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## **Liberal-Democratic States Should Privilege Parental Efforts to Instill Identities and Values**

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### **Abstract**

Liberal-democratic states' commitments to equality and personal autonomy have always proven problematic with respect to state regulation of relations between parents and children. In the parental authority literature positions have varied from invoking children's interests to argue for limitations on parental efforts to instill identities and values to invoking parental rights to justify state privileging of such efforts.

This article argues that liberal-democratic states should privilege parental efforts to raise their children to share their identities and values. Its approach is distinctive in two ways: i) it engages in interdisciplinary reflection upon selected findings in psychological literature on immigrant youth, acculturation, and identity development to assess philosophical arguments about parental authority; and ii) it argues that children's, and not parental, interests should be viewed as the primary basis for parental rights to instill identities and values. Ultimately, the article argues, parental authority to instill identities and values is justified by children's interests in psychological wellbeing and personal autonomy.

### **Keywords**

Autonomy, parental authority, psychology, upbringing, values, acculturation

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### **Introduction**

Liberal-democratic states value individual equality and personal autonomy. Commitment to these values has always proven problematic in the case of state regulation of parent-children relations because children begin life, and remain for many years, clearly unequal to their parents in terms of their capacity for personal autonomy. Some authors have argued that concern for children's capacity for personal autonomy and respect for their equality require that strict limits be placed upon parents' efforts to instill identities and values in their children. Others have argued that the state should privilege such efforts. For instance, Ferdinand Schoeman advocates that the state recognize, subject to regulation to prevent abuse, two types of parental rights 'against society at large': privacy rights to shield the family

from outside scrutiny and control rights to empower parents to regulate their children's behaviour and the influences to which they are exposed (1980: 10).

This article contends that liberal-democratic states should privilege parental efforts to instill their identities and values in their children. The distinctiveness of its contribution to this literature has two bases. First, and most original, it makes its case by engaging in interdisciplinary reflection upon selected findings in psychological literatures on immigrant youth, acculturation, and identity development. Second, and less unique, it claims that children's interests, not parental interests, should be viewed as the primary basis for parental rights to make such efforts.

The phrase '*parental efforts to instill values and identities*' is used advisedly. Parents face many obstacles to identity and value transmission, such that it is only reasonable to speak of supporting '*efforts*,' not outcomes. In addition to the many counterinfluences children experience outside the home, the psychological literature suggests that parental efforts are challenged by the fact that the parent-child relationship in the socialization process is reciprocal, not unidirectional (Benish-Weisman et al., 2013; Kuczynski and Navarra, 2006; Padilla-Walker and Thompson, 2005).

This article advances its case by focusing upon two important critiques that have been made of parental efforts to instill identities and values. One critique suggests that parental efforts represent a conflict between parents' and children's interests. The other suggests that such parental efforts may threaten children's capacity for autonomy by preventing them from developing identities and values that are properly their *own*. Psychological literature on immigrant youth, acculturation, and identity development facilitates reflection upon some of the key assumptions that underlie these critiques, particularly those concerning the likely effects of parent-child identity and value congruence on children's wellbeing and the ability of parents to influence, and to refrain from influencing, children's identity and value development. This article finds both critiques wanting and argues that children's wellbeing and autonomy interests, when understood through reflection on the psychological literature, can be advanced by privileging parental efforts to instill identities and values.

The psychological literatures on adolescence, socialization, identity development, and parenting and autonomy are vast (Guenther and Alicke, 2015; Laird, 2015). This article focuses on research within these domains that addresses acculturation and immigrant youth. In this literature, acculturation refers to 'the process of cultural and psychological change that follows intercultural contact' (Berry et al., 2006: 305); 'youth' are typically, but not universally, defined as those aged 13-24; and, depending upon the study, 'immigrant youth' includes first-, second-, and, less so, third-generation immigrants. Youth are an appropriate focus for this study for two reasons: i) key processes that are directly relevant to this article, identity and autonomy development, take place during adolescence (Laird, 2015); and ii) adolescence represents a key point at which to assess the impacts of parental efforts to instill identities and values that begin in childhood, on their children's wellbeing. While the studies that compose this literature do not work with a uniform conception of identities and values, the 'cultural dimensions' they tend to address (e.g., 'language, religion, values, status and 'race'' (Berry, 2006: 131-132)) are typical of the kinds of identities and values that parents seek to instill and that significantly influence children's ability to exercise autonomy as they mature.

Having become familiar with this literature in another context (Wilson-Forsberg and Robinson, forthcoming), I recognized its potential to inform interdisciplinary contributions to the parental authority literature. While the psychological literature drawn upon in this article focuses on immigrant

youth, the implications are much broader. As Padilla-Walker and Thompson (2005) have noted ‘research on immigrant and ethnic families for whom the question of conflict between family values and values from other sources is particularly salient’ (306) is relevant for considering the situation of ‘typical middle-class families of the dominant culture in the United States who do not face the same kinds of acculturation and discrimination pressures...but who still face situations in which children encounter values outside the home that conflict with the parents’ own values’ (308).

