Socialization and Psychological Autonomy

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SOCIALIZATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTONOMY

By

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This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Thomas Anthony Mahaffey, who sacrificed so much so that I could chase my dream.
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Although the word “autonomy” is not featured in daily folk discourse, the concept of autonomy as self-government is endemic in Western culture. Each of us wants to be free to make her own decisions for her own reasons, but given the pervasiveness of social influence, at least some of which is oppressive, in what sense can agents really be said to be self-governing? In this dissertation, I take on the challenge of explaining why social influence is compatible with autonomy in some cases, but not in others.

I begin in chapter 1 by setting up the conceptual framework for the project. While “autonomy” is assigned various distinct meanings in the philosophical literature, I am interested in autonomy as the actual condition of self-government and, more specifically, I am interested in autonomy with regards to an agent’s values, preferences, and other pro-attitudes – or psychological autonomy. In chapter 2, I set up the socializationist challenge as a kind of compatibility problem for accounts of psychological autonomy. Socializationists raise at least two different problems for psychological autonomy. On the one hand, the hard social determinist claims that values, preferences, and other pro-attitudes are fully determined by social factors, and, since social determinism is incompatible with psychological autonomy, no agent is autonomous regarding her pro-attitudes. On the other hand, the socialization compatibilist stops short of claiming that socialization determines agents’ values and preferences. Rather, she challenges the autonomy theorist to offer a principled way to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate social influences. The latter challenge is the focus of this dissertation.

In chapter 3, I introduce Natalie Stoljar’s feminist intuition, which is the intuition that agents cannot autonomously hold preferences that are based on oppressive norms. I argue that no characteristic, or combination of characteristics, is unique to oppressive social norms that justifies Stoljar’s feminist intuition. In chapters 4 and 5, I present a disjunctive explanation of the autonomy-undermining effects of oppressive socialization. In chapter 4, I argue that an externalist, historical control condition is necessary for psychological autonomy. That is, I argue that whether a value or preference is an agent’s own is historically sensitive. I then demonstrate that the internalization of oppressive
norms sometimes violates the above control condition for psychological autonomy, thereby rendering the development – and sometimes the possession – of relevant pro-attitudes non-autonomous. In chapter 5, I build on recent empirical work in social psychology, arguing that oppressive socialization undermines psychological autonomy when the internalization of oppressive social norms interferes with the agent’s ability to exercise some skill or capacity necessary for psychological autonomy.
CHAPTER 1
AUTONOMY: CONCEPTS AND COMMITMENTS

Introduction

We all want to be autonomous agents; we want our actions to be representative of our beliefs, desires, preferences, and values in ways that merely intentional actions are not. Settling on the necessary conditions for autonomy has, however, proved quite difficult because, in part, autonomy is tied closely to our concepts of rationality, motivating reasons, moral responsibility, and free will. This task is further complicated by social influences on our pro-attitudes, such as our desires, preferences, and values, because these influences are “formed within a context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 4). In light of these forces, theories of autonomy face at least two challenges. The first is to accommodate the social nature of humans. The second is to explain why it seems that socialization is conducive to autonomy in some cases, but not in others. The goal of this chapter is to set up the conceptual framework necessary to address the second of these two.

In section 1, I offer a first glance at autonomy and the claim that autonomy is incompatible with socialization. In section 2, I discuss the different types of individual autonomy at work in the philosophical literature. In section 3, I look more closely at psychological autonomy and explain differences among autonomous development of a pro-attitude, autonomous possession of a pro-attitude, and autonomous control over a pro-attitude. I also explain what I mean by autonomous action. In sections 4, 5, and 6, respectively, I offer an overview of procedural, substantive, and relational accounts of autonomy.
1.1 A First Glance at Autonomy and The Socialization Problem

Autonomy, literally translated, means self-rule or self-government and I am interested in this concept as it applies to individual agents. More specifically, I am interested in “psychological autonomy,” which is “roughly, autonomy regarding various aspects of one’s mental or psychological life, including one’s pro-attitudes (e.g., one’s values and desires)” (Mele 1995, p. 138). I am also interested in the relationship between psychological autonomy and autonomous actions. I will say more about psychological autonomy in section 3. For now, I will state that I am interested in autonomy as a relation between an agent and her mental states.

It is a widely expressed criticism of theories of autonomy that individual autonomy “is in tension with the fact that the self’s very identity is determined by the communities of which one is a part, that is, by the pervasive influence of parents, peers, and culture” (Barclay 2000, p. 53). In its strongest version, we may understand the argument as claiming that “the inevitable socialization that affects us all, makes authenticity, and therefore autonomy, impossible” (Bernstein 1983, p. 120). It is, I think, incontestibly true that many of our values are influenced by social forces. One may, in fact, question whether there are any human values that are not the product of socialization. I stop short, however, of accepting that pervasive social influence determines agents’ values and other pro-attitudes.

At first glance, it is clear that the challenge philosophers face in light objections like those above is to explain what is required for agents to be self-governing, “how individuals can develop their own conception of the good life in the face of such [social] factors, and how we can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate ways of influencing the minds of the members of society” (Dworkin 1988, p. 11). Is the process of socialization compatible with psychological autonomy? Are some methods of social influence incompatible with psychological autonomy? If so, which ones and why? I will return the “socializationist” criticism of autonomy in chapter 2 (Bernstein 1983, p. 120).
1.2 The Different Types of Individual Autonomy

Before I begin to address the claim that social influence is incompatible with psychological autonomy, it will be helpful to say some more about both autonomy, in general, and psychological autonomy, in particular. In this section, I will lay out several different conceptions of autonomy in the philosophical literature with an eye toward identifying those conceptions that are most relevant to addressing the problem at hand, which is to explain the compatibility of socialization and psychological autonomy. In the next section, I will give a more complete treatment of psychological autonomy.

Individual autonomy may be conceived of in different ways. Joel Feinberg divides the concept according to “four, closely related meanings,” (1989, p. 28). According to Feinberg, autonomy may be understood as i) “the capacity to govern oneself…”, ii) “the actual condition of self-government…”, iii) “the ideal of character derived from that conception [of autonomy]…”, or iv) “the sovereign authority to govern oneself” (1989, p. 28).¹ In this dissertation, I am interested in autonomy as the actual condition of self-government and not merely the capacity for self-government.

Before I begin a summary of the views of autonomy in the philosophical literature, there is one more distinction to make. Conceptions of autonomy may be either global or episodic. Global accounts view autonomy as a condition that characterizes a person’s entire life. Gerald Dworkin describes autonomy as “a feature that evaluates a whole way of living one’s life and can only be assessed over extended portions of a person’s life” (1988, p. 16). Instead of the agent’s entire life, episodic views of autonomy are concerned with whether an agent is autonomous with regards to some aspect of her life (e.g., a desire or an action) at a specific time. I am interested in autonomy in the latter sense.

Nomy Arpaly identifies eight different conceptions of individual autonomy at play in the philosophical literature. First, she identifies agent-autonomy, which is “the relationship between an agent and her motivational states that is characterized by the agent’s ability to decide which of her motivational states [such as desires, preferences, and values] to act on” (2003, p.118). Agent-autonomy refers to a type of control that

¹ Feinberg’s emphasis.
agents have over the springs of their actions. On this view, an agent is autonomous when she decides which of her pro-attitudes to act on. Agent-autonomy does not require that the motivational state she decides to act on is an autonomously held state.

The second type of autonomy Arpaly identifies is autonomy as personal efficacy. Autonomy as personal efficacy, or material independence, is understood as “having the ability to get along well in the world without requiring the help of others” (Arpaly 2003, p. 119). In this sense, individual autonomy increases with self-sufficiency. Autonomy as personal efficacy is not necessary for agents to “develop their own sense of the good life,” as Dworkin put it (1988, p. 11). An agent may have cooperative view of the good life that not only allows for dependence on others, but requires it. People who live in communes, for example, may still be self-governing in that they are living their lives according to their values, even though they depend upon the assistance of others.

The third type of autonomy Arpaly discusses is autonomy as independence of mind. According to this conception, people who are servile or submissive and “people who blindly accept the views of their gurus or communities” are not autonomous because they lack independence of thought or mind (Arpaly 2003, p. 120). Servility, according to Thomas Hill, “manifests the absence of a certain kind of self-respect” (1991, p. 12). Servility is a tendency to deny one’s moral rights and can be understood in two ways (Hill 1991, p. 12). An agent may be servile because he misunderstands his moral rights “or has little concern for the status they give him” (Hill 1991, p. 13). Agents fail to be self-governing when they are servile.

Not all persons who we consider submissive, however, meet Hill’s definition of servile. Hill leaves it open that an agent may avoid servility in giving up her rights so long as she does so “with a full appreciation of what they [her moral rights] are” (1991, p. 15). For example, in wishing to be guided by her husband, a woman may devote herself to him and avoid servility “if she is uncoerced, knows what she is doing, and does not pretend that she has no decent alternative” (Hill 1991, p. 15). Although she does not exhibit independence of mind, she is self-governing in another respect. Her life is governed precisely the way she wants it to be and her desires seem to be autonomous ones.²

² I will say more about what it is for an agent to be autonomous with regards to a desire in section 3.
The fourth type of autonomy is *normative moral autonomy*. This is the type of autonomy “invoked when people ask to be allowed to make their own decisions and to be free from paternalistic intervention” (Arpaly 2003, p. 120). In this sense of autonomy, individuals are at liberty to direct their lives as they see fit, so long as they are not harming others. Normative moral autonomy is a right of agents to be self-governing; and if agents have this right, they have it whether they are, in fact, self-governing.

The fifth type of autonomy considered is autonomy as *authenticity*. Authenticity in this account is understood as “being true to one’s-self” (Arpaly 2003, p. 121). Authenticity, in this sense, may be understood in terms of the agent’s identification with her motivational states (Mele 1995, p. 156). In this sense, an agent is autonomous with regards to a particular mental state if the state is one the agent identifies with as her own. There is a second way, however, that authenticity may be understood, which is not quite captured by Arpaly’s characterization. Authenticity, in the second sense, may be understood in terms of the historical processes that give rise to the agent’s motivational states, including one’s reasons for acting (Mele 1995, p. 157). In this sense, an agent is autonomous with regards to a particular pro-attitude if it was produced in the right way. Although this is different from the idea of being true to oneself, it should be noted that whether a particular pro-attitude counts as the agent’s own could conceivably depend on how the agent came to hold the pro-attitude.

The sixth type of autonomy Arpaly identifies is autonomy as *self-identification*. According to this conception, an autonomous person is one, “with a harmonious and coherent self-image who never experiences her desires as an external threat” (Arpaly 2003, p. 124). Laura Waddell Ekstrom’s coherentist account of autonomy is an example of this type of conception. According to Ekstrom, agents exhibit autonomy when their freely, not coercively, formed preferences cohere with their other preferences (2005). The

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3 The idea that individuals should be free from paternalistic intervention is exemplified in John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* where he writes:

That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. He cannot rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier, because, in the opinions of others, to do so would be wise, or even right. These are good reasons for remonstrating with him, or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or visiting him with any evil in case he do otherwise. (1999, p. 50)

4 I give a more detailed description of Ekstrom’s account in section 4.
autonomous agent does not experience internal, psychological conflict because he “possesses cohesion among the significant items of his psychology” (Ekstrom 2005, p. 154).

The seventh type of autonomy is what Arpaly calls **heroic autonomy**. Heroic autonomy does not describe a distinct conception; rather it describes a category of ideal accounts of autonomy that are universally desirable, but attainable by only a few (Arpaly 2003, p. 124). Perfectionist accounts of autonomy are examples of heroic accounts. For example, an account of autonomy that requires that an agent be perfectly self-sufficient is an example of a heroic account. Such a state, if achievable at all by actual human beings, would be achievable by very few individuals.

The eighth and final type of autonomy that Arpaly identifies is **rational autonomy**. Autonomy in this sense is characterized by, “the ability to respond to reasons—reasons in general and moral reasons in particular,” and “acting for good reasons,” on this account, is tantamount to “acting rationally” (Arpaly 2003, p. 125). If we think of acting for good reasons as acting for reasons that we endorse, then it is easy to see how one can get this identification of autonomy with reasons-responsiveness. Arpaly writes, “On such a view, rational action is always agent-autonomous action – is always action in which the agent, whoever she is, exercises control over her desires” (2003, p. 125).

The idea of an agent’s control over her motivational states, including her pro-attitudes, is central to understanding psychological autonomy and, I think, addressing the worries about the effects of socialization that Barclay, Bernstein, and others have expressed. It will be helpful, therefore, to keep in mind the four conceptions of autonomy that Arpaly identifies that are related to the agent’s control over her motivational states. Agent-autonomy is a type of control over which motivational state to act on. Agents fail to exhibit independence of mind when they are servile, submissive, and unreflective. Authenticity, if understood in terms of identification, requires that the agent exhibit control over what she accepts. If understood in terms of the historical processes that give rise to her motivational states, then authenticity requires that an agent’s control is not bypassed in the production of the motivational state. Rational autonomy, understood as acting for reasons that the agent endorses, requires control in both the endorsement of reasons and in putting those reasons into action.
1.3 Psychological Autonomy

As I stated above (1.1), psychological autonomy is “roughly, autonomy regarding various aspects of one’s mental or psychological life, including one’s pro-attitudes” (Mele 1995, p. 138). There are, at least, three distinct types of psychological autonomy regarding pro-attitudes (Mele 1993 and 1995) – i) the autonomous development of a pro-attitude, ii) the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude, and iii) autonomy “regarding the influence of a pro-attitude on ... intentional behavior” (Mele 1995, p. 138). My goal in this section is to explain the difference between these three accounts. I begin with a brief statement of pro-attitudes.

