lie in recognition and respect, concretely focused on and conducted. Honneth outlines three forms of recognition—love, rights, and solidarity—and their respective opposites of disrespect and misrecognition are physical abuse, denial of rights (exclusion), and degradation. Disrespect and misrecognition include the neglect of love, rights, and solidarity-derived self-esteem in societies and cultures—that is, "status subordination" (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 29). Here, struggles for recognition require concrete action and activism. Honneth's theory of recognition connects the individual and society, interpersonal relations, human rights, and solidarity. These address action for social justice, to redress marginalisation, inequality, domination, subordination, neglect, harm, suffering, oppression, misrecognition, disrespect, denigration, degradation, and humiliation, underlining part of the agenda of TMMR. From Honneth, TMMR involves identifying misrecognition, disrespect, and the action required for their rectification.

Moving beyond Habermas's appeal to the cool, rational consensus of the *ideal speech situation*, achieving social justice here is a concrete, power-related, identity-related, daily-life-related struggle (Honneth, 1995). Social justice is an existential, concrete struggle, not simply an abstract theoretical matter. It directly engages real-life personal, legal, social, cultural, affective, cognitive, and intellectual matters, together with respect, social recognition, and identity legitimation, which are key foci of TMMR. For Honneth, as for Mertens (2008), social justice and recognition require action, not simply understanding (Lepold, 2019). Additionally, then, Honneth provides a powerful critical theoretical basis in his revised critical theoretical framework.

Recognition for Honneth is an emancipatory force in society. Here, recognition is normative, and is part of the "politics of identity" (Honneth, 2001, p. 52). TMMR has an agenda of respecting identity (Fleming, 2014, Kompridis, 2007; Zurn, 2003). Social justice, for Honneth, focusing on the lived experiences and lifeworlds of the members of society, and working on, with, and for, the social conditions that impact on their identity and its formation, places individual freedom and "social inclusion" (Honneth & Markle, 2004, p. 361) at its centre. For Honneth, disrespect stems from misrecognition, illegitimate asymmetrical relations of power and life chances, denigration, exclusion, humiliation, and degradation, in which

subaltern groups are regarded negatively, as societal pathogens. Indeed, Mertens (2003) notes that a "defining characteristic" (p. 144) of the transformative paradigm replaces "defect" with "difference" in minority groups who embody diversity (p. 145).

Social justice and social freedoms are based on mutual recognition and the promotion and operation of individual dignity, esteem, and identity. Exemplifying TMMR, Honneth advocates concrete activism and resistance in the struggle for equality, such as "for civil rights, decolonisation, identity recognition, respect, inclusion, gender and sexual equality, feminism, religious freedoms, ethnic freedoms, environmental movements, peace movements, movements for respecting identity, concern for suffering and underprivileged groups" (Bramley & Morrison, 2023, p. 80). This is a wide agenda for TMMR. The many and different forms of struggle constitute the "morally motivated struggle for recognition" (Foster, 1999, p. 6) against disrespect.

Underlining TMMR, Honneth's *recognition* is premised on relationships and mutual recognition, reinforcing Mertens's (2003) comment earlier on the significance of relations between the researcher and the researched. Honneth (1995) argues that reciprocal social recognition is a key normative target for concrete action, emancipation, and social justice, recognising the "equal status of all others" (Honneth, 2001, p. 45). Here, reciprocity is a key element of TMMR (Romm, 2018), and recognition, for Honneth, is the precondition for freedom and social justice (Lepold, 2019).

Justice, for Honneth (1995), starts with "the social and moral fact that social recognition is necessary" (p. 352), and these are differentiated into three "modes of recognition" (Honneth, 1995, p. 25): *love*, *rights*, and *solidarity*, which contribute to his theoretical framework for TMMR. Giving and receiving the recognition of each individual's unique characteristics and abilities can forge identity and self-respect. Honneth's three *modes of recognition* can foster self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem:

(i)   *Love* that is free from domination, which has emotional connection and recognises people as entities in their own right, with reciprocal attachment, mutual confirmation, and interdependence (e.g., between two people, such as between mother and child), which meets the needs of both parties, and "being oneself in the other" (Honneth, 1995, p. 96). This develops and recognises mutual respect, promoting self-confidence through fundamental affective relations (Zurn, 2005), a key element of TMMR.

(ii) *Rights*, such as legal rights and freedoms, and civil, political, and social rights that guarantee liberty, participation, and basic welfare, respectively (Honneth, 1995, p. 115). Here, personal autonomy is protected by the law, and rights are designed to develop and to recognise self-respect through social respect that comes from recognition of the rights of a legal adult (Zurn, 2005).