The next section sets the context for the discussion that follows by locating the two critiques of parental efforts to instill identities and values within the broader philosophical literature on parental authority.

### **Liberal-democratic theories of parental authority**

In arguing in favour of state privileging of parental efforts to instill identities and values in their children, I accept and propose to work within key points of agreement in the literature on parental authority in the liberal-democratic states.

These points of agreement can be usefully discussed by reflecting upon what Brighouse and Swift (2014) call the ‘liberal challenge.’ It

concerns the distribution of freedom and authority between parents, children, and the state. Liberals think it valuable that individuals be free to make and act on their own judgments about how they are to live their lives; justifying authority requires an account of how anybody can have the right to decide for others (2).

The first sentence emphasizes the key interest-bearers in discussions of parental authority: parents, children, and the state. The reference to the need for justification of authority in the last sentence accentuates the liberal commitment to treat all humans as possessing equal moral worth: this places the onus of justification on those who would impose limitations. This literature relies primarily on the language of rights to justify and limit authority. And, whether implicitly or explicitly, most participants work with something akin to Joseph Raz’s interest-based conception of rights according to which “X has a right’ if and only if X can have rights, and, other things being equal, an aspect of X’s well-being (his interest) is a sufficient reason for holding some other person(s) to be under a duty’ (1986: 166). Given the commitment to equality, the determination of such rights requires that the interests of both rights-claimants and proposed duty-bearers receive consideration. Finally, the importance of personal autonomy is reflected in the endorsement of the freedom of individuals ‘to make and act on their own judgments about how they are to live their lives’.

It is within these points of general agreement that critiques of parental efforts to instill identities and values have arisen. Two such critiques are examined in light of psychological literature in the two sections that follow. The first presents parental efforts to instill identities and values as constituting a conflict between parents’ and children’s interests. The second suggests that such parental efforts can undermine children’s capacity for personal autonomy. After suggesting problems with these critiques, the final section describes ‘situated autonomy,’ which, it is argued, is consistent with psychological accounts of identity development and can justify state privileging of parental efforts to instill values.

**Are parental efforts to instill identities and values primarily a matter of parents’, and not children’s, interests?**

One critique of parental efforts to instill identities and values has emerged in a line of argument between advocates of 'dual interest' and 'child-centred' approaches to defining parental authority (Hannan and Vernon, 2008). Those who adopt 'dual interest' approaches suggest that parental authority is justified by a combination of parents' and children's interests, while those who adopt 'child-centred' approaches suggest that only children's interests should count. What is interesting from our perspective is that, despite the definitions, both advocates of dual interest approaches and their critics treat parental efforts to instill identities and values as primarily a matter of parents' interests that can potentially conflict with children's rights. This characterization obscures the possibility that children might also have vital interests in these processes. As we shall see, reflection upon the psychological literature suggests that children do have vital interests in terms of wellbeing and, thus, children's interest should play a greater role in these discussions.

While proponents of the dual interest approach suggest that parental efforts to instill identities and values promote both parental and children's interests, their arguments suggest that the primary justification rests with parental interests. Consider two of the most prominent advocates, Ferdinand Schoeman (1980) and William Galston (2002) (other examples include Macleod, 2015; Noggle, 2002; Reshef, 2013). While both argue that the sharing of identities and values between parents and children benefits children, they put special emphasis on the contribution to parents' interests. Schoeman says parent-child intimacy 'tends to be the primary reason adults in our culture give for wanting and having children' (1980: 9); Galston famously argues that parental authority should recognize that 'the ability to raise their children in a manner consistent with their deepest commitments is an essential element of [parents'] expressive liberty' (2002: 102). Dual interest advocates are also insistent that these parental interests are distinct from, and thus, I would add, susceptible to come into conflict with, children's interests: Galston writes that 'the expressive interests of the parents are not reducible to their fiduciary duty to promote their children's interests' (2002: 103) and Schoeman says that the danger of rights talk is that it 'unambiguously suggests that the [parent-child] relationship is a one-way relationship aimed almost solely at promoting the best interest of the child' (1980: 9). Thus, in these accounts, children's interests in parental efforts to instill identities and values appear to play a secondary role and may even be overridden by parental interests if the two come into conflict.

The idea that parental interests play a primary and potentially conflictual role in dual interest approaches is also shared by their child-centred critics. For instance, reflecting concerns about the equality and separateness of persons, Hannan and Vernon (2008) have criticized Schoeman's claim that parents' interest in familial intimacy can justify instilling identities and values in their children: 'we certainly do not grant adults control rights to influence the values and commitments of other adults in the name of fostering intimacy;...if that were really what intimacy required, it would rule out the possibility of having a right to it (as opposed to simply desiring it) in the first place' (176). In case it needs to be stated, child-centred critics of the dual interest approach do not appear to consider children's interests to play a role in justifying parental efforts to instill identities and values. For instance, while some of them do derive parental rights from parental duties to compensate for children's deficiencies vis-à-vis adults (e.g., deficiencies in intellectual abilities and life experience (Brighouse and Swift, 2014; Hannan and Vernon, 2008)), none to my knowledge has noted children's deficiencies vis-à-vis sharing their parents' identities and values.