I understand pro-attitudes, like Donald Davidson, as including “desires, wantings, urges, promptings, and a great variety of moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions, and public and private goals and values in so far as these can be interpreted as attitudes of an agent directed toward actions of a certain kind” (1973, p. 686). Many of the cases I offer in this dissertation focus on the relationship between an agent and her desires, broadly construed to include wanting and preferences, but it should be understood that I take pro-attitudes to encompass more than desires.

Now that it is clear what is meant by a pro-attitude and by valuing, I will focus the rest of the section on explaining the “tripartite distinction” Mele offers regarding psychological autonomy (1995, p. 138). One type of psychological autonomy concerns the development of pro-attitudes, which I will call D-autonomy. As an example of an account that focuses on the autonomous development of a pro-attitude, consider the following conditions for autonomy, which were offered by John Christman (1993):

S is autonomous with regards to some desire, D, at t iff:

i. S did not resist the development of D (prior to t) when attending to the process of development, or S would not have resisted the development of D had S attended to the process;

ii. The lack of resistance to the development of D (prior to t) did not take place (or would not have) under the influence of factors that inhibit self-reflection;

iii. The self-reflection involved in condition (i) is minimally rational and involves no self-deception; and

iv. S is minimally rational with regards to D at t.
Although Christman’s conditions do not provide necessary or sufficient conditions for autonomous possession of a particular desire, they do give us an idea of what is means to be autonomous with regards to the development of a desire.

If we look back for a moment at the claim that the pervasiveness of social influence is inconsistent with autonomy, then we can see why a philosopher may be concerned about the autonomous development of a pro-attitude. If I have no control over the social factors that shape my beliefs, desires, values, and such, then how can I be self-governing with regards to any of these states?

That “the autonomous development of a pro-attitude $P$ that one possesses throughout $t$ is not sufficient for the autonomous possession of $P$ throughout $t$,” is illustrated in cases of the autonomous development of irresistible desires (Mele 1995, p. 139). Mele discusses the case of Alice, “a specialist on drug addiction,” who decides “to make herself a heroin addict” so she can experience the particular phenomena of heroin addiction directly (1995, p. 138). Alice, by hypothesis, meets all the requirements of $D$-autonomy, but when Alice judges it best to stop her experiment, she cannot. Even though Alice “is convinced that the experiment is more dangerous than she had realized and that it is time to start setting things right..., she is incapable of immediately eradicating her standing desire for heroin” (Mele 1995, p. 138). While Alice is compelled to desire to use heroin and she desires not to desire to use heroin, Alice is not autonomous with regards to the possession of her desires for heroin, what Mele calls “P-autonomy” (1995, p. 149).

Autonomous possession of a pro-attitude does not guarantee that the agent will act in accordance with pro-attitude. There is another type of psychological autonomy that is concerned with the agent’s control over the influence of her pro-attitudes on her actions, which I will call I-autonomy. Even if Alice autonomously possesses her irresistible desires for heroin before she changes her mind, she may not be I-autonomous. Alice may desire to use heroin and even desire to have those desires, but not want her heroin desires to be put into action. If this is an intelligible story, then it is possible for Alice to be P-autonomous with regards to a desire, but not I-autonomous. Furthermore, Alice may exhibit I-autonomy with regards to a desire that she does not autonomously hold. Let us

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5 For an argument that Christman’s conception as it is here gives neither necessary nor sufficient conditions see Taylor, 2005.
assume that Alice sometimes has a strong, but not irresistible, desire to strike a patient during a session. When this desire arises, it is not something that Alice endorses. In fact, she immediately rejects the desire and refrains from acting on it. In successfully resisting the desire to strike her patient, she is exercising control over the influence of the desire on her actions and, therefore, can be understood to be autonomous in this sense.

In this dissertation, I will focus on psychological autonomy as the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude, P-autonomy. There may be times, however, when it is helpful to discuss cases of either D-autonomy or I-autonomy. When this occurs, I will make it clear that the “species” of psychological autonomy has changed (Mele 1995, p. 138).

Before I move on to the next section, there is one further distinction I would like to make. It is commonplace in the philosophical literature to talk about autonomous actions, but what does it mean to say that agent acts autonomously? As I understand it, autonomous actions are actions that are caused in the right way by autonomously held pro-attitudes. I will not defend a causalist account of action here, as that is beyond the scope of this project. Nor will I attempt to offer an analysis of caused in the right way, but I will state that, minimally, being caused in the right way requires that an agent is not compelled to act as she does.

1.4 Procedural Accounts of Autonomy

Procedural accounts of autonomy state that an agent is autonomous with regards to a belief, desire, value, or preference only if the agent has subjected her beliefs, desires, values, and preferences to the proper critical reflection. Procedural accounts are also called content-neutral because no constraint exists on the propositional content of an agent’s autonomous beliefs, desires, values, or preferences. Procedural accounts can be differentiated further based on the characteristics and requirements of the account. In this section, I begin by distinguishing hierarchical accounts from non-hierarchical accounts. Then I discuss the difference between historical and non-historical accounts of autonomy.

In the following sections (5 and 6), I offer similar treatments of substantive and relational accounts of autonomy. My goals in these sections are to give overviews of
procedural, substantive, and relational accounts of autonomy, pointing out benefits and potential problems, while remaining neutral between these accounts.

Hierarchical and Non-Hierarchical Accounts of Autonomy

Procedural accounts of autonomy seek to provide a purely procedural and content-neutral explanation of autonomy. Procedural accounts of autonomy can be differentiated as either hierarchical or non-hierarchical. While the details of the accounts differ, hierarchical accounts share the core feature that autonomy is to be understood “in terms of hierarchies of desires” (Taylor 2005, p. 4). The two most influential hierarchical accounts on contemporary conceptions of autonomy are those of Harry Frankfurt and Gerald Dworkin.

Frankfurt explains these hierarchies as relationships between first-order desires and second-order volitions, which are desires that specific first-order desires be effective in moving one to act. Although his account has been modified over the years to address certain objection, I am mainly interested in describing the structure of hierarchical accounts and my description here will focus on Frankfurt’s early view.

According to Arpaly’s taxonomy, Frankfurt’s account would be characterized as an account of agent-autonomy. First-order desires are represented by “statements of the form ‘A wants to X’,..., in which the term ‘to X’ refers to an action” (Frankfurt 1971 in 2006, p. 13). The statement “A wants to smoke a cigarette,” is a representation of a first-order desire. Second-order desires are represented by “statements of the form ‘A wants to X’,..., in which ‘to X’ refers to a desire of the first order” (Frankfurt 1971 in 2006, p. 14). The statement “A wants to want to not smoke a cigarette,” is a representation of a second-order desire. Second-order volitions are a special type of second-order desire. An agent has a second-order volition when he “wants a certain desire to be his will,” that is he wants the desire to be effective in moving him to act (Frankfurt 1971 in 2006, p. 16). An agent is autonomous with regards to a first-order desire, D, when the agent has a corresponding second-order volition that D be effective in moving him to act. In this sense, autonomy is understood as a type of identification between first-order desires and second-order volitions. The agent identifies with his first-order desires and wishes to be moved to act by those first-order desires.
Dworkin rejects Frankfurt’s claim that identification between first- and second-order desires is necessary for autonomy. Since, according to Dworkin, autonomy is a global characteristic (see 1.2 above) and “identification is something that may be pinpointed over short periods of time” something more is needed for autonomy (1988, p. 16). Dworkin’s hierarchical account explains autonomy in terms of reflective endorsement of desires – endorsement that is procedurally independent. Furthermore, Dworkin states that when we focus on “only the promotion or hindrance of first-order desires... [we] ignore a crucial feature of persons, their ability to reflect and adopt attitudes toward their first-order desires, wishes, intentions” (1988, p. 15).

Dworkin replaces the identification requirement with an endorsement requirement. Autonomy, on Dworkin’s view, is “a second-order capacity of persons to reflect upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher-order preferences and values” (1988, p. 20). According to Dworkin, an agent is “autonomous with respect to the desires that motivate him if he endorses being so moved” (Taylor 2005, p. 4). Dworkin also states that the reflection that leads to either the endorsement or rejection of the agent’s motivational states must be procedurally independent, where procedural independence is understood as being free from “influences such as hypnotic suggestion, manipulation, coercive persuasion, subliminal influence, and so forth” (1988, p. 18).

While the accounts above have been extremely influential, they are subject to three serious objections. I will briefly state each of these objections before moving on to an example of a non-hierarchical account of autonomy. The first objection is the Regress-cum-Incompleteness Problem. The objection questions whether an agent who is autonomous with regards to a first-order desire because of its relationship with a second-order desire must be autonomous with regards to the second-order desire. If the agent is autonomous with regards to the second-order desire because of an even high-order desire, “then a regress threatens, for the question will then arise whether she is autonomous with regards to this third-order desire – and so on” (Taylor 2005, p. 6).

If the agent is autonomous with regards to her second-order desire for some other reason, then the account is incomplete. If in response to the Regress-cum-Incompleteness Problem, one claims that the agent is not autonomous with regards to the second-order
“endorsing” desire, but is autonomous with regards to the “endorsed” first-order desire, “because autonomy is simply constituted by such an endorsement,” another problem arises. The Ab Initio Problem questions how an agent “can become autonomous with respect to a desire through a process which was not autonomous” (Taylor 2005, p. 6).

The third problem that these early hierarchical accounts face is the Manipulation Problem. The Manipulation Problem states that some third party could instil a particular first-order desire in an agent, as well as a corresponding second-order volition that the desire be effective in moving the agent to act. How could an agent be autonomous with regards to a desire acquired in this way?

Laura Waddell Ekstrom’s account of autonomy is an example of a purely procedural account that is not a hierarchical account and, therefore, is not subject to the Regress-cum-Incompleteness and Ab Initio problems. Ekstrom utilizes Keith Lehrer’s coherence theory of epistemic justification to explain autonomy. According to Ekstrom, an agent is autonomous with regards to her preferences, where preferences are specific type of preference that first-order desire be effective in causing action because that agent finds that “first-order desire to be good” (Taylor 2005, p. 14). When these “uncoercively formed” preferences cohere with the agent’s other preferences and nondeviantly cause an action, that action is autonomous (Ekstrom 2005, p. 151).

Ekstrom comes to a coherence theory of autonomy, in part, through the “notion of wholeheartedness” (Ekstrom 2005, p. 153). Autonomy is undermined, Ekstrom says, when attitudes that conflict with “certain other elements of the agent’s psychology” play a role in the production of an action (Ekstrom 2005, p. 153). The wholehearted agent does not experience this conflict, on Ekstrom’s view, because he “possesses cohesion among the significant items of his psychology” (Ekstrom 2005, p. 154).

One problem with Ekstrom’s view is that it does not adequately account for influences on a person’s preferences. An agent could have an entirely coherent set of preferences that were all produced by oppressive social practices, but not coercively so, and on this account, that agent would be considered autonomous. Furthermore, if we look at cases where an agent is in the process of changing her preferences, it seems plausible that an agent could be autonomous with regards to a pro-attitude without satisfying the

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6 Ekstrom’s account may be susceptible to some form of the manipulation argument.
coherence requirement. Sometimes, people experience radical shifts in their values and preferences, but rarely do they modify all of their relevant preferences at the same time. If psychological autonomy requires coherence, then agents will not be autonomous with regards to their pro-attitudes during these transition periods.

**Historical Accounts of Autonomy**

Ahistorical accounts of psychological autonomy state that autonomy is a relationship between an agent and her pro-attitudes at a specific time. Furthermore, these accounts hold that the historical conditions that give rise to the states in question have no bearing on the agent’s psychological autonomy. Frankfurt’s account of autonomy is one such view. The most difficult objection raised against ahistorical accounts is the manipulation argument. How can an agent be autonomous with regards to a desire that is produced (and endorsed) through manipulation? The manipulation argument has led many philosophers to adopt a historical condition on autonomy.

Historical accounts claim that authenticity, whether a particular pro-attitude is the agent’s own, is understood in terms of the historical processes that give rise to the pro-attitude. Christman’s model of autonomy is an example of a historical view that builds on the foundation of the Frankfurt/Dworkin-style hierarchical account. According to Christman’s most recent account, an agent, A, is autonomous with regards to a characteristic, C, only if:

i) were A to engage in sustained critical reflection on C, and do so in light of the historical processes (adequately described) that gave rise to C, she would not be alienated from C,

ii) the reflection being imagined in (i) is not constrained by reflection-distorting factors, and,

iii) A is competent to effectively form intentions to act on the basis of C. (2007, p. 21)

Notice that Christman’s condition (i) is a historical condition. This is a benefit for two reasons. First, it helps Christman avoid the problem of manipulation. Secondly, and importantly for the task at hand, it enables us to take into consideration the processes, including the social processes, by which the characteristic was produced.

Christman’s condition (i) is a counterfactual version of an endorsement condition. Rather than require that an agent actually reflect on and endorse a characteristic, Christman only requires that if the agent were to reflect on the characteristic, in light of
the historical processes that gave rise to it, then the agent would not reject or feel alienated from the characteristic.