(iii) *Solidarity*, for example, as a fully-recognised member of society and a "community of value" (Honneth, 1995, p. 129) for the common good, a reciprocal, intersubjective recognition of people as individuals and groups with "mutual esteem" (p. 121), self-esteem, and "social esteem" (p. 122) for their individual, personal, personality-related, and social worth. Self-esteem here comes from shared values in local communities (Zurn, 2005). Solidarity, here, includes an awareness of deserved honour, dignity, recognition of the power of collective, legitimised "mutual integrity, support, status, prestige, and esteem" (Bramley & Morrison, 2023, p. 82), and the importance of "social worth" in terms of an individual's "contribution to the realization of societal goals" (Honneth, 1995, p. 122).

How far these modes of recognition occur and/or are breached in society is an important agenda for TMMR. For Honneth, they can promote self-realisation and emancipation in a socially just world, recognising and legitimating identity. Not to recognise the three forms of

recognition—that is, misrecognition—promotes an unjust society and turns respect into disrespect (Honneth, 2014). Misrecognition and disrespect are a "form of power and oppression" (Lepold, 2019, p. 249). Honneth (1995, 2014) argues that disrespect can take three forms which relate, respectively, to three modes of recognition outlined earlier (i.e., love, rights, and solidarity):

(i)   physical abuse and mistreatment;

(ii)   denial of rights (i.e., social exclusion), which can damage the "social integrity" (p. 129) and moral self-respect of individuals, violating and diminishing their human, legal, and civil rights and freedoms;

(iii)   degradation and insult (i.e., misrecognition and disrespect), which can cause psychological and social damage to the esteem, "social value," "honour," and "dignity" (p. 129) of individuals and groups, and their ways of life.

The presence of these is a target for TMMR to address and to remove. Honneth's work sets a wide agenda for TMMR in the "collective struggle for recognition" (Honneth, 1995, p. 164) and respect.[4] A significant figure in applying the work of Honneth (and Habermas), particularly in higher education and adult education, is Fleming (e.g., Fleming, 2016a, 2016b, 2017, 2022a, 2022b, 2024; Fleming & Finnegan, 2014).

Limitations of Honneth's Work on Recognition and Respect

Although Honneth's work provides a useful theoretical basis for TMMR, his work is not without criticism. Deranty (2009) questions how far Honneth draws on empirical studies. The same concern for Habermas also applies to Honneth, *viz*. his abstract, theoretical approach to understanding and rectifying injustice rather than indicating how to do it in concrete, practical action. However, as the earlier cited empirical references demonstrate, his work underpins much empirical, mixed methods research.

McNay (2008) argues that Honneth's understated attention to power neglects explaining how external social structures condition individuals' experiences and lifeworlds. Honneth neglects the (obstructive) operations of power, ideology, and exclusion in recognition because excluded and marginalised groups seek more than recognition (Foster, 1999), and inclusion needs more than simply affirmation of identity (recognition); that is, the transformative potential of recognition is limited. Iser (2019) notes that recognition risks losing sight of social justice as (re)distribution, and he questions how far recognition can promote emancipation (see also Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Honneth's three forms of recognition have been criticised for being too simplistic, preventing an understanding of the complexity of actual events and activities in which individuals give or withhold their recognition of others (Giles, 2020). Honneth is "blind to power relations that go along with relations of recognition" (Herrman, 2021, p. 58). Power subverts, undermines, and deflects the realisation of inclusion in social struggles. TMMR should investigate power in greater detail than Honneth undertakes (although the earlier cited examples of Honneth-based empirical studies indicate how power and empowerment operate in people and groups).

Foster (1999) argued that Honneth's work requires greater radicalisation of recognition, at individual, community, and society levels. Giles (2020) argues that Honneth's binary account of recognition/misrecognition is too simplistic, and that Honneth needs a fuller, more concrete account of the actual struggle for recognition. Giles questions how far misrecognition can ignite a transformative struggle for recognition, as power can remain untouched by superordinate groups exercising power over parties; an agenda for TMMR to address. Further, Zurn (2003) comments that Honneth's argument for recognition and identity are mistakenly

"internalist"; that is, a subjective matter of a mental state, neglecting an "objectivist, socio-theoretic account of social differentials" (p. 528). This argues for TMMR to engage in social theory research in addition to social practice, as the present article advocates.

Honneth, like Habermas, provides an abstract, theoretical underpinning of key features of TMMR. That is its strength. How transformative this is, is an open question. How recognition can be operationalised in practice is an open question that Honneth neglects, although, like Habermas, Honneth's work has spawned empirical research, as reported earlier. His *struggle for recognition* supports, but does not dwell on, concrete, practical struggle. However, like Habermas, his work argues for a wider view of action than solely concrete action, arguing for action as theorisation and as identifying and reflecting on misrecognition as legitimate research methods in TMMR—that is, as mentalistic action on understandings, questioning of values, and applying analytical lenses in approaching social (in)justice. Again, this argues for TMMR to open its doors wider to include non-empirical research in the pursuit of transformation and emancipation, with theorisation, critical discourse analysis, ideology critique, and theoretical underpinning providing a useful addition and alternative to empirical-only TMMR.