Thus, both sides present this debate, albeit implicitly, as reflecting a dichotomous choice between privileging parental interests in instilling identities and values and children's interests in maintaining respect for their equality and separateness. The validity of this dichotomy, however, depends upon obscuring the possibility that children might have vital interests of their own in their parents' efforts.

Reflection on several branches of psychological literature on acculturation and immigrant youth suggests that the possibility that children themselves do have strong interests in being raised to share their parents' identities and values. There is much evidence to support the claim that children's wellbeing (operationalized by standard measures of psychological adaptation (e.g., 'life satisfaction, self-esteem, and [a lack of] psychological problems') and sociocultural adaptation (e.g., 'school adjustment and behavior problems') (Berry et al., 2006)) is enhanced by developing their ethnic identities. Since youth usually receive their ethnic identity from their parents, I treat the adoption of ethnic identity as a proxy for adopting a key aspect of their parents' identities and, to a lesser degree, values. As shall be demonstrated, this literature suggests that adopting parents' identities and values tends to promote wellbeing among immigrant, and in some cases, non-immigrant youth.

A key approach in acculturation psychology involves defining acculturation strategies—identity options available to immigrants—and then assessing outcomes in terms of the wellbeing of those who adopt each strategy. In the following passage, Berry et al (2006) describe the four acculturation strategies they study.

In this framework, two issues are raised: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity; and the degree to which people wish to seek involvement with the larger society. When these two issues are crossed, an acculturation space is created with four sectors within which individuals may express *how* they are seeking to acculturate. *Assimilation* is the way when there is little interest in cultural maintenance combined with a preference for interacting with the larger society. *Separation* is the way when cultural maintenance is sought while avoiding involvement with others. *Marginalisation* exists when neither cultural maintenance nor interaction with others is sought. *Integration* [also called biculturalism] is present when both cultural maintenance and involvement with the larger society are sought (306).

Applying this framework, Berry et al (2006) report three findings that support the claim that sharing their parents' identities and values promotes children's wellbeing: identification with one's (parent's) ethnic group (characteristic of the integration and separation strategies) is positively associated with successful psychological adaptation; identification with both the national and ethnic culture (i.e., integration) is associated with positive measures of psychological and sociocultural adaptation; and strategies that do not involve identifying with the parental/ethnic culture (i.e., assimilation and marginalization) are associated with much weaker levels of psychological adjustment (see also, Costigan et al., 2010; Liebkind, 2006; Phinney et al., 2006; Stuart et al., 2016). Explanations that have been offered for these correlations include the contribution of strong identities to 'a sense of emotional stability and personal security' (Sam et al., 2006: 133) and the creation of 'ingroup loyalties and connectedness' that can lead to greater levels of social support from family and others (Oppedal, 2006: 103, 108; Costigan et al., 2010; Berry, 1997). In an interview-based qualitative study, Stuart et al (2010)

have also found evidence of connections between shared cultural values and families providing adolescents with strong support systems.

The contribution of shared identities and values to wellbeing is also supported by psychological research that investigates the effects of acculturation gaps. Acculturation gaps occur where parents and children adapt to the host society at different rates, which can lead to greater generational differences in values in immigrant homes than are typically found in dominant culture homes (Phinney and Vedder, 2006). Survey-based studies have generally found that larger acculturation gaps (i.e., where parents and children share less identities and values) are correlated with lower wellbeing for immigrant youth. For instance, Phinney and Vedder (2006) report that larger value gaps are 'associated with poorer psychological and sociocultural adaptation for both immigrant and national [i.e., non-immigrant] adolescents' and that adolescents who identify more strongly with the ethnic culture 'were the least influenced by discrepancies' (178, 179). While it might be assumed that these effects were due to parents expressing displeasure with children who chose not to share their identities and values, other studies suggest this may not be the case. Drawing upon an interview-based study in New Zealand, Stuart et al (2010) report that both immigrant parents and adolescents valued youth retaining their culture (119) and a study of immigrant and national mother-daughter dyads in Luxembourg found that 'maternal affection toward daughters seemed to be independent of value consensus' (Albert et al., 2013).

Finally, the contribution of shared identities and values to children's wellbeing also finds support in research that applies Phinney's (1992) three-stage model of ethnic identity formation. The stages range from not having begun to explore one's identity, to having begun, to becoming *identity-achieved* by reaching 'a state of clarity and understanding about the meaning of their ethnicity' (Martinez and Dukes, 1997: 504). In a survey-based study involving 12,386 American youth Martinez and Dukes (1997) found that those classified as identity-achieved reported statistically significantly higher levels of self-esteem, purpose in life, and academic self-confidence than those with less-developed ethnic identities.