The counterfactual condition has two benefits. First, since it is unlikely that normal human agents ever reflect on all of their relevant mental states, a counterfactual condition opens up the possibility of autonomy for more actual human agents. This is a benefit because a theory of autonomy that is too narrow, that bars too many people from autonomy, will not be terribly useful in addressing the effects of socialization. Second, unlike Frankfurt, Christman does not require that an agent endorse a particular characteristic or value. Rather, Christman requires that the agent not reject or feel alienated from the characteristic. This is a benefit because it seems to capture something about human behavior. Sometimes, upon reflection, we are surprised by our beliefs and desires—not always pleasantly so. Yet, we are not always alienated from our more base desires. While we may not endorse them, it is not conceptually impossible to recognize an unsavory desire or characteristic as a part of ourselves and, therefore, be content to act upon this characteristic.

Christman’s condition (ii) requires that the hypothetical reflection be adequate and free from reflection-distorting factors. In addition to other requirements, such as not being self-deceived, adequate reflection requires a kind of openness to alternatives. Christman writes, “a person has the capacity to reflect adequately if she is able to realistically imagine choosing otherwise were she in a position to value sincerely that alternative position” (Christman 2007, p. 14). This condition may be helpful in addressing the socializationist worries because if an agent cannot imagine herself otherwise, she cannot be autonomous with regards to that characteristic.

Although there are several characteristics of Christman’s account that recommend it for addressing the socializationist challenge, there are also some problems with the account. Consider the case of Eric. Eric is someone that most people would regard as a good person. He is polite, helpful, and kind. However, Eric is very peculiar in that he never, ever reflects on any of his pro-attitudes. He neither lacks the capacity for critical reflection nor the power to exercise it, but, still, he never reflects on the characteristics that motivate his actions. Eric is peculiar in another way as well. Were Eric to reflect on any of his characteristics, he would not feel alienated from any of them and that
reflection, were it to occur, would not be constrained by any reflection-distorting factors. In short, were Eric ever to reflect on characteristics, he would meet all of Christman’s criteria. It is odd, however, to say that Eric is autonomous with regards to his characteristics. How can an agent who never actually reflects at all on his characteristics be autonomous with regards to them? While Eric’s characteristics would not look any different to an outside observer if he were to actually reflect on them, it seems that Eric is just too lucky with regards to the truth of the counterfactual claim to be considered self-governing. If we understand autonomy as the actual condition of self-government, then it seems that some amount of actual reflection, deliberation, and endorsement is going to be required. This worry leads me to be sceptical about counter-factual endorsement requirements.

1.5 Substantive Accounts of Autonomy

Substantive accounts of autonomy claim that, in addition to procedural requirements, normative, or non-neutral, conditions are required for autonomy. Substantive accounts can be broken down into two different categories – strong substantive accounts and weak substantive accounts. Strong substantive accounts “reject the content neutrality of procedural theories by requiring specific contents of the autonomous [beliefs, desires, values, or] preferences of agents” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 19). Weak substantive accounts place other normative constraints on autonomy, such as a normative competency requirement.

Substantive accounts of autonomy claim that procedural requirements alone are not sufficient for autonomy. One concern is that since “structural procedural theories analyze autonomy as a feature of an agent’s occurrent mental states, they cannot do justice to the historical processes of socialization leading up to those states,” and even when procedural accounts attempt to address this issue, they fail because they focus on the negative effects of socialization on autonomy, “rather than the global implications of socialization for autonomy” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 13). Another concern is that the content-neutrality of procedural theories cannot accommodate intuitions that there are just some values that an agent cannot autonomously hold.
Strong substantive accounts of autonomy can be differentiated by the type of normative constraint they place on autonomy. Some theorists, like Stoljar, argue that in addition to any procedural requirements, there must be a constraint on the actual content of autonomous beliefs, desires, preferences, characteristics, and values. On the one hand, content constraints could require that an agent hold a particular value, i.e., an account might require that an agent value her own well-being. On the other hand, one might place a negative constraint on the content by requiring that an agent not hold a particular value or set of values. On these accounts there would be some values that one cannot autonomously hold. This is the view that Stoljar adopts.

Stoljar’s position is motivated by what she calls that feminist intuition. Although content-neutral, procedural theories of autonomy are in line with many feminist goals, Stoljar argues that there are still cases that would satisfy the requirements of procedural theories and yet “would still be regarded as nonautonomous by many feminists” (Stoljar 2000, p. 95). This is because “preferences influenced by oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous,” and this claim is the feminist intuition (Stoljar 2000, p. 95). Stoljar uses her intuition to motivate a strong substantive requirement that excludes oppressive content from autonomously held pro-attitudes.

While Stoljar’s argument does capture something about our intuitions in certain cases, her position is susceptible to several objections. She claims that only a normative constraint on the content of autonomous beliefs, desires, preferences, and values can “vindicate the feminist intuition” (Stoljar 2000, p. 109). However, Stoljar fails to consider other possible explanations. First, as Marilyn Friedman suggests, the intuition may be mistaken. After all, we have a competing intuition that people in oppressive social contexts are capable of acting autonomously (Friedman 2003, pp. 24-25). Second, we may be able to explain the intuition in terms of the types of socialization involved. For example, if the socialization of the oppressive gender norms in question include aspects that are coercive, deceptive, or manipulative, then current procedural theories can explain why agents are not autonomous in these cases. Third, if the internalization of these norms implies that the norms are unshedable or nearly unshedable, then procedural theories can explain why the agents are not autonomous. While the type of content constraint that
Stoljar suggests would address the worry in her feminist intuition, it is not the only way to do so.

Weak substantive accounts focus not on content constraints, but rather on normative competency. Benson’s normative competency account requires that an agent hold herself to be competent to give reasons for her values and actions. On this account, the internalization of false, oppressive norms can undermine autonomy because the internalization can lead to “impairment of one’s sense of self-worth, self-trust, or self-respect” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 21).

In support of this view, Benson asks us to consider the case of Charlotte, a white, middle-class, American woman in the 1880’s. Charlotte has internalized the social norms of her time. As such, she finds herself faced with a terrible internal conflict when she begins to desire to leave her husband and family and launch a career of her own. The key piece of the story for Benson, is that Charlotte’s internal conflict leads to her “doubting her very capacity to make such a decision [to leave her family]” and she regards making such a decision as evidence that she is, in fact, deranged (Benson 2000, p. 75). Benson’s normative competency requirement is useful for addressing the problem of socialization because it highlights the effects that at least some forms of socialization can have on the rational and deliberative capacities that may be necessary for psychological autonomy. Although I do not wish to commit myself to a normative competency requirement at this time, it will be useful to keep this requirement in mind as we look more closely at the relationship between socialization and autonomy.

1.6 Relational Accounts of Autonomy

Relational accounts of autonomy “stress the ineliminable role that relatedness plays in both persons' self-conceptions (relative to which autonomy must be defined) and self-government itself” (Christman 2009; my emphasis). Marina Oshana’s social-relational account is currently the best developed relational account of autonomy. In this section, I focus on Oshana’s substantive independence requirement for autonomy as a way of distinguishing relational accounts from procedural and substantive accounts.

Relational accounts, like historical accounts, are a kind of externalist account of autonomy in that there are “factors external to a person’s psychological profile [that] are
relevant to the formation of autonomy” (Oshana 2006, p. 49). For historical accounts, these factors are facts about the historical processes that give rise to the agent’s pro-attitudes. For relational accounts, these factors are facts about the agent’s social-relational status.

Oshana is interested in autonomy in a global, broader sense than the view of psychological autonomy that I have sketched above. According to Oshana, “autonomy is a condition of persons constituted in large part by the social relations people find themselves in and by the absence of other social relations” (2006, p. 49). Autonomy, Oshana argues, “is not decided ‘from within,’ or on the basis of the evaluational perspective of the individual whose autonomy is at stake” (2006, p. 50). She is not arguing that the relationship between an agent and her pro-attitudes is not relevant at all to autonomy. She instead argues that accounts that fail to take into account the social-relational status of agents do not capture autonomy, in general, and psychological autonomy in particular. For Oshana, whether an agent meets the requirements for psychological autonomy will depend on whether, in addition to meeting the other requirements, the agent is substantively independent.

Substantive independence requires that “a person who is in a society... find herself within a set of relations with others,” such that the following criteria are met (2006, p. 86). First, the agent’s social background, including social institutions, allow the agent to determine “how she shall live in a context of at least minimal social and psychological security,” where this security is understood as whatever is needed to protect the agent from “arbitrary attempts of others to deprive her” of the power to self-govern (2006, p. 86). Second, the agent may pursue and hold “values, interests, and goals different from those who have influence and authority over her, without risk of reprisal sufficient to deter her in this pursuit” (2006, p. 87). Third, the agent is “not required to take responsibility for another’s needs, expectations, and failings unless doing so is reasonably expected of the individual in light of a particular function,” such as parenthood (2006, p. 87). Fourth, the agent is adequately financially and materially self-sufficient “to be independent of others” (2006, p. 87). Fifth, and finally, the agent is not “subject to misinformation about what she is able to do” (2006, p. 87). Together these five criteria make up the substantive independence requirement. As I noted above, Oshana is interested in a global, not episodic, view of autonomy. That being said, she does hold that psychological autonomy is possible only when an agent meets the five criteria for substantive independence.

While I do not wish to commit myself to a relational account, I remain open to the addition of a relational requirement, like the substantive independence requirement, in addressing the effects of socialization on psychological autonomy. The benefit of adopting something like Oshana’s substantive independence requirement is that we would have a
principled way to address the socializationist’s objections. There are, however, some worries about relational accounts that stem from the ephemeral nature of many of our relationships. Christman points out that, “claiming that a self or a person's autonomy is essentially tied to her relations with others not only flies in the face of the temporal variability of our self-conceptions (and life situations) but also restricts a person's autonomous self-definition to the social relations she now finds herself in” (Christman 2009).

Conclusion

In section 1, I took a first look at the concept of autonomy as self-government, the concept of psychological autonomy, and the objection that socialization is incompatible with individual autonomy. In section 2, I discussed the different conceptions of autonomy at work in the philosophical literature. In this section, I noted four conceptions that are related to agential control over pro-attitudes – agent-autonomy, autonomy as independence of mind, autonomy as authenticity, and rational-autonomy and suggested that we keep these conceptions in mind as we move forward. In section 3, I examined psychological autonomy more closely and discussed the three distinct types of psychological autonomy – autonomous development of a pro-attitude, autonomous possession of a pro-attitude, and autonomous control over the influence of a pro-attitude. I also explained what I understand autonomous actions to be. In sections 4, 5, and 6, I offered an overview of procedural, substantive, and relational accounts of autonomy, respectively.

In the next chapter (2), I continue to focus on the conceptual groundwork necessary to address the objection that socialization is incompatible with autonomy. I begin by distinguishing between the different forms of the objection. Then I clarify the concepts necessary for addressing the objection, including socialization, indoctrination, and oppression. Finally, I examine some relevant work in social psychology to get a better understanding of the effects of socialization on psychological autonomy.
CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIALIZATIONIST CHALLENGE

Introduction

In chapter 1 (section 1), I made a first attempt at articulating the claim that psychological autonomy is incompatible with the pervasiveness of social influence. How can agents be self-governing in light of the fact that most, if not all, of our values, preferences, and desires are influenced by our families, friends, peers, the media, etc.? This question is at the heart of the socializationist’s challenge, which I return to in this chapter.

Before I begin, I want to remind the reader where we stood at the end of the first chapter. Psychological autonomy, the reader will recall, is “roughly, autonomy regarding various aspects of one’s mental or psychological life, including one’s pro-attitudes (e.g., one’s values and desires)” (Mele 1995, p. 138). I am interested in psychological autonomy as an episodic concept, rather than a global concept. That is, I am interested in psychological autonomy as a relationship between an agent and her pro-attitudes at a time, t, and not as a concept that characterizes the agent’s entire lifetime. Following Mele (1995), I distinguish between three distinct types of psychological autonomy – i) D-autonomy, which is the autonomous development of a pro-attitude; ii) P-autonomy, which is the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude; and iii) I-autonomy, which is autonomy regarding the influence of a pro-attitude on an agent’s actions. My main focus in this dissertation is P-autonomy, the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude.

With these concepts in mind, we can finish laying the groundwork necessary to address the claims that socialization, or at least some forms of socialization, is not compatible with psychological autonomy. I begin in section 1 by explaining what I take socialization to be, as well as distinguishing socialization from other forms of influence like indoctrination and brainwashing. In sections 2 and 3, I return to the socializationist’s challenge for accounts of psychological autonomy. I distinguish between two different
formulations of the socializationist objection. The first formulation, which I call hard social determinism, claims that socialization, in general, is incompatible with psychological autonomy. The second formulation, which I will call socialization compatibilism, claims that some, but not all, forms of socialization, such as oppressive gender and race socialization, are incompatible with psychological autonomy. In section 4, I clarify which formulation of the socializationist challenge I am directly addressing in this dissertation. In section 5, I look at recent empirical work in social psychology on stereotype threat and draw some connections between the effects of stereotypes and psychological autonomy.

2.1 What is Socialization?

Although socialization is a key concept in sociology, getting clear on the concept is more difficult than it may seem. Even sociologists do not agree on one definition or characterization of socialization. The task is further complicated by the use of the concept of socialization in the philosophical literature. Socialization is a relatively unanalyzed notion in the philosophical literature on psychological autonomy and it appears that the term “socialization” is used in different ways. My aims in this section are to use the resources of sociology to build a working definition of socialization and distinguish socialization from forms of social control, like indoctrination and brainwashing.