Honneth's work resonates with, and can underpin, central features of TMMR, for example, recognition, reciprocity, respect, action and activism, social justice, beneficence, solidarity, and relationships. Here, TMMR includes identifying and addressing the concrete situations, contexts, and processes in which, and through which, individuals and groups find their identities challenged, disrespected, marginalised, excluded, denigrated, degraded, humiliated, and misrecognised. TMMR advocates setting and implementing agendas for moving towards individual, social and societal recognition and legitimation (i.e., social justice and the furtherance of human rights).

Conclusion

In promoting social justice, human rights, recognition, and empowerment, much TMMR emphasises its focus on marginalised and disempowered groups in society, and on interventionist, collaborative, solidarity-promoting participatory action research to promote agency, emancipation, and empowerment of diverse subordinated and subaltern groups in society. This includes research on empowering dominated, neglected, oppressed, and silenced groups with voices that are listened to and acted upon, promoting their existential self-control within a socially just, democratic society, in the struggle for emancipation and social justice. Although the critiques of Habermas and Honneth indicate boundaries of their application and validity, nevertheless their key ideas have considerable theoretical, heuristic, and substantive value in contributing to the foundations, foci, operations, and methodology of the emancipatory transformative paradigm in TMMR, offering not only a theoretical, foundational underpinning but clear methodologies of MMR and TMMR, in critical theory, critical discourse analysis, and ideology critique. In addressing emancipation and TMMR, more forms and foci of MMR and TMMR can be adopted than currently obtain, including:

(i) greater inclusion of those in power in TMMR studies;
(ii) widening the types, methodologies, and methods of TMMR studies, to include critical discourse analysis, theory development and extension, theoretical discourse and analysis, ideology critique, argument, and reflective research as legitimate methodologies in themselves in TMMR, that draw on analytical, reflective, discursive, argument-based, theoretical, and political research, and which are not confined to empirical research;

(iii)   including studies that report where, and question why, emancipation and empowerment have not been successful or only partially successful;

(iv)   greater analysis of the processes, leadership, management, and internal and external factors in transformation;

(v)   including more non-empirical, social-theoretical, policy and power studies in TMMR;

(vi)   utilising the work of Habermas and Honneth in the theoretical underpinning of empirical and non-empirical TMMR;

(vii)   recognising that TMMR's commitment to action can engage a wider view of 'action', for example, in promoting understanding, reflection, argument, deliberation, disputation, ideology critique, values debate, and consciousness raising; all these constitute action, but of a different kind from that adopted in empirical MMR, that is, adopting a more generous view of action than often obtains. This adds to TMMR's reporting empirical examples of intervention- and action-based research, to using mixed methods research for different kinds of transformative, emancipatory achievements, which operate at levels other than the immediately practical, thereby broadening the scope of TMMR to include considerations of worthwhileness, what matters, values, axiology, and purposes of TMMR studies.

Although the article provides many examples of the work of Habermas and Honneth in empirical research and action, the article argues for the benefits of providing more practical guidance and advice on, and examples of, implementing the theories of Habermas and Honneth in conducting TMMR. This is for further investigation and is beyond the scope of the present article.

For TMMR to operate in wider than an often only (case-based) empirical scenario, a more generous scope of TMMR is advocated here, embracing theorisation, theoretical frameworks, ideology critique, critical discourse analysis, non-empirical methodologies, and methods of multiple kinds and at all levels, that serve the emancipatory intention from micro to mezzo to macro levels of society.

Notes

1. Mertens changed this term from the *emancipatory* paradigm to the *transformative* paradigm, "in order to shift the focus to the active agency of community members in change processes" (Cram & Mertens, 2015, p. 94). However, Shannon-Baker (2016) argues for keeping "emancipatory" and "transformative" together, as "transformative" on its own could "mean simply some level of change" (p. 332).

2. The "lifeworld" is the "taken-for-granted universe of daily social activity which always remains in the background" (Habermas, 1987a, p. 131), a familiar "cultural stock of knowledge" (p. 125) and received wisdoms that are reconstituted in the daily actions of participants (Habermas (1984). It is the tradition and established ways of doing things, comprising, and derived from, the accumulated and sedimented experiences of peoples and their contexts and situations, and which impact on present "lived experiences" (p. 128) of individuals and their societies. Lifeworlds' networks bind societies and individuals together, and give them solidarity and identity.

3. Habermas (1976) recognised that theory alone is not enough for achieving emancipation.

4. Mertens (2007) noted the significance of three basic ethical principles in considering the axiology of TMMR: "respect, beneficence, and justice" (p. 216).

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