The implication of these psychological findings is suggested by Martinez and Dukes (1997) who conclude that families 'can raise adolescent wellbeing by increasing ethnic identity' (515). On the assumption that children have an interest in their wellbeing, then the presumed conflict between parents' and children's interests that animates much of the debate between dual interest and child-centred approaches, while undoubtedly real in many cases, does not appear to be nearly so prevalent as is often assumed. In fact, if children's interest in increasing their psychological wellbeing is significant enough, it may constitute a child-centred justification for parental rights that privilege their efforts to instill their identities and values.

### **Do parental efforts to instill identities and values undermine children's capacity for autonomy?**

Even if children do have significant wellbeing interests in parental efforts to instill identities and values, it might still be argued that these interests are outweighed by the threat that such parental efforts pose to children's capacity for personal autonomy. This concern draws our attention to a fundamental disagreement between participants in the parental authority literature regarding how to understand personal autonomy and what is required to promote and protect it. The discussion in this section begins by describing two competing conceptions of personal autonomy at play in the parental authority literature. It then focuses on 'autonomy-as-choice,' a conception that does not support state privileging

of these parental efforts, and assesses it in light of psychological literature on immigrant youth, acculturation, and identity development. The discussion concludes that concerns raised by the autonomy-as-choice perspective about parental efforts to instill identities and values do not find support in the psychological literature.

### *Two conceptions of personal autonomy*

The conceptions of personal autonomy that are the focus of this section and the next have a lot in common. Both autonomy-as-choice and situated autonomy expect people to ground their choices in fairly stable values, identities, principles, etc., and to resist making choices capriciously based on random or arbitrary principles or momentary passions. Most important to the present discussion, they also agree that personal autonomy requires the values, identities, and principles upon which people ground their decisions to be *their own*. At a minimum, there are three conditions that it is generally agreed must be met for values to be sufficiently one's own to support autonomy: people must not have developed them by being brainwashed or coerced; they must not have been rendered servile such that they always do what someone else tells them to do (Burt, 2003a); and, when they formed their values, they must have been aware that they had alternative identities and values to choose from (Brighouse and Swift, 2014: 164).

Looking beyond these basic requirements, however, a key difference becomes apparent. It concerns the processes through which people adopt their identities and values and thus, succeed or fail at making them their own. What are being called *autonomy-as-choice* conceptions suggest that adults' identities and values are only sufficiently their own where they 'self-consciously *select* rather than *accept* the principles that govern their lives' (Burt, 2003a: 184; see also Clayton, 2012; Hannan and Vernon, 2008; Morgan, 2006; Reich, 2002). On this view, anything less than explicit choice constitutes harm because the person's identities and values will have been determined by someone else and thus are not their own (Clayton, 2012). Conversely, what are being called *situated autonomy* conceptions suggest that it is possible for unchosen identities and values to become one's own. Brighouse and Swift (2014) provide a good example of what this might look like when they write,

it is not the genesis of one's beliefs and commitments that tells us whether they are autonomous, but their relationship to one's current judgment. Commitments generated by nonautonomous processes become autonomous when the agent reflects on them with an appropriate degree of [independent judgment and] critical reflection (165).

On this view 'independent thought and action' are the measure of whether people's identities and values are sufficiently their own, not whether they were the objects of explicit choice (Brighouse and Swift, 2014; Burt, 2003a; Callan, 2002; Galston, 2002).

Since parents typically exercise substantial influence over the conditions under which children develop their identities and values, this disagreement about the requirements of personal autonomy has implications for the question of whether states should privilege parental efforts to instill identities and values. Proponents of autonomy-as-choice tend to conceive such parental efforts as potential threats to children's capacity for autonomy. The rest of this section reflects on these claimed threats in light of findings from the psychological literature on immigrant youth, acculturation, and identity development. Situated autonomy is considered and assessed in the next section.



### *Autonomy-as-choice*

Proponents of autonomy-as-choice are deeply concerned that parental influences on the development of children's identities and values will prevent these from becoming sufficiently children's own and, thus, children will not retain a capacity for autonomy as adults. Clayton (2006) illustrates this clearly when he writes,

if others, such as her parents, are concerned that *she* is the author of her life, they will regard themselves as under an obligation not to choose for her, not try to get her to hold particular beliefs that they find attractive or compelling, or to make her engage in particular ethical practices, such as worship, which they regard as essential to a worthwhile life (105).

Given this understanding of the relationship between parental influences and children's autonomy, advocates of the autonomy-as-choice perspective tend to focus on two types of threats to children's autonomy. These may be described as direct threats, based in parental efforts to indoctrinate their children, and indirect threats, derived from parents' exercise of autonomy in their own lives. Reflection on psychological findings suggests that parents are neither as able to exert or to limit their influence over their children's identity and value development as these threats presume and require.