Characterizing Socialization

Socialization, at the level of the individual agent is “society’s principal mechanism for influencing the development of character and behavior” (Long and Hadden 1985, p. 39). This general characterization is the basis for what is deemed by sociologists the “dominant conception of socialization” (Inkles 1968, p. 76). According to the dominant conception, socialization is “the process whereby a person acquires the attitudes, values, ways of thinking, need dispositions, and other—attributes which characterize him in the next stage of his development” (Inkles 1968, p. 76). The defining characteristic of this process is internalization. On this view, an agent has internalized a value when the value is “experienced by the… [agent] as… [her] own, definitive of…

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7 Long and Hadden 985, p. 40.
her own true nature, not merely as external demands” (Long and Hadden 1985, p. 40). Internalization, in the above sense, is understood as the process by which an agent comes to accept a value as her own.

There are two main problems with the dominant conception of socialization. First, the dominant conception is not a useful analytic tool because it is vacuous. The dominant conception of socialization “generally refers to the ways in which individuals learn skills, knowledge, values, motives, and roles appropriate to their position in a group or a society” (Bush and Simmons 1981, p.134). There is, however, no systematic and non-arbitrary way to delimit the scope of the concept. In fact, the dominant conception, “extend[s] socialization to all parts of life, indeed to all social interaction” (Long and Hadden 1985, p.41). On this account all social interactions are socializing forces; “everyone becomes both a socializing agent and a novice in all encounters with others” (Long and Hadden 1985, p.41). The dominant conception focuses almost solely on the outcome of the socialization process, but it does not specify the socializing activities through which the goal is achieved. Therefore, “socialization is left without a social home; it is all around us but no place in particular” (Long and Hadden 1985, p.41).

The second problem is that the dominant conception of socialization cannot adequately distinguish socialization from other social forces. The dominant conception is so broad that the “process can include anything, and anything which is part of the process at one time may be excluded at another [time]” (Long and Hadden 1985, p. 41). This problem seems to arise in part from the ambiguity of the concept of socialization itself. The dominant conception of socialization is so “broad and all-inclusive…that it is often impossible to differentiate socialization…from other processes of change in a person’s cognitions or behavior” (Tannenbaum and McLeod 1967, p. 28). This problem makes the dominant conception particularly unfit for addressing whether some methods of socialization undermine autonomy because “except for slight differences in relative emphasis on behavior or character, for example, it is very difficult to distinguish socialization from social control” (Long and Hadden 1985, p. 41). I will return to the distinction between socialization and social control at the end of this section.
In light of the above problems, recent sociological theories have attempted to re-conceptualize socialization in terms of the functional role of socializing activities.\textsuperscript{8} In his recent work on race socialization, Chase Lesane-Brown offers an improved, comprehensive definition of race socialization that can easily be used as a model for all group socialization. On this model, race socialization is defined as:

the specific verbal and non-verbal (e.g., modeling of behavior and exposure to different contexts and objects) messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity. (Lesane-Brown 2006, p.403)

This definition is comprehensive because it focuses on socializing activities as much as the goal of socialization itself, unlike the dominant conception, which focuses on the goal of socialization.

The characteristics of this conception, which make it more suitable for philosophical inquiry, are its emphasis on “how messages are transmitted…, what types of messages are transmitted, and the purpose of the messages” (Lesane-Brown 2006, p.403). This conception is easily amendable to focus on other groups, i.e., gender and religious groups, and, as we will see in section 2, socialization of group members is a particular concern for those philosophers worried about whether socialization impedes autonomy. Using Lesane-Brown’s conception as a model, I will understand socialization as follows:

Socialization is the specific verbal and non-verbal messages that are transmitted to the individual members of a society for the development of pro-attitudes (including values), behaviors, and beliefs about intergroup and intragroup interaction, as well as personal identity and identity relative to group membership.

Lesane-Brown makes a further distinction between inadvertent and deliberate messages that will be helpful in understanding how socialization may have an effect on psychological autonomy.

**Deliberate Versus Inadvertent Messages**

Deliberate messages are, as the name implies, messages that are purposefully transmitted. For example, Alexis may wish that her child, Brittany, were less selfish. As such, Alexis may purposefully talk to Brittany about the value of sharing with others.

Inadvertent messages, in contrast, are “…subtle, often inadvertent communications…that may or may not be directed at… [the person who receives the message], but nevertheless, transmit information… regarding… [the speaker’s] attitudes, values, or views” (Hughes and Chen 1999, p. 471). For example, Brittany may notice that her mother never volunteers, gives money to charity, or offers to share her own possessions with others. From this Brittany may infer that although her mother verbally expresses the value of selflessness, she does not really value sharing because she does not express the value through her actions.

As the example of Alexis and Brittany illustrates, deliberate messages can conflict with inadvertent messages. Consider an example of gender socialization. Craig is undecided about whether to pursue nursing when he goes to college. Although he is very interested in nursing, he fears that he will be judged negatively by others because nursing is not a masculine profession. When he discusses his indecision with his family and friends, they are all very supportive and tell Craig that he should pursue whatever career will make him happiest. However, whenever Craig watches television and movies, he sees that nurses are almost universally portrayed by women. Furthermore, male nurses are often the subject of ridicule and speculation about their sexual orientation. These inadvertent messages might be insignificant if they were infrequent. We should expect, however, that the frequency and uniformity of inadvertent messages which support established gender norms will have an effect on our desires and values. While the acceptance of inadvertent messages as a socializing mechanism may threaten to push the conception back into the realm of the vacuous, solely focusing on deliberate messages is much too narrow for a useful conception of socialization.

**Broad Versus Narrow Socialization**

One further distinction will be helpful in understanding how socialization can have an effect on an agent’s autonomy. The theory of broad and narrow socialization identifies seven sources of socialization, which are, “… [the] family, peers, school/work, community, the media, the legal system, and the cultural belief system” (Arnett 1995, p. 617). According to this theory, all forms of socialization, which are expressed through the seven sources above, are either broad or narrow. On one hand, “[c]ultures characterized by broad socialization encourage individualism, independence, and self-expression”
(Arnett 1995, p.617). So, these cultures are characterized as broad in the sense that there is a “relatively broad range of individual differences in paths of development” (Arnett 1995, p. 618). On the other hand, “cultures characterized by narrow socialization hold obedience and conformity as the highest values and discourage deviation from cultural expectations” (Arnett 1995, p.617).

In narrow cultures there is a restricted range of variation because “individuals are pressed toward conformity to a certain cultural standard” (Arnett 1995, p.618). The distinction between broad and narrow socialization is useful because, although Arnett’s project is descriptive, philosophers may assign a prescriptive value to these types of socialization, which could in turn influence their intuitions about certain cases. Worries about narrow socialization seem to motivate claims that there are “certain forms of socialization that uncontroversially militate against the development of the kinds competencies that are required of a person exercising procedural autonomy” (Barclay 2000, p. 56). On this view, certain types of socialization “radically delimit the choices available to some individuals...[and] undermine autonomy...either in virtue of what skills they fail to encourage or in virtue of what is actively discouraged or penalized” (Barclay 2000, p. 56). Although it may be true that all actual societies that practice narrow socialization are as Barclay describes above, it does not follow from Arnett’s characterization that all narrow cultures are bad.

Socialization Versus Social Control

Before moving on it will be helpful to distinguish between socialization and methods of social control, like indoctrination and brainwashing. As a reminder, I understand socialization as the specific verbal and non-verbal messages that are transmitted to the individual members of a society for the development of pro-attitudes (including values), behaviors, and beliefs about intergroup and intragroup interaction, as well as personal identity and identity relative to group membership. As we will see in section 2, the hard social determinist’s challenge claims that socialization determines agents’ preferences, desires, and values. The characterization I offer treats socialization as a form of social influence, but it does not assume that this influence undermines agential control. If socialization does bypass the agent’s control over her relevant pro-attitudes, then some argument is needed to explain why that is the case. For my purposes,
I distinguish socialization as an influence, albeit a very strong influence, from social control.

I understand social control as encompassing methods like indoctrination and brainwashing that bypass an agent’s control over her relevant beliefs and pro-attitudes. That brainwashing bypasses an agent’s control over her relevant beliefs and pro-attitudes, is, I think, relatively uncontroversial. Gideon Yaffe defines indoctrination as “causing another person to respond to reasons in a pattern that serves the… ends [of the indoctrinator]” (2003, p. 335). While the goal of socialization is that the agent comes to accept or internalize the values of the group, the goal of indoctrination is stronger. The goal of indoctrination is to cause the agent to believe that the values that the group holds are the right values. The success of both socialization and social control is understood in terms of the agent’s coming to adopt the relevant values, but with socialization, it seems, there is always the chance that the agent may reject the values of the group. This is not so with methods of social control, like brainwashing and indoctrination.

2.2 The Socializationist Challenge – Hard Social Determinism

In chapter 1 (section 1), I offered a first glance at the socializationist challenge for psychological autonomy. The challenge raises the following questions. How can agents be autonomous with regards to pro-attitudes that are themselves the product of socialization? Is socialization compatible with psychological autonomy? I now return to the socializationist challenge. In this section I present the challenge of the hard social determinist. In the next section I present the challenge of the socialization compatibilist.

The hard social determinist formulation, as I understand it, stems from an identification of authenticity with self-determination. In chapter 1 (section 2), I distinguished between two forms of authenticity. One is understood in terms of the agent’s identification with her pro-attitudes as her own. The other is understood in terms of the historical processes that give rise to the agent’s pro-attitudes. The hard social determinist views authenticity as requiring that pro-attitudes issue from the agent rather than from other sources.

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Of course, it remains to be seen whether the type or amount of control that agent’s retain in light of socialization is sufficient for psychological autonomy.
than from “societal pressures” (Bernstein 1983, p. 120). For a pro-attitude to be an agent’s own, she must be the source of that pro-attitude.

To understand the force of the challenge, start with a view of autonomy that claims that agents make pro-attitudes “their own” through a process of reflective deliberation and endorsement. Now consider the following case. Jonas is a hardworking college student. He has never been really interested in politics, but he is fiscally conservative and believes in a free market economy. Since it is an election year, a friend of his recently invited him to a Libertarian party meeting. Jonas was intoxicated by the arguments of the party members for limited government interference in not only the lives of individuals, but also in matters of business. Jonas is a very thoughtful person, however, and does not like to make rash decisions. So, he decides to go home and deliberate about the party platform before he makes a decision about whether he accepts their views. Jonas waits a few days for the euphoria to wear off. Then he carefully deliberates about the party’s positions and values. After his careful deliberation, he endorses the views and values of the Libertarian party and adopts them as his own.

According to the hard social determinist, no type of endorsement will ever be sufficient to make Jonas’ newly adopted political views his own. Why? As Mark Bernstein argues, “That the reflective powers of the agent be put to use or not, is a direct consequence of the antecedent societal environment of the agent” (1983, p. 121). Furthermore, whether the agent even has the capacities for critical reflection is determined first by genetic factors and second by social factors (1983, p. 121). On this view, agents have control over neither the acquisition of the capacities necessary for critical reflection and endorsement, nor over whether those capacities are exercised. Consider the following, which is based on Bernstein’s own argument (1983, pp. 121-122):

For any actual human agent, S₁₀,

1. Socialization causes S to have the desires, opinions, goals, and other pro-attitudes that S in fact has.

Although Bernstein does not specify that he is restricting his argument to the autonomy of actual human agents, I think that the most charitable reading of the argument is one in which we read it in the restricted sense.
2. If socialization causes S to have the desires, opinions, goals, and other pro-attitudes that S in fact has, then S’s desires, opinions, goals, and other pro-attitudes are not authentic, in the way that autonomy requires.
3. If S’s desires, opinions, goals, and other pro-attitudes are not authentic, then S is not autonomous with regards to the desires, goals, and other pro-attitudes that S in fact has.
4. Therefore, S is not autonomous with regards to the desires, opinions, goals, and other pro-attitudes that S in fact has.

Bernstein remarks that the “thorough-going socializationist,” the proponent of hard social determinist, “is a kindred spirit of the Hard Determinist [about free will]. He views societal pressures… as coercive forces, determining the motivations and actions of an agent” (1983, p. 121). Hard social determinism can be understood as follows:

HSD: For any plan, value, or other pro-attitude of S, there is a set of social facts that determines that S chooses that particular plan, value, or other pro-attitude.

Hard social determinists reject the compatibility of socialization and psychological autonomy. They accept that agents’ pro-attitudes, including values, are determined by social factors and therefore, agents’ pro-attitudes, including values, cannot be other than they are and cannot be autonomously held.

2.3 The Socializationist Challenge – Socialization Compatibilism

Socialization compatibilists, as the label suggests, do not argue that socialization is always incompatible with psychological autonomy. They claim, rather, that an adequate theory of autonomy must accommodate the social nature of humans and the pervasiveness of social influence. There are at least two different groups of philosophers who adopt what I am calling socialization compatibilism, but, as I understand it, they all agree that purely procedural accounts of psychological autonomy are incomplete insofar as they fail to i) account for the social nature of actual human agents, ii) explain the compatibility of acceptable forms of socialization and psychological autonomy, or iii) explain the incompatibility of unacceptable forms of socialization and psychological autonomy.