*Direct threats.* One autonomy-as-choice concern is that parents will directly undermine their children's capacity for autonomy by attempting to indoctrinate them by sheltering them from knowledge of alternative identities and values (Morgan, 2006; Hannan and Vernon, 2008). The oft-cited example is that of the 'fundamentalist' religious parent who does not want her child exposed to any ideas that are contrary to what she teaches at home. For example, Brighouse and Swift (2014) claim that this parent 'is making a mistake about the content of her duty of care. She is misidentifying the child's true interests. She owes her child an upbringing that will equip him to judge for himself independently how to live his life' (153). Here the concern is that the child's 'choice' of identities and values will have been so constrained that those adopted will represent 'adaptive preferences' (Reich 2002) and thus will not be sufficiently the child's own to support personal autonomy. To address these concerns, proponents of autonomy-as-choice advocate a role for the state, especially through public education, to counter insular parental influences and thus protect children's capacity for autonomy. For instance, Macleod says schools should facilitate autonomy by exposing 'children to different doctrines and encourag[ing] independent critical thinking about such matters' (2015: 240; Reich, 2002). Clearly the threat and the proposed solution presume that it is normally, and not just exceptionally, possible for parents to exert such influence over the processes by which their children develop identities and values.

The psychological literature on acculturation and immigrant youth suggests, however, that parents—fundamentalist, atheist, immigrant, or otherwise—are not nearly so able to exert control over the processes by which their children develop identities and values as the threats described by the autonomy-as-choice perspective presume. (Note: this is not to deny that this can happen, only that it is not so easy to orchestrate as some seem to suppose.) For instance, while Phinney writes that 'for young children, whose family and community constitute their world, the customs and values in which they are immersed are seen as the way things are, the norm' (2006: 119), she also suggests that most older children are able to access alternative identities and values from adults and peers in the community, neighbourhood, and school and through the media. Further, presumptions of monolithic 'familial' or

'parental' values must be tempered, by recognition that 'a mother's values do not always correspond to the father's values' (Kuczynski and Navara, 2006: 303, citing Kohn). And further, evidence is emerging to suggest that children and youth exercise a fair degree of autonomy over their own socialization. For instance, Benish-Weisman et al (2013) note that recent thinking has rejected 'so-called fax models [of socialization] that assumed that parents transmitted a copy of their personal values to their children' in favour of more reciprocal processes which view 'the child as an active agent that can manipulate and change parents' values' (614); Kuczynski and Navara (2006) report that 'the best-researched generalization is that children influence the course of their own socialization by influencing parental choice of discipline and socialization strategies' (304); and finally, Kuczynski and Navara also note research that suggests that even parents who do 'use separation strategies to preserve their cultural heritage may nevertheless adapt their childrearing strategies to prepare their children for success in the society in which they would eventually work and live their adult lives' (317).

*Indirect threats.* Besides direct attempts to indoctrinate, advocates of autonomy-as-choice also raise concerns about indirect threats to children's autonomy that arise when parents exercise personal autonomy in their own lives. The concern is that when parents exercise autonomy by living their own lives according to their own identities and values, as, for example, when they attend religious services, this can have shaping effects on the identities and values of their children whose participation is often not voluntary (Clayton, 2012). Given the importance they place on conscious choice, advocates of this perspective believe that the effects of such parental influence must be mitigated.

Of course, it would be much easier to accept that such influences should be mitigated if we could be convinced that they *can* be mitigated. Reasons to question parents' ability to control the value-shaping effects of their behaviour are found in both parental authority and psychological literatures.

Writing in the parental authority literature Burt (2003a) suggests that 'the circumstances of human development' are such that no one really freely chooses their identities and values (200). Giesinger (2013) suggests that families' forms of life are inherently so comprehensive that they will influence children's values 'even if parents refrain from *intentionally* educating their children' (274). And Lecce suggests that parental narrowing of children's options 'is only problematic...if we assume, per impossible...that selves so produced are rendered de facto incapable of subsequently reopening' options (Lecce 2008: 38).

Turning from critics to proponents of autonomy-as-choice, uncertainty about the extent of parents' ability to limit their influence is also suggested by the variety of positions proponents have taken with respect to what is to be mitigated and how. Regarding what needs to be mitigated Clayton (2012) focuses on parental intentions (353); Hannan and Vernon (2008) focus on the likely consequences of parental behaviour, regardless of intentions; and Morgan suggests categorically that 'children have an interest in being protected from value *systems*' (2006: 14). A similar diversity of opinion is found concerning the threshold of effects on children's value adoption that parents should not exceed: for Hannan and Vernon (2008) the effect of parental introduction of values should not control 'future choice in irreversible ways' (188); for Clayton (2002) it should not generate 'avoidable costs with respect to goal-revision later in life' (363); and for Morgan (2006) parental influence should not impede future choice by creating emotional ties to identities and values. This range variety of positions concerning what parents can reasonably be expected to do to mitigate their indirect influences

on their children indicates that proponents of autonomy-as-choice work from very different assumptions about what is humanly possible.

Evidence from several fields of psychology also suggests reason to believe that much value-shaping parental behaviour is beyond parents' ability to consciously control. Acculturation psychology research suggests a variety of unavoidable parental choices that can have identity-shaping effects on children. Some are obvious: parents cannot help but determine the language of the home and the phenotype of their biological children which, in many societies, will strongly influence whether they have identity-shaping experiences of privilege or discrimination. Other effects are more subtle. For instance, by choosing where to live, parents determine the type of neighbourhood in which their children will grow up. This matters because it has been demonstrated that children raised in ethnically mixed neighbourhoods tend to display an integration/bicultural profile whereas 'the ethnic profile predominates in more ethnically homogenous neighbourhoods' (Berry et al., 2006: 324). Neighbourhood composition has also been shown to affect the size of acculturation gaps (Phinney and Vedder, 2006).

Some findings in developmental psychology echo Giesinger's point about the implicit influences of a family's form of life. For instance, Kağitçibaşı (2012) identifies three 'prototypical family patterns' that are distinguished by their emphasis on relatedness, independence, or psychological and emotional interdependence. Erikson suggests that even mundane, but unavoidable, decisions like whether to swaddle a baby and whether to comfort a child or let her cry are 'related to [a] culture's general aim and system' (1968: 98-99). Costigan and Su (2008) report that Chinese Canadian parents' views on how to parent (e.g., authoritarian, directive, conformist) are positively correlated to the strength of their attachment to Chinese cultural values. And, Oppedal suggests that basic cultural values can be transmitted to children through 'feeding routines, sleeping routines, and other modes of interaction' (2006: 104).

Other findings in developmental psychology provide reasons to question whether parental efforts to resist exerting indirect influences are likely to succeed. For instance, Erikson emphasizes the importance of conformity between the values parents live by and the values they seek to instill: 'parents must not only have certain ways of guiding by prohibition and permission, they must also be able to represent to the child a deep, almost somatic conviction that there is meaning in what they are doing' (1968, 103); and 'no matter what we do in detail, the child will primarily feel what it is we live by' (113). The importance of such conformity to successful value-sharing also finds support in Benish-Weisman et al's (2013) empirical finding that parents whose personal values are highly differentiated from the values they try to inculcate 'have been shown to convey their values less successfully to their adolescent children' (617).

Taken together, this reflection on direct and indirect threats to autonomy-as-choice suggests that parental efforts to exert conscious control over the processes by which their children develop values and over the influence of their own behaviour on those processes are less effective than the autonomy-as-choice perspective presumes and requires. If this is the case, then such influences may not be nearly as detrimental to children's autonomy as has sometimes been supposed; it also suggests that efforts to restrict parental influence on children's adoption of identities and values may be in vain. But, is there a conception of personal autonomy that find more support in the psychological literature.

### Situated autonomy

Unlike autonomy-as-choice, the situated autonomy perspective suggests that parental efforts to instill identities and values positively contribute to children's personal autonomy. Consideration of psychological literature suggests that situated autonomy offers the advantages of congruence with how children's identities and capacity for autonomy actually develop. It also suggests limitations upon parents' exercise of their autonomy with which parents are more likely to be able to comply.

According to situated autonomy, people require identities and values, including those instilled by parents during childhood, to become autonomous adults. A leading proponent of the conception of personal autonomy that I am calling situated autonomy is Sandra Burt. She suggests an explanation of how children can make the identities and values they receive from their parents their own. When successful, Burt suggests, such parental efforts enable children to generate what she calls 'encumbered selves.' As an encumbered self, a person identifies with (i.e., is encumbered with) inherited traditions, communities, and identities. 'The idea,' Burt (2003b) writes,

is to provide a child with an identity, sense of purpose, and orientation to life strong enough to tie him to that life and identity throughout adulthood. Education is seen as fitting the child with the worldview, personal commitments, and moral understandings that his parents and the faith community that he inhabits believe to be necessary to live a good life (179).

Besides providing people with principles and values that can inform their agency, such identifications can encourage the kind of critical reflection through which children can make them their own. For example, Burt (2003a) writes that teaching a child that certain ideals 'are worthy of commitment because of the particular sort of person one is--born into this family, of this nationality, sharing this heritage, fated to this physical condition, stuck with these relatives' promotes critical reflection and autonomy because

[i]ndividuals who cultivate, accept, or adopt this sort of relationship to their ends act autonomously when they reason responsibly and critically about what it means to be the sort of person characterized by the ends they accept as given. 'What does it mean to be a person who...' is a core question of this sort of autonomous thought (187).

Rather than promoting the 'unquestioning' acceptance characteristic of indoctrination, Burt (2003a) suggests that such thinking promotes skills essential to 'autonomous thought and action' like 'practical reason and the virtue of moral courage' (189; also see Callan (2002) on the importance of autonomous adherence to values). Thus, Burt writes, 'Once we place independent thought and action rather than free choice at the center of our understanding of autonomy, comprehensive forms of religious and cultural education do not seem quite so restrictive' (184). Recognizing that such independent thought and reflection may lead people to reject, replace, or modify inherited values and identifications, I think Callan's (2002) description of such selves as '*revocably* encumbered' (120) is preferable to 'encumbered.'