The first group of socialization compatibilists claim that certain forms of socialization, such as oppressive socialization, are incompatible with psychological
autonomy; therefore, any account that doesn’t properly distinguish between the cases where socialization is acceptable and unacceptable is incomplete. Natalie Stoljar makes this claim in her article “Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition” in which she states that “preferences influenced by the oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomous” (2000, p. 95). As an illustration of this view, consider the following case from Paul Benson.

Consider the eighteen-year-old college student who excels in her studies, is well liked by her many friends and acquaintances, leads an active, challenging life, yet who regularly feels bad about herself because she does not have the “right look.” She has those familiar sorts of “imperfection” that others have called to her attention from an early age. Her hair has never been quite curly or straight enough; her make-up is always too heavy or too light; her body is never just soft or firm enough; she has never been sure what the strong points of her appearance were, so she never has known what styles of clothing would capitalize on them. Periodically, she has tried not to care so much about all of this, but in each instance something arose to remind her that others attach significant value to a woman’s appearance and that, as a woman, she would feel much happier about herself is she could just sculpt her appearance more successfully. So, on top of everything else she does, she expends a great deal of time and money trying to straighten or curl her hair, to refine her cosmetic technique, to harden or soften her body, and so on, as well as trying to keep up with all of the latest products, routines, and tricks that might help her finally attain more success at these tasks. (1991, pp. 389 – 390).

Proponents of socialization compatibilism, like Stoljar, hold that in the above case the agent cannot be autonomous with regards to her desires to conform to the beauty standards of her society. Why? For Stoljar, the answer is that the socialization of feminine beauty standards is oppressive and that the oppressive content of the norms undermines the agent’s ability to effectively reflect on them. I will return to Stoljar’s position in chapter 3.

The second groups of socialization compatibilists claim that autonomy is “constituted, in large part, by the external social relations people find themselves in (or the absence of certain relations)” (Oshana 1998, p. 81). This version formulation of the challenge is illustrated by Barclay when she states that “certain forms of socialization… uncontroversially militate against the development of the kinds competencies that are required of a person exercising procedural autonomy” (Barclay 2000, p. 56). On this

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11 I return to Stoljar’s claim in Ch. 3.
view, certain types of socialization “radically delimit the choices available to some individuals...[and] undermine autonomy...either in virtue of what skills they fail to encourage or in virtue of what is actively discouraged or penalized” (Barclay 2000, p. 56). Certain forms of socialization and social relationships cut off the development of the capacities that are necessary for agents to be autonomous with regards to their socially-influenced pro-attitudes.

Autonomy, on this view, is comprised of a “cluster of different skills and capacities, in particular skills of self-discovery, self-direction, and self-definition,” and these skills are developed in “the context of social relationships, practices, and institutions” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 17). An adequate theory of autonomy needs to not only specify what these skills and capacities are, it must also explain which social relations are necessary to develop these skills, or at the very least identify which social relations undermine the development and exercise of these skills.

2.4 Focusing the Socializationist Challenge

In this dissertation, I will be concerned with the socialization compatibilist’ challenge. In chapter 3, I return to Stoljars’s worries about oppressive norms and directly address her claim that pro-attitudes influenced by oppressive norms cannot be autonomously held. In chapter 5, I return to claims about autonomy competency and address arguments that autonomy is constituted, in part, by social relations. Before moving on, however, I’d like to say a few things about hard social determinism.

In addressing the hard social determinist’s claims, like those of Bernstein, Linda Barclay claims that social determinism is only a threat to autonomy if we assume that “agency is only genuinely autonomous if it is uncaused, or determined by no reasons whatsoever” (2000, p. 54). “Numerous theorists,” Barclay states, “have developed accounts of how autonomous people can negotiate the effects of socialization… [emphasizing] the importance of self-knowledge and gaining understanding of how the influence of one’s culture, family, and so on has shaped one’s aims, aspirations, and values” (2000, p. 55). The view that socialization is incompatible with autonomy should be rejected, Barclay claims, “because it is committed to an unrealistic conception of
autonomy,” a conception that agents are the ultimate source of their pro-attitudes (2000, p. 55). Why is this conception unrealistic? Consider the following quote from Mele:

Any conception of authenticity that requires individuals who possess that property to be the sole source of their values, preferences, and the like would be poorly suited to our needs. External influences on our values are considerable; a view of autonomy that placed autonomous individuals above all would exclude all of us. (1995, p. 157)

The view of authenticity as self-determination fails to recognize that “autonomy does not imply the simple shedding of social influence but the ability to fashion a certain response to it” (Barclay 2000, p. 55). Although I won’t be directly concerned with the strong formulation, much of what I say in the following chapters, especially chapter 4, where I discuss the control condition for psychological autonomy, will be useful in addressing the claims of the hard social determinist.

2.5 Relevant Work in Social Psychology on the Effects of Socialization

In January 2005, then president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, shocked and offended many people with his comments at the NBER Conference on Diversifying the Science and Engineering Workforce. Summers presented “three broad hypotheses” about the lack of women in “higher-end scientific professions” (from transcript of Summers’ talk). The most controversial of his hypotheses was that the dearth of women in higher-level science and engineering jobs could be explained, in part, by innate differences between men and women in mathematical and scientific ability – differences that, according to Summers, “are not plausibly, culturally determined” (from transcript). One of the of the responses to Summers’ comments is that they were insensitive to the fact that people are in many ways products of their environments. That is, agents’ beliefs, desires, preferences, and values are “formed within a context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity” (Mackenzie and Stoljar 2000, p. 4). Empirical work in social psychology provides evidence that stereotypes can have a significant effect not only on an agent’s desires and values, but also on how an agent performs on certain tasks. In this
section, I examine some of the relevant empirical work in social psychology that sheds light on the effects of socialization, in general, and oppressive socialization, in particular. 

**Stereotype Threat**

Stereotype threat is the “fear that arises in situations where individuals are afraid of being judged or treated on the basis of a negative stereotype, or where individuals run the risk of inadvertently confirming a negative stereotype related to their group” (Keller and Molix 1997, p. 437). For example, consider Antonia, a brilliant theoretical physicist. All of Antonia’s colleagues are men. The only other women in her department are support staff. Antonia had been working for the past 18 months on a solution to a particularly difficult problem with black holes when she experienced a massive setback. Antonia is frustrated and angry. She wishes that she could yell and hit the wall, or just cry, but she is afraid that if she expresses her frustration that she will confirm the stereotype that women are overly emotional. Her fear of confirming the stereotype makes Antonia even more angry and frustrated and, in a moment of misplaced rage, she throws her notebook across the room just as a couple of her colleagues walk into the lab. Antonia is so embarrassed that she cannot even find the words to explain her actions. She walks away hurriedly, believing that she has just confirmed the stereotype that she tried so hard to avoid.

Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) were the first to demonstrate the effects of stereotype threat and “the disruptive effects of negative stereotypic expectancies have been replicated in a substantial number of studies” (Keller and Molix 2007, p. 437). In these studies, the subjects were primed with either conscious stereotypic expectations, i.e., the researchers explicitly told the subjects about the stereotype, or unconscious means of stereotype activation, i.e., subliminal exposure to images or stereotypic words. The studies showed that exposure to negative stereotypic expectancies (about a group the subject is a member of) undermines the subject’s performance on relevant tasks. When either no stereotypic expectancies or positive stereotypic expectancies were present, the subjects showed a higher level of performance.

**A Sample of Empirical Studies on Stereotype Threat**

Since stereotype threat has been confirmed by so many independent studies, I will only focus a few studies that highlight the different ways that stereotype threat affects
agents. One study (Spencer et al. 1999) tested the effects of negative stereotypes on the math ability of female undergraduates. The stereotype was activated in the test group by telling the subjects that test they were about to take had yielded gender differences indicating that men perform better than women. The result was significantly lowered performance compared to the control group, where no stereotype was activated.

A similar study (Aronson et al. 1999) tested the effects of negative stereotypes on groups of Caucasian, male undergraduates who self-identified either highly or lowly with being good at math. The subjects in the test groups were presented with a stereotype of Asians as being exceptionally good at math. In the group of subjects who highly identified with math, the result was lowered math performance, but in the group who did not highly self-identify with math, the result was improved performance. What can explain the asymmetry between these groups? Studies have shown that in order for a stereotype to be threatening, the individual must have some degree of self-identification with performance in that domain (Wheeler and Petty 2001, p. 805). As Steele writes:

Ironically…, [the subjects’] susceptibility to this threat derives not from internal self-doubts about their ability… but from their identification with the domain and the resulting concern they have about being stereotyped in it. (1997, p. 624)

Identification with the subject, like math or verbal ability, is not the only relevant factor. Studies have shown that identification with the group that is the subject of the negative stereotype also affects the activation of the stereotype threat. A recent study (Schmader 2008) found that women with high levels of gender identification performed worse on math tests when gender differences were salient, whereas women with lower levels of gender identification were not affected by the manipulation. Studies like Schmader’s indicate that group-based performance standards are most likely to affect individuals who self-identify with respective group (Keller and Molix 2008).

**The Relevance of Stereotype Threat for Accounts of Psychological Autonomy**

Why is stereotype threat relevant to psychological autonomy? I think that stereotype threat sheds some light on the effects of socialization, in particular, and oppressive socialization, specifically, on agents’ pro-attitudes. According to Ann Cudd, stereotyping is a fundamental psychological mechanism of oppression (2006). She states,

12 For an excellent review of the experiments on stereotype threat through 2000, see table 1 in Wheeler and Petty 2001.
“Stereotypes, and the in-group/out-group formation process that there are a part of, form the groundwork for the possibility of oppression” (2006, p. 155). Stereotype effect could cause agents to reject pro-attitudes with which they identify. It is not far-fetched for me to imagine that at least some agents might revise their desires on the basis of a confirming instance of a negative stereotype.

For example, Courtney is a junior in high school. She really enjoys math and she wants to pursue engineering in college. Courtney knows that engineering programs are hard to get into and that her SAT score will determine whether she is allowed to major in engineering. Courtney has taken several practice SAT’s and has done extremely well, but in the car on the way to the testing center, she hears a story on the radio about the performance of women on standardized math tests. The exposure to the negative stereotype, just before she begins the SAT, results in Courtney’s underperforming on the math section. Courtney does not score high enough to be admitted into the engineering program. In underperforming, Courtney confirms the stereotype for herself. On the basis of this, she revises her desires to pursue engineering. Now, a person who over estimates her abilities and learns, via some test, that she is not cut out for a particular field would be right to change her desires. But Courtney, by hypothesis, underperforms because of the stereotype threat. She does have what it takes. She just doesn’t believe it anymore. The undermining of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth that accompanies stereotype threat can, I think, have a significant effect on an agent’s psychological autonomy. I will return to this point in Chapters 4 and 5.

Conclusion

In section 1, I explained that I understand socialization as the specific verbal and non-verbal messages that are transmitted to the individual members of a society for the development of pro-attitudes (including values), behaviors, and beliefs about intergroup and intragroup interaction, as well as personal identity and identity relative to group membership. I also distinguished between broad and narrow systems of socialization, as well as between socialization and social control. In section 2, I explained the strong formulation of the socializationist argument, which claims that socialization, in general,
is incompatible with psychological autonomy. I call advocates of the strong formulation hard social determinists. In section 3, I distinguished the weak formulation of the socializationist challenge from the strong formulation. In section 4, I explained that I will be focusing on the weak formulation of the challenge. In section 5, I explored some recent empirical work in social psychology on stereotype threat and began to draw some tentative connections between the effects of stereotype threat and the impeding effects of some forms of socialization. I will return the effects of stereotype threat in chapter 5.
CHAPTER 3

PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTONOMY AND THE FEMINIST INTUITION

Introduction

In “Autonomy and the Feminist Intuition,” Natalie Stoljar argues that any adequate theory of personal autonomy must place a substantive constraint on the content of autonomous pro-attitudes. Stoljar motivates her argument with the “feminist intuition,” which states that beliefs, desires, and preferences that are formed on the basis of oppressive norms of femininity cannot be autonomously held. If Stoljar’s position is correct, then there is some feature of oppressive norms of femininity that undermines an agent’s autonomously holding or acting on pro-attitudes based on these oppressive norms. If the internalization, or acceptance, of oppressive norms of femininity is autonomy-undermining, then an explanation of this effect is that there is something about the oppressive nature of these norms that undermines an agent’s autonomy. In the next chapter, I will argue for a disjunctive explanation of the autonomy-undermining effects of oppressive norms. I begin, however, in this chapter, by focusing on the characteristics of oppressive norms in general to identify, and reject, some possible explanations of the autonomy-undermining effect.

In section 1, I begin with a brief explication of Stoljar’s feminist intuition. Then I offer a working definition of oppressive norms. In section 2, I argue that the falsity of a norm is not sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy with regards to that norm. Again, by psychological autonomy, I mean “autonomy regarding various aspects of one’s mental or psychological life, including one’s pro-attitudes (e.g., one’s values and desires)” (Mele 1995, p. 138). In particular, I am interested in the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude, what Mele calls $P$-autonomy (1995, p. 139). In section 3, I argue that a norm’s propensity to cause harm is not sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy with regards to that norm. In section 4, I argue that morally objectionable content is not

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13 The term norm will refer to a particular standard that governs acceptable behavior for particular groups, and members of those groups, within a society.
sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy with regards to a particular norm. In sections 5 and 6, respectively, I consider whether oppressive norms are inconsistent with an agent’s valuing either her own well-being or autonomy itself and whether those values are necessary for psychological autonomy.