Situated autonomy's claim that children must first develop secure identities before making identities their own finds support in the psychological literature. Identity development literatures suggests that distinct, yet related, processes or 'tasks' are involved in identity formation during childhood and adolescence. While the task of childhood is to learn the 'characteristics' (Costigan et al.,

2010: 264) or 'beliefs, values and behavioral scripts' (Oppedal, 2006: 103) of one's ethnic and national cultures, as Phinney et al (2006) explain, the task of adolescence is to transform what has been learned into an adult identity:

With increasing age, more mature cognitive skills support the process of constructing a sense of self that integrates prior understandings and experiences....For adolescents in immigrant families, the process of ethnic-identity formation involves examining the ethnic attitudes, values, and practices learned at home from their immigrant parents and considering them in relation to those of their peers and the larger [national] society (76; Berry 1997; Sam et al., 2006).

Psychological models of the processes by which people make unchosen identities and values their own are consistent with the role situated autonomy attributes to reflection. For instance, of successful adolescent identity development, Erikson (1968) writes:

The final identity, then, as fixed at the end of adolescence, is superordinated to any single identification with individuals of the past: it includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and reasonable coherent whole of them (161).

Further, according to Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, people can integrate behaviours and values derived from constitutive connections with others (e.g., parents, groups, nations) into their personal identities by evaluating them and bringing them 'into congruence with [their] other values and needs' (73).

Contrary to the autonomy-as-choice perspective, situated autonomy suggests that the greatest threat parents may pose to their children's autonomy is not that they will instill values and identifications too strongly (although, of course, they might), but that they not do so sufficiently. For instance, Burt (2003b) refers to 'those parental abdications of responsibility that leave a child with an open future but no tools with which to make sense of it' (267) and Lecce (2008) suggests that parents may have a duty to 'transmit ethical, including religious, values, and practices to their children' (39). The claim that children need both identity and autonomy finds support in the psychological literature in the context of migration to the West. According to Kağitçibaşı (2012) it is optimal for children to develop what she calls 'autonomous-related' selves which can satisfy their needs for agency *and* interpersonal relatedness. To enable parents to fulfil duties to transmit identities and values to their children, proponents of situated autonomy advocate for the state to extend limited parental rights, like the privacy and control rights associated with Schoeman in the introduction.

The limitations on these parental rights flow logically from situated autonomy. One is that parents should not attempt to instill identities and values through *processes* that undermine their children's capacity for autonomy. Thus, for instance, Burt (2003b) rejects parental efforts to impose identity closure by attempting to 'systematically wall their children off from any and all interactions with the outside world' (266). This prohibits illegitimate forms of indoctrination, religious or otherwise. Another limitation is that children should not be encouraged to adopt values or identifications that would preclude them from becoming autonomous, like, for example, convincing them 'that the best way of life involves unquestioning obedience and submission to the will of another person, whether priest, parent or politician' (Burt, 2003a: 188). A third limitation reflects concern for children's wellbeing:

parental rights are forfeited where children are abused or neglected or where parents fail to demonstrate even a basic level of competence (Macleod, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

These limitations on the exercise of parental rights offer a number of advantages. First, compared to the uncertainty created by limitations associated with autonomy-as-choice, it is generally easier to determine how they should be applied. Second, adults can respect these limitations without forgoing normal motivations for becoming parents like the desire to share one's identities and values, passions and preferences with one's children. Finally, these limitations are consistent with Ryan and Deci's (2000) psychological findings that children's value adoption works best when parents do not try impose their values on them and that identity integration is most likely to occur where people are introduced to behaviours and values under 'autonomy-supportive' as opposed to externally controlling, conditions (74; Kuczynski and Navara, 2006).

It may be useful to digress from making the case for situated autonomy to explain why two possible limitations on parental rights have not been adopted.<sup>2</sup> One such limitation concerns parents whose identities and values do not line up with those of the wider society in which they live. For example, while the Amish in the United States seem to raise psychologically well-adjusted children, it is also true that their children do not have the same access to the broad choice of life opportunities that mainstream American society offers other children. Should the state limit parental authority in the name of ensuring such children can access such wider choices? This is a difficult question and space only allows a brief comment here (see Robinson 2017). Where children are not being abused or neglected, or being raised by parents who are incompetent, I think the state should be very cautious about restricting parental authority for this reason. While children should be made aware that they have the right to exercise options in the wider community and the state should use its jurisdiction over education to ensure they are not completely unable to exercise such options should they so choose, the state and the dominant/majority community should also exercise some humility in assessing whether such children are being harmed by not being raised in the same way that dominant/majority community parents raise their children. History suggests that overzealousness to 'save' such children from their parents not only reflects a lack of humility, it may be the cause of even worse harm to the children it was meant to 'save.' Consider an example from my homeland. In 1883 Canadian Prime Minister Macdonald made the following remarks:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men (cited in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015: 2).<sup>3</sup>

For anyone who are unaware of the multigenerational harm wreaked by this effort limit parental authority in order to bring children's identities and values into greater alignment with the wider society, please consult Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

A second possible limitation that is not endorsed here concerns the possibility that parental authority may be limited because it is in the broader society's interest that certain families and children

with minority identities and values be assimilated. Examples that have been suggested include families with terrorist, cultist, or criminal values.<sup>4</sup> If children are well-treated within such families and not subjected to abuse or neglect, then, other things being equal, the state should be very hesitant about limiting these parents' authority. If parents in such families are actually convicted of crimes, then social service agencies will be in a position to assess whether the children should be removed to foster care or adoption. The obvious alternative, to label such parents deviant in the absence of criminal convictions and to limit or deny them the right to raise their children, would be very dangerous to a free society. What would be the basis, in the absence of convictions, of such labelling: that they are likely to be terrorists because they attend a 'radical' mosque or they are likely to be criminals because they are Roma? While liberal-democratic societies should stay off this path, this does not mean they should not do anything at all. For instance, they could create policies to assist spouses and children to escape such families if they are so inclined.