It is helpful to keep in mind that even if oppressive norms do not always undermine psychological autonomy, they may undermine or violate some other kind of autonomy. It might be the case that just being subjected to oppressive norms violates an agent’s autonomy in some other sense – where autonomy refers to an agent’s right to be treated with respect and dignity, for example – but I am not interested in these other conceptions in this chapter. Furthermore, even if it turns out that there is nothing uniquely autonomy undermining about oppressive norms, it does not follow that there is nothing wrong with oppressive norms. There will still be independent reasons to object to the dissemination of oppressive norms.

### 3.1 The Feminist Intuition and Oppressive Norms

The feminist intuition, as Stoljar calls it, is related to a broader worry about the effects of socialization on psychological autonomy, autonomy with regards to one’s pro-attitudes. As individuals within a particular society, there are numerous influences exerted daily on our beliefs, desires, preferences, and values. Socialization is the process by which an individual learns the rules and values of his social and cultural groups, as well as the norms that govern the expectations for his behavior. Norms are rules or standards that define the acceptable conduct of members of social groups. Sometimes these norms are explicit, such as the rule that students should raise their hands before speaking. More often, however, they are implicit, such as the rule that one should always wait at least three days after a first date to call. The feminist intuition is concerned with a subset of these norms, particularly oppressive norms.

The feminist intuition is the intuition that agents cannot autonomously hold pro-attitudes that are “influenced by oppressive norms of femininity” (Stoljar 2000, p. 95). Stoljar argues that this intuition highlights a problem with procedural, or content-neutral, accounts of autonomy. Since content-neutral accounts require only that agents meet some
procedural criteria in the acquisition (and retention) of autonomously held pro-attitudes, some philosophers, like Stoljar, worry that these accounts cannot adequately address the effects of social influence on an agent’s psychological autonomy. According to Stolar, it is possible for an agent to meet the procedural requirements for psychological autonomy with regards to a particular pro-attitude and yet fail to be autonomous with regards to that pro-attitude. The failure occurs because procedural theories do not take into account the “pernicious aspects of the oppressive content” of oppressive norms (Stoljar 2000, p. 95; my emphasis).

Stoljar does not offer a definition of oppressive norms. She focuses, rather, on examples of norms that are clearly both false and oppressive, like the norm that a woman increases her worth as a person through pregnancy and motherhood. In order to determine whether there are any autonomy-undermining characteristics specific to oppressive norms, it is necessary to provide a definition of oppressive norm and any definition of oppressive norm depends on an analysis of oppression. It is not my goal to offer or defend a complete analysis of oppression in this chapter. Some preliminary remarks on oppression are, however, necessary to set up an adequate definition of oppressive norm and, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will rely on Ann Cudd’s analysis from Analyzing Oppression (2006).

Oppression, according to Cudd, “names a harm through which groups of persons are systematically and unfairly or unjustly constrained, burdened, or reduced by any of several forces,” including physical and psychological forces (2006, p. 23). Cudd draws a distinction between what she calls material and psychological oppression. Material oppression occurs both when an agent’s “physical being is harmed,” and when an agent’s “material resources,” such as “wealth, income, [and] access to health care… are reduced” (Cudd 2006, p. 24). Psychological oppression occurs when an agent is “oppressed by… [her] mental states, emotionally or by manipulation of… [her] belief states” (Cudd 2006, p. 24). Psychological oppression results in psychological stress, a reduction of the agent’s self-image, or some other psychological harm. Based on Cudd’s analysis of oppression, oppressive norms will be understood as follows:

A norm, N, is oppressive for members of a group, G, if and only if (i) N governs the behavior of members of G, (ii) there is some harm (physical, material, or psychological) to members of G that results from N, (iii) the harm that results
from N is unjustly inflicted on members of G, and (iv) some other group, O, benefits from N.

I will use this definition of oppressive norm in the following sections to examine some of the general characteristics of oppressive norms.

### 3.2 False Norms and Psychological Autonomy

In her discussion of Kristin Luker’s *Taking Chances*, Stoljar states that Luker’s subjects, all of whom were women who had elective abortions in the 1970’s, were not autonomous with regards to their desires to have unprotected sex, which led to the pregnancies that the women chose to terminate, because the reasons for their actions “are often derived from false norms that have been internalized” (2000, p. 109). Stoljar also claims that in virtue of internalizing false norms, such as “that women should not actively desire sex or prepare for sex in advance,” these women “do not have the capacity to perceive” the norms as being false (2000, p. 109). In this section, I will focus on the falsity of the oppressive norms and show that the internalization of a false norm is not sufficient to undermine an agent’s psychological autonomy with regards to any pro-attitudes that are based on that norm.

Consider the following case. Nia is raised in a culture that accepts that sexual desire in women is morally abhorrent, that a woman’s value is directly linked to her chastity, and, therefore, all females should undergo a procedure, clitorectomy, to reduce the likelihood of pre- or extra-marital sexual encounters by reducing sexual desire. Based in part on her acceptance of these norms, Nia comes to believe that clitorectomies are a good and useful tool for society and that all women, herself included, should undergo the procedure. If Nia is not autonomous with regards to her pro-attitudes about clitorectomies, why?

One could argue that the reason that Nia cannot be autonomous with regards to these particular pro-attitudes is that they are false or represent false claims about the world. It is not true that sexual desire in women is morally abhorrent. It is not true that a woman’s value is directly linked to her chastity. Falsity undermines Nia’s autonomy with regards to any mental states based on these norms. If this is correct, then the reason that
pro-attitudes, rules, and values that are formed on the basis oppressive social norms cannot be held autonomously is either they are false or they represent false claims about
the world.\textsuperscript{14}

If the reason that the acceptance of oppressive norms undermines psychological
autonomy is that the norms are false, then it would follow that the acceptance of any false
norm would undermine an agent’s psychological autonomy, but this does not seem to be
the case. Consider the utterly mundane case of George. George is raised in a society that
accepts that chicken soup will cure the common cold. Based in part on his acceptance of
this norm, George forms the rule that whenever a person has a cold, she should eat
chicken soup to cure it.

Modern medical research has provided evidence that, no matter what our
grandmothers might tell us, chicken soup does not cure the common cold. If this evidence
is correct, then in forming the rule that anyone with a cold should eat chicken soup to
cure the cold, George bases his rule on a false claim. If the falsity of the relevant norm is
sufficient to undermine Nia’s psychological autonomy, then it should be sufficient to
undermine George’s psychological autonomy, but while some philosophers, like Stoljar,
may have strong intuitions that Nia is not autonomous with regards to her pro-attitudes
about clitorectomies, I would be very surprised if they had the same intuitions about
George.

One response, on behalf of Stoljar, is that the reason George may be autonomous,
but Nia is not, is that by internalizing oppressive norms, agents do not only internalize
false claims, they “internalize false construals of personal value” (Benson 1991, p. 387).
Psychological autonomy is consistent with the internalization of most false norms, but

\textsuperscript{14} If all oppressive norms are false or represent false claims about the world, then one benefit of this explanation is that it can be universally applied to all cases where an agent’s pro-attitudes are based on oppressive norms. Is there good reason to believe that all oppressive norms represent false claims about the world? The answer, I think, is yes. Some of the key aspects of oppression are that individuals are subject to oppression based on their membership in a particular group, they are subject to unjustified unequal treatment on the basis of their membership in the group, and that they are subject to serious harms that arise from circumstances including, but not limited to being the object of violence, degradation, or social exclusion (Cudd 2006). When the norms that direct our treatment of groups are based on true beliefs about the world, groups could be rightly subject to unequal treatment. The group NAMbLA (North American Man boy Love Association), for example, claims that its members are oppressed and that they are the unfair targets of coercive laws that restrict their activities. Most of us would agree, however, that this is not a case of oppression because the unequal treatment that NAMbLA members are subject to is justified.
oppressive norms are relevantly different. The false ideas of personal value agents internalize lead them to “misconstrue many of the reasons there are for them to act” (Benson 1991, p. 387). In so far as the false construal of personal value is negative, it is a reduction of the agent’s self-image and, therefore, the agent is harmed psychologically. Stoljar could argue that it is not merely the fact that the agent internalizes a false norm that prevents her from being able recognize that the norm is false. It is in the internalization of a false construal of personal value that the agent’s ability to recognize the norm as false is undermined. Therefore, Nia cannot be autonomous with regards to her desires to have a clitorectomy, since those desires are based on the internalization of oppressive norms.

In order for the above response to work, Stoljar needs to show that the internalization of oppressive norms always undermines the agent’s ability to recognize that the norm is false. Which is the more reasonable position, that the internalization of oppressive norms completely undermines psychological autonomy or, as Paul Benson suggests, that it impedes an agent’s psychological autonomy (1991, p. 406, n1)? If Stoljar is correct, then not only would we rule out autonomy in cases like Nia’s, we would also have to rule out the possibility of agent’s rejecting oppressive norms that she once accepted. We can imagine that Nia’s sister, Neve, also internalized her society’s norms about sexual desire in women and women’s value being linked to chastity. Let’s stipulate that in this society, clitorectomies are performed at age 25. (Women are kept secluded from men until then.) Imagine further that when Neve was younger, say 22, she desired to have a clitorectomy and that her desire was based on the internalization of her society’s norms. Neve is now 23 and she has begun to reflect on her reasons for having a clitorectomy. After reflection and careful deliberation, Neve decides that she rejects the claims that sexual desire in women is morally abhorrent and that a woman’s value is directly linked to her chastity. Since she rejects the reasons she once held, she no longer desires to have a clitorectomy.

How do we explain Neve changing her mind and coming to reject oppressive norms that she once accepted? There does not seem to be a satisfactory explanation available on Stoljar’s view. Stoljar might claim that Neve never really internalized the oppressive norms, but that seems extremely counterintuitive. If Stoljar admits that the
internalization of oppressive norms does not completely undermine psychological autonomy with regards to pro-attitudes based on those norms, then she opens herself up to the possibility of psychological autonomy with regards to pro-attitudes based on oppressive norms, but cases like this are specifically ruled out by the feminist intuition. If the response is going to work, then Stoljar needs an argument that internalization of an oppressive norm is more than just an impediment to psychological autonomy. Without such an argument, I maintain that it is more reasonable to hold that oppressive norms impede, but do not rule out psychological autonomy with regards to relevant pro-attitudes.

3.3 Harmful Norms and Psychological Autonomy

In the previous section, I showed that neither the internalization of false norms, in general, nor false construals of personal value of oppressive norms, in particular, is sufficient to undermine an agent’s autonomy with regards to any pro-attitudes that are based on the false or oppressive norm. If we look back to the cases of Nia and George, there are some other obvious differences between the norms that each accepts that might explain why Nia cannot be autonomous with regards to her desire to have a clitorectomy, but George may be autonomous with regards to his standing desire to eat chicken soup anytime he gets a cold. Specifically, the norms in Nia’s case are not only false, they are also harmful. So, perhaps, it is not the falsity by itself that undermines the agent’s psychological autonomy, but falsity plus a propensity to cause harm. Is this sufficient to explain why Nia is not autonomous, but George is? I think not.

Suppose that Steve really loves reptiles, especially snakes. Unfortunately for him, he was raised in a society of people who never learned to properly tell the difference between a coral snake and a king snake. Instead of ‘Red and yellow, kill a fellow,’ Steve believes the rule is ‘Red and yellow, friendly fellow.’ Instead of ‘Red and black, won’t attack,” Steve believes the rule is ‘Red and black will attack.’ Furthermore, Steve believes that these rules hold true for all snakes. As it happens, neither king snakes nor coral snakes can inhabit the part of the world where Steve lives and, therefore, no member of Steve’s community has ever been actually harmed by the acceptance of these
norms. Steve, however, has gone on vacation to a remote part of the country where both king snakes and coral snakes live. Based in part on his acceptance of the false norms about handling snakes, Steve forms a desire to pick up and examine snakes with red and yellow stripes next to each other.

In Steve’s case, like in Nia’s, the pro-attitude formed is based on false beliefs about the world and both have a propensity to cause harm, but someone could argue that Nia’s and Steve’s cases are not relevantly similar. One might argue that in Steve’s case he will only be harmed if he has the opportunity to pick up a venomous coral snake, but that Nia is harmed just by accepting her society’s norms about women’s value and sexual agency whether any further harm occurs or not.

If the harm that Nia experiences is a violation of some other conception of autonomy, such as the right to be treated with dignity and respect, then this harm does not necessarily undermine her psychological autonomy. If the harm is a psychological harm, such as dehumanization or shame, then an argument is needed to show that the harm experienced is sufficient to undermine the agent’s autonomy with regards to pro-attitudes based on oppressive norms. I do not deny that psychological harms, like dehumanization and shame, can undermine an agent’s psychological autonomy. I am unconvinced, however, that any amount of psychological stress or the reduction of the agent’s self-image by any degree is sufficient to undermine the agent’s psychological autonomy. It is conceivable to me that an actual human agent could internalize oppressive norms and yet not experience psychological harms that are sufficiently strong to undermine the agent’s psychological autonomy.

3.4 Morally Objectionable Norms and Psychological Autonomy

If neither the falsity of oppressive norms nor falsity together with a propensity to cause harm are sufficient to undermine an agent’s psychological autonomy, then what characteristic of oppressive norms, if any, is autonomy-undermining? Looking back at Nia’s case, one might argue that there is another aspect of her case that is not shared by the other cases. In Nia’s case not only are the relevant norms false and harmful, they are also morally objectionable. If Nia is not autonomous with regards to her pro-attitudes
about clitorectomies, then another possible explanation is that her pro-attitudes based on norms that are morally objectionable. In this section, I will argue that a norm’s being morally objectionable is not sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy.