Returning to situated autonomy, the case for it is further advanced by considering how children are likely to adopt identities and values in the absence of intentional parental efforts to instill identities and values. Psychologists Ryan and Deci (2000) report that people initially adopt the values and behaviours that they later integrate into their identities because 'the behaviors are prompted, modelled, or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related' (73). Thus, where parents resist making efforts to instill identities and values, children are likely to adopt them from other role models. Advocates of situated autonomy are not optimistic that the obvious alternatives, 'peers, television, or the latest arbiter 'what's cool'' (Burt, 2003a: 188), are likely to inform identities that will promote autonomous lives. Psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) reflects a similar concern when he writes:

If the majority of young people, therefore, can go along with their parents in a kind of fraternal identification, it is because they jointly leave it to technology and science to carry the burden of providing a self-perpetuating and self-accelerating way of life (34)

Situated autonomy suggests at least two dangers with such sources of identities and values. One is that they are often not adequate, and sometimes not intended, to support autonomy. For instance, Callan (2002) suggests that a problem with 'the advertising industry and mass entertainment' as sources of identities and values is that their 'persuasive strategies are designed to short-circuit independent thought' (135). Another danger where identities and values are adopted from, and thus largely align with, popular culture is that the kinds of incongruence between personal and societal identities and values that can give rise to critical reflection are less likely to occur. Thus, for instance, Phinney (2006) reports that national (i.e., host culture) youth, whose ethnic identities tend to be affirmed by public education and popular culture, are the least likely to feel motivated to explore and affirm their ethnic identities (123; Martinez and Dukes, 1997). Conversely, identifications with the kinds of social traditions to which parents will often introduce their children are much more likely to generate autonomy-supporting reflection. For instance, Besta et al (2016) report finding that where individuals' personal identities are fused with social identities, like country and family, greater 'self-concept clarity' emerges. Self-concept clarity supports independent thought and action, they report, since it has been associated with being 'more clear and confident when it comes to knowing who they are and what they want to do in life' (61) and less willing to 'passively follow the action of others' (68-9).

The last two sections have considered whether parental efforts to instill identities and values in their children are likely to harm their children's capacity for autonomy. They did so by reflecting on the parental authority literature in light of psychological findings. Three consecutive conclusions now appear justified: i) since the situated autonomy conception of personal autonomy is more persuasive than autonomy-as-choice, then ii) parental efforts to instill identities and values actually promote children's capacity for autonomy; and, thus, iii) it is in children's interests that states privilege and promote their parents' efforts to instill identities and values.

### **Conclusion**

This article has argued that liberal-democratic states should privilege parental efforts to instill their identities and values in their children. It has done so by considering two important critiques of such efforts in the parental authority literature: that such efforts overemphasize parental interests; and that they fail to respect children's interests in developing a capacity for personal autonomy. Reflection on psychological literature concerning immigrant youth, acculturation, and identity development has demonstrated that these critiques do not succeed and, in fact, parental efforts to instill identities and values (subject, of course, to certain limitations) can significantly contribute to children's wellbeing and capacity for personal autonomy. This being the case, it is in children's interests that liberal-democratic states privilege such parental efforts through such measures as parental privacy and control rights.

This conclusion has important implications. With respect to the parental authority literature, it suggests, *contra* Clayton and others, that parents should be encouraged, not discouraged, to share their identities and values with their children. With respect to liberal-democratic states, it suggests that they should adopt policies that promote and respect parental privacy and control rights. Policies that may be in need of review include those concerning mandatory school curricula and social cohesion (see, e.g., Robinson, forthcoming). Finally, with respect to the theory and practice of liberal multiculturalism, this article's conclusion provides the basis of a powerful response to the argument that minority cultural rights harm children's interests (see, e.g., Robinson, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> I have discussed other limitations that follow from situated autonomy elsewhere (Robinson 2007: 150-153).

<sup>2</sup> These limitations were suggested during the review process. I would like to thank those who suggested I discuss them.

<sup>3</sup> This example was brought to my attention in a public lecture by Professor Amos Key Jr. of the University of Toronto on March 1, 2017 at Wilfrid Laurier University (Brantford, Ontario).

<sup>4</sup> As evidence that the latter possibility is not entirely fanciful, see Gaia Pianigiani, 'Breaking Up the Family as a Way to Break Up the Mob,' *New York Times*, February 10, 2017 (online).