First, psychological autonomy does not require that agents adhere to any particular moral standard. Second, if an agent can be autonomous with regards to a pro-attitude that is based on a morally objectionable norm, then forming a pro-attitude on the basis of a morally objectionable norm is not sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy. Imagine that Kevin accepts, after careful deliberation and in the absence of brainwashing and other monkey business, the norm that one should do whatever it takes (lie, steal, cheat, etc.) to get ahead in life and that the norm is morally objectionable. On the basis of Kevin’s acceptance of this norm, he forms a desire to blackmail his boss in order to get a promotion and a raise.

It seems clear to me that Kevin is autonomous with regards to his desire to blackmail his boss. Kevin’s desire is formed on the basis of a norm that he has deliberated about and endorsed. We do not judge that Kevin is less self-governing because the norm that he endorses in this case is morally bad. Given that Kevin is not compelled to acquire and sustain his desire to blackmail his boss, it seems to me that Kevin is not only autonomous with regards to this pro-attitude, but morally blameworthy for it as well. If it is possible for Kevin to autonomously hold his desire to blackmail his boss, then it is not the case that a norm’s being morally objectionable is sufficient to undermine an agent’s psychological autonomy. If it is possible for Kevin to autonomously hold his desire to blackmail his boss, then the case also demonstrates that falsity, a propensity to cause harm, and morally objectionable content are not jointly sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy.

3.5 Well-Being and Psychological Autonomy

Thus far I have argued that the falsity, propensity to cause harm, and morally objectionable content of oppressive norms are neither individually nor jointly sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy with regards to pro-attitudes based on those norms. In the next sections (3.5 and 3.6), I will focus not on characteristics of oppressive
norms, but rather on the relationship between oppressive norms and some values that may be required for psychological autonomy. One might argue that pro-attitudes based on oppressive norms cannot be held autonomously because the internalization of such norms undermines some value that autonomous agents must hold and, in this section, I will consider whether psychological autonomy requires a commitment to one’s own well-being, where well-being refers to something like the agent’s future health, happiness, and prosperity.

If we look back again at the case of Nia, one might argue that the reason that Nia is not autonomous with regards to her pro-attitudes about clitorectomies is that those pro-attitudes are inconsistent with her valuing her own well-being. If psychological autonomy requires a commitment to one’s own well-being and pro-attitudes formed on the basis of oppressive norms are inconsistent with this value, then we will have identified one autonomy-undermining feature of oppressive norms. If, however, valuing one’s own well-being is not a necessary condition for psychological autonomy, then even if all pro-attitudes that are based on oppressive norms are inconsistent with agents’ well-being, that inconsistency alone would not undermine psychological autonomy.

Concern about the relationship between autonomy and well-being is directly related to arguments about the permissibility of paternalism. Paternalism occurs when an agent, S, interferes in the life of another agent, P, and S’s interference is for the sake of P’s well-being. The conflict that occurs when agents endorse courses of action inconsistent with their own well-being is particularly seen in cases where patients refuse treatment in the literature on autonomy in bio- and medical ethics. Consider the following case. Mark was attacked in a bar fight. During the fight, Mark was shot and lost a lot of blood. He lost consciousness immediately. The bar owner called 911 and an ambulance took Mark to the local hospital. Mark awakens as he is being brought into the emergency room. As forcefully as he can, Mark tells the doctors and the nurses that he does not want to be treated. They tell Mark without treatment he will die and Mark says, “I don’t care about that. I don’t want to be treated. Leave me alone.” If autonomy requires a commitment to one’s own well-being and Mark’s wishes are inconsistent with his valuing his well-being, then Mark is not autonomous with regards to desire not to be treated and the doctors would not violate his autonomy in treating him.
We can divide theories of well-being into two broad categories – subjective and objective. A subjective theory of well-being, on the one hand, holds that “a person’s good… [is] determined by her own decisions” (Varelius 2006, p. 120). If psychological autonomy requires a commitment to a subjective kind of well-being, then an agent violates this requirement only if the pro-attitude is inconsistent with the agent’s own view of her own well-being. Let’s grant that Mark’s refusal for treatment is based on his fervent beliefs that the death of the body is just the next step in a journey and that his spiritual well-being depends on his not fighting death, when it comes. Mark does not take a cavalier attitude toward life, but has made it clear to his friends and family members that he does not wish to be treated for any ailment that might befall him. In fact, if the doctors were to look in Mark’s wallet, they would find a card, signed by Mark, explaining all of this. Mark’s refusal, in this case, is entirely consistent with his own subjective view of well-being.

An objective theory of well-being, on the other hand, holds that whether something is consistent with an agent’s well-being is a matter of objective fact and is not dependent on the agent’s acceptance of that fact. If psychological autonomy requires a commitment to an objective kind of well-being, then an agent would not be autonomous with regards to any pro-attitude that was inconsistent with the agent’s well-being, whether the agent took it to be in her own well-being or not. Suppose that Mark is wrong about death. Death is not the next step in a journey. It is simply the end. Mark’s refusal, in this case, is inconsistent with an objective view of his own well-being. Although Mark believes that refusing treatment is in line with his well-being, he is mistaken.

If psychological autonomy requires a commitment to well-being, is it a commitment to subjective well-being or objective well-being? If psychological autonomy requires a commitment to an objective standard of well-being, then even agents who value their own well-being and always take their well-being as the most important value will not be autonomous with regards to a pro-attitude any time they are mistaken about whether the pro-attitude is consistent with their actual well-being. This is much too strong a requirement for actual human agents. Furthermore, when there are disagreements about whether a course of action is consistent with an agent’s well-being, how will those be settled? What standard could be applied to determine who is right? There would be no
obligation, on the basis of autonomy, to respect the wishes of agents who are aware that their individual views of well-being were not in line with the ‘objective’ view.

If psychological autonomy requires a commitment to subjective well-being, then agents cannot autonomously hold pro-attitudes that they take to be inconsistent with their own well-being. Is it possible for an agent to be autonomous with regards to a pro-attitude that is inconsistent with her own view of her own well-being? Consider the following case. Rita has learned that her daughter is in need of a kidney transplant. Her daughter has a very rare tissue type and there are currently no donors on the donor list that match her. Rita is a perfect match and volunteers one of her kidneys for the transplant. The doctors tell Rita that they do not use organs from donors Rita’s age because of the increased risk, but that given that she is in good health, they will make an exception.

Even though she is in good health, Rita knows that there is a high likelihood that she could become seriously ill or even die as a result of the donation. Furthermore, even though she is a perfect match, there is still a significant chance that her daughter’s body will reject the kidney and die anyway. Isn’t it conceivable that Rita’s parental love for her daughter could trump a commitment to Rita’s well-being and that Rita could autonomously desire to donate her kidney?

It will be helpful in assessing this case to make a distinction between an agent’s putting an inappropriately low weight on her well-being and failing to take her well-being to override all other considerations. Even if agents are required to consider their own well-being in the deliberative process, it doesn’t follow that individual well-being trumps all other values. It seems entirely reasonable that if an agent had a conflict between her autonomously held parental values, for example, and the value of her own well-being, the parental value could win out. Furthermore, if all that is required is that the agent appropriately weighs her well-being in the deliberative process, then it seems that Rita meets this requirement. She takes the risk into account and decides, after careful deliberation, to donate her kidney. It does not seem that, in this case at least, the agent puts an inappropriately low weight on her own well-being, but what about the following case?
Deborah and Dave have been trying for several years to have a baby. Although Deborah has become pregnant five times in the past, she miscarried each pregnancy and each miscarriage occurred during the second trimester. Deborah is currently pregnant for the sixth time and her doctors have informed her that if she does carry this pregnancy to term, it highly unlikely that she will be able to conceive again. Deborah is only 10 weeks pregnant when she learns that she has a particularly aggressive type of cancer. The doctors tell her that with immediate treatment she has a 40% chance of recovery. Without treatment, the doctors estimate that she will live only 6 to 12 months. Unfortunately the treatments available are not safe for pregnant women. Therefore, if Deborah chooses treatment, she must also choose to terminate her pregnancy. If she waits until the fetus is developed enough to survive outside the uterus, the cancer will be too advanced to treat. Deborah refuses treatment and tells her doctors that she does not care at all if she dies. She doesn’t care that the chances of carrying this pregnancy to term are low. She doesn’t care that if she takes the pregnancy to term, she won’t survive to see her child grow up. The only thing she cares about is trying to bring a child into the world and she refuses to take any course of action that jeopardizes that goal.

I think that most people will agree that in the above case, Deborah does not appropriately weigh her well-being in her decision to refuse treatment. Is it possible for Deborah to be autonomous with regards to her desire to forgo treatment? Given that the chances of successfully carrying the pregnancy to term, one might argue that in putting so little value on her own life, Deborah demonstrates a lack of self-worth that undermines her ability to be self-governing. If self-sacrifice, like Deborah’s, is incompatible with psychological autonomy, does it follow that agents can never autonomously desire to sacrifice themselves? If so, then does it follow that no one can ever autonomously desire to sacrifice her life for another? This seems unlikely. Even if Deborah fails to be autonomous with regards to her desire to forgo treatment for her cancer, it seems plausible to me that a person, such as a Secret Service Agent, could autonomously desire to sacrifice her life for another.

It should be noted that if Deborah fails to be autonomous with regards to her desire to forgo treatment, there are other explanations open. One could argue that Deborah’s desire to bring a child of her own into the world, no matter the personal cost,
is irrational. There are other options available, such as adoption, and the desire to sacrifice her own life for the chance of bringing her own child into the world is irrational. Deborah’s desire to refuse treatment is not non-autonomous because she fails to weigh her well-being properly, but because she fails to be responsive to the reasons in favor of treatment. I will return to this explanation in chapter 5.

In this section, I argued that a commitment to an objective standard of well-being is too strong a requirement for psychological autonomy. I also argued that a commitment to a subjective standard of well-being that requires that well-being trump other values is too strong a requirement for psychological autonomy. Finally, I used the case of Deborah to illustrate that an agent may fail to appropriately weigh her well-being and still be autonomous with regards to her desire. If Deborah fails to be autonomous, then I maintain that it is for some other reason.

### 3.6 The Value of Autonomy and Psychological Autonomy

In this section, I consider another reason that may explain why pro-attitudes based on oppressive norms cannot be autonomously held. Psychological autonomy may require that agents value their own autonomy in such a way that agents cannot autonomously desire to live in ways that are inconsistent with this value. Self-governing agents, on some views, are not at liberty to autonomously choose to give up the freedom to direct their own lives. If psychological autonomy requires that agents are committed to their own liberty or autonomy, in the above sense, then pro-attitudes that are inconsistent with maintaining control over one’s life cannot be autonomously held. I begin this section with a discussion of the argument that agents cannot autonomously sell themselves into slavery. Then I consider whether a commitment to autonomy that rules out autonomous voluntary slavery also rules out autonomous servility. I will present some cases to show that submission, even extreme submission, is not sufficient to rule out psychological
autonomy because it is possible for an agent to endorse a submissive role and maintain a level of control needed for psychological autonomy.\textsuperscript{15}

Consider the case of the contented slave offered by Marina Oshana (2006, p. 53). The contented slave is “autonomy competent” (Oshana 2006, p. 53). He willingly relinquishes his rights and chooses slavery “under conditions free of whatever factors might impair the autonomy of his decision [according to most accounts of psychological autonomy]” (Oshana 2006, p. 53). Is the contented slave autonomous with regards to his desires? Does psychological autonomy allow that agents may autonomously desire to give up their autonomy, their ability and right to govern themselves?

John Stuart Mill argues that when an agent contracts himself into slavery, “he abdicates his liberty,” and agents, according to Mill, are not free to give up their own freedom (1999, p. 153). The kind of freedom that Mill has in mind is the freedom to self-govern. Contracting yourself into slavery is a “once-and-for-all self-defeating exercise of autonomy” and the liberty to self-govern does not include actions of this kind (Hughes 1999, p. 18).

Some philosophers, like Gerald Dworkin, argue that agents can autonomously desire to enter into slavery. Dworkin states:

If we conceive of autonomy as the capacity of individuals to critically reflect on and take responsibility for the kind of persons they want to be, then… there is nothing in the idea of autonomy which precludes a person from saying: “I want to be the kind of person who acts at the command of others. I define myself as a slave and endorse those attitudes and preferences. My autonomy consists in being a slave.” If this is coherent, and I think it is, one cannot argue against such slavery on the grounds of autonomy. (Dworkin as quoted by Oshana 2006, p. 56)

Oshana holds that so long as an account of psychological autonomy is purely procedural, all proponents are committed, like Dworkin, to accepting that agents can autonomously desire to enter into slavery. Christman argues, however, that a minimal rationality requirement on psychological autonomy can address the worry about autonomous voluntary slavery. On Christman’s account, the reflection that leads to the endorsement of any particular pro-attitude, “must be undertaken free from the influence of any factors

\textsuperscript{15} I assume that agents who are self-governing must have some level of control over their lives, but I will not specify what type of control agents need for psychological autonomy in this chapter. In the next chapter (4), I will examine control conditions on psychological autonomy and defend a particular condition.
which we know severely restrict free consideration of one’s condition and one’s options” (2004, p. 154). An agent’s “reflective abilities must contain sufficient flexibility that she could imagine responding appropriately to alternative reasons (where ‘appropriately’ and ‘reasons’ are understood from her own point of view)” (2004, p. 154). The reflection requirements for psychological autonomy are, for Christman, “high enough that virtually all imaginable cases of ‘voluntary slavery’ would fail to meet them” (2004, p. 157). Ruling out virtually all imaginable cases does not rule out all cases. If an agent were to meet all of the requirements for psychological autonomy, both the authenticity requirements and the competency requirements, and desired to enter into slavery, then Christman would have to accept that the agent is autonomous with regards to the desire.

Even if psychological autonomy requires a substantive commitment that rules out voluntary slavery, it does not follow that such a rule would extend to pro-attitudes in favor of less submissive lifestyles. Consider the following example. Mona deeply values human life and believes that she has a moral obligation to prevent suffering and death from lack of food, clean drinking water, and medical care. Based on these values, Mona forms a pro-attitude to dedicate her life to humanitarian work. Mona decides to take a job as a relief worker under the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). Mona believes that UNOCHA can direct her humanitarian efforts better than she could direct herself and so she desires to be guided completely by UNOCHA - to go where UNOCHA wants her to, when UNOCHA wants her to go, and to perform the duties that UNOCHA assigns. Mona does not seem to value her liberty or autonomy. She does not want to be the captain of her own ship. She wants to be guided by UNOCHA.

When Mona decides that she wants her humanitarian efforts to be guided completely by UNOCHA, is that a once-and-for-all self-defeating exercise of autonomy? It seems not. In desiring to be guided, even completely guided, Mona is not relinquishing her liberty in the way that the person who tries to sell himself into slavery does. Mona believes that her goal would be best achieved by deferring to UNOCHA. So, in being guided by UNOCHA she is living her life exactly as she wants. Mona does, at least temporarily, give up some of her rights, but she does so with a “full appreciation of what
they are” (Hill 1991, p. 15). The main difference between Mona and the voluntary slave is that Mona still has the liberty to change her mind at any time, but the slave does not.

One might argue that Mona’s case does not demonstrate that agents who live extremely submissive lives can still be psychologically autonomous because the case is not one of extreme submission. Consider the following example. Tammy is the “perfect” wife. She loves her husband and desires above all to make him happy. Tammy believes that the way to satisfy her desire is to defer to her husband in all things and so she forms a desire to do whatever her husband wishes. From what she wears to what she reads, Tammy wishes to be guided completely by her husband.

If Tammy lived in the 1950’s, one might argue that the pervasiveness of messages about a woman’s place and men’s natural superiority are responsible for Tammy’s views. As it turns out, Tammy was not even alive in the 1950’s. She is a young wife and mother now. She is fully aware that most people view her role as demeaning and antiquated, but she doesn’t care. She has reflected on her pro-attitudes, rules, and values regarding her role as a wife, deliberated about them and endorsed her views.

Compare this case with the case of Mona. A major aspect of each of their characters is that each of them value living in accordance with the will of another. In Tammy’s case it is the will of her husband and in Mona’s case it is the will of UNOCHA. Each woman is living in accordance with a value that she has seemingly endorsed. What is it about Tammy’s case that inspires the response that she is not autonomous? Is commitment of the above variety to someone else’s wishes really incompatible with psychological autonomy? Perhaps one more case will help us to decide.

Nora is a workaholic and her boyfriend, a very talented neuroscientist, is extremely jealous of all the hours that Nora spends working. One night while she is sleeping, her neuroscientist boyfriend replaced Nora’s work values with values about deferring to her boyfriend’s wishes. Where she was once highly independent and reflective, she is now submissive and passive. From that time on, Nora’s strongest desire is to defer to the wishes of her boyfriend.

Clearly Nora’s case is significantly different from Tammy and Mona. Unlike Nora, Tammy and Mona chose, after careful deliberation, to live submissive lives. Nora only comes to hold her relevant pro-attitudes by means of radical manipulation. How
does the Nora case help to shed light on the Tammy and Mona cases? Even though Tammy and Mona have chosen to live extremely submissive lives, they each have a level of control over their actions that Nora lacks. If we apply a tracing principle, one could reasonably conclude that so long as we can trace the submissive behaviors back to an authentic/autonomous pro-attitude, rule or value, even submissive behaviors can be autonomous.

While it seems clear that Nora is not autonomous, we do not explain her lack of autonomy in terms of a conflict with the value of autonomy, but rather as a result of manipulation. If Tammy is not autonomous, then it seems there is some further reason that we have not yet identified. Tammy and Mona come to accept their values on the basis of active reflection, deliberation, and evaluation and unless their values undermine some other requirement of psychological autonomy, there is no reason to suppose that it is conceptually impossible that an agent might autonomously choose to put the needs or desires of another above her own.

Conclusion

My main goal in this chapter was to consider whether there is a unique characteristic of oppressive social norms that would explain why accepting an oppressive norm undermines an agent’s psychological autonomy with regards to relevant pro-attitudes. I argued that there is no characteristic or combination of characteristics of oppressive norms that would justify the feminist intuition that preferences based on oppressive norms cannot be autonomously held. This chapter does not show, however, that the internalization of oppressive norm never undermines psychological autonomy. In the next two chapters (4 and 5), I offer a disjunctive explanation of the autonomy-diminishing effects of oppressive socialization. In chapter 4, I argue that an agent’s psychological autonomy is undermined when the development or acceptance of a norm occurs in a way that violates the agent’s control over her mental life. In chapter 5, I build on recent empirical work in social psychology to argue that the mechanisms of oppressive socialization undermine psychological autonomy when they interfere with the
proper functioning of the skills and capacities necessary for the agent to exercise her autonomy.
CHAPTER 4

CONTROL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTONOMY

Introduction

In chapter 3, I argued that there is no characteristic, or group of characteristics, unique to oppressive norms that would justify Stoljar’s feminist intuition, which states that agents cannot autonomously hold preferences, or other pro-attitudes, that are based on oppressive norms. As I pointed out, however, it does not follow from my argument that the acceptance of oppressive norms never undermines psychological autonomy. In this chapter, I argue that agents fail to be autonomous with regards to the possession of a pro-attitude when they lack the relevant control over the development and possession of that pro-attitude. Then I demonstrate how violence, as a mechanism of oppressive socialization, can undermine the control necessary for psychological autonomy. In chapter 5, I build on recent empirical work in social psychology to show how social exclusion and stereotyping can undermine the competency condition on psychological autonomy.

My main aim in this chapter is to show that the internalization of oppressive norms sometimes undermines psychological autonomy by bypassing or otherwise disabling an agent’s control over the development, possession, or influence of pro-attitudes based on these oppressive norms. Accomplishing this goal requires some

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16 In chapter 3 (section 1), I explained that norms are rules and standards that govern the acceptable behavior for individual members within particular groups. I went on to define oppressive norms as follows: A norm, N, is oppressive for members of a group, G, if and only if (i) N governs the behavior of members of G, (ii) there is some harm (physical, material, or psychological) to members of G that results from N, (iii) the harm that results from N is unjustly inflicted on members of G, and (iv) some other group, O, benefits from N.

17 Recall that by psychological autonomy, I mean “autonomy regarding various aspects of one’s mental or psychological life, including one’s pro-attitudes (e.g., one’s values and desires)” (Mele 1995, p. 138). Following Mele (1995), I distinguish between three distinct categories of psychological autonomy – i) D-autonomy, which is the autonomous development of a pro-attitude; ii) P-autonomy, which is the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude; and iii) I-autonomy, which is autonomy regarding the influence of a pro-attitude on an agent’s actions. Although my main focus in the dissertation is on P-autonomy, in this chapter I will also be considering closely the effects of socialization and various forms of social influence on D-autonomy and I-autonomy as well.
background work. I begin in section 1 with a discussion of control in an effort to get clear on what aspects of her life an agent needs control over for psychological autonomy. In section 2, I draw connections between authenticity and control. If exercising control is a necessary condition of psychological autonomy, then an agent’s pro-attitudes will not be her own – will not be authentic – in circumstances where the control requirement is not met. In section 2, I also introduce the distinction between internalist and externalist accounts of psychological autonomy. In section 3, I present Frankfurt’s account of autonomy as a model for an internalist control condition. In section 4, I use a manipulation argument to show that an internalist control condition is insufficient for psychological autonomy and that an externalist, historical control condition is necessary for psychological autonomy. In section 5, I demonstrate the ways that violence can undermine psychological autonomy.

Before I move forward, I’d like to make one final note. In this chapter I rely on the discussion of control conditions from the philosophical literature on moral responsibility. I do not, however, wish to commit myself to any particular view about the control necessary for moral responsibility. For some philosophers the control condition for autonomy just is the control condition for moral responsibility. Others explicitly deny that the control condition for autonomy is the same as the control condition for moral responsibility. Fortunately, it is not necessary for my purposes to settle whether the control conditions for autonomy and moral responsibility are the same to address the

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18 For example, Harry Frankfurt writes, “In virtue of a person’s identification of himself with one his own second-order desires, that desire becomes a second-order volition. And the person thereby takes responsibility for the pertinent first- and second-order desires and for the actions to which these desires lead him” (1988, p. 53).

19 Michael McKenna, for example, argues that the control condition on autonomy is stronger than the control condition on moral responsibility, because the control condition on autonomous agency is sensitive to historical constraints that do not apply to the control condition on moral responsibility. McKenna states, “[A]s a condition for morally responsible agency, guidance control is better construed as a current time slice notion. … By contrast, on the view of autonomy I sketched, guidance control is to be understood as a historical notion” (2005, p. 224).
socialization compatibilist’s challenge.\textsuperscript{20} I will, therefore, remain agnostic about whether these control conditions are, in fact, the same.\textsuperscript{21}

4.1 Control

At the end of chapter 3 (3.6), I claimed that one relevant difference between the cases of Nora, the woman whose desires are directly manipulated by her neuroscientist boyfriend, and Tammy, the “perfect” wife, is that Nora \textit{clearly} lacks control over both the acquisition and possession of her new pro-attitudes, but Tammy seemingly endorses her desires on the basis of active reflection, deliberation, and evaluation. Whereas Nora’s desires to forgo work and spend time with her boyfriend are controlled by the machinations of Dr. X, Tammy exhibits a level of control over those aspects of her self that are related to her desires to be a “perfect” wife and mother. These cases provide us with a starting point for understanding the control necessary for psychological autonomy. There are two questions that we can ask in an examination of control. What is it that agents need to have control over to be psychologically autonomous? What type of (or how much) control is needed for an agent to be psychologically autonomous? I briefly address the first question in this section, before moving on to address the second question in the following sections.

It seems clear that if we are going to take the concept of autonomy as the actual condition of self-government seriously, then our account of psychological autonomy should include a control condition on an agent’s development and possession of her pro-attitudes, as well as her ability to guide her conduct on the basis of her autonomously held pro-attitudes. Given the differences between D-autonomy, P-autonomy, and I-autonomy, it would not be surprising if each of these required control over different aspects of the self. I will take each in turn.

\textbf{D-Autonomy and Control}

\textsuperscript{20} Although addressing the relationship between the control conditions on moral responsibility and psychological autonomy is beyond the scope of the current project, I would like to return to this question in future work.

\textsuperscript{21} Although I remain agnostic about whether the control conditions for psychological autonomy and moral responsibility are the same, I think that even if they are not the same, there will be a great deal of overlap between the control required for psychological autonomy and the control required for moral responsibility.
Let us begin with the autonomous development of a pro-attitude, D-autonomy. At first glance, it may seem that D-autonomy requires control over all external influences to the extent that agents are able to transcend external influence. Given that we are interested in developing an account of autonomous agency that applies to actual human beings in the actual world, we can reject right away any control condition that requires that the agent is the original and sole source of her autonomously held pro-attitudes, values, and rules. There are very few, if any, pro-attitudes, values, and rules that we hold that are not influenced in some way by external forces – our friends, families, cultures, educational systems, governments, religions, etc. Control over the autonomous development of pro-attitudes does not entail the power of self-determination. Agents may exercise control over the autonomous development of pro-attitudes by limiting the scope of their external influences. If I do not want my desires about what car to buy to be influenced by advertisements, then I can exercise control by limiting my exposure to car advertisements. Agents may also exercise control by actively participating in the process of developing pro-attitudes through reflection and deliberation.

P-Autonomy and Control

A pro-attitude may be autonomously possessed whether it developed autonomously or not. For example, at least some of the pro-attitudes we hold are based on habits that we formed as children before our cognitive capacities were fully developed. We can imagine that an agent comes to prefer quiet evenings at home to going out with groups of friends and that the preference is based on the habits she developed as a child. Whether the agent autonomously possesses the pro-attitude now depends on a number of factors including whether the agent currently identifies with her preference to spend a quiet evening at home. If an agent does not identify with her preference, if she feels that it is alien to her self, then she does not autonomously possess it at that time.

One might also think that the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude requires the ability to reject that pro-attitude. Is this required? It seems as though there are some values, some desires, some parts of our characters that are so essential to who we are it simply is not up to us, in some important sense, to reject these aspects of ourselves. Mele uses the example of parental values to illustrate this point. Al’s parental values, “his desires [for] his children’s welfare” (Mele 1995, p. 152) are such that he is incapable now
of voluntarily producing conditions such that he would reject or change these values (p. 153). Even though he is stuck with these values, his p-autonomy is not necessarily undermined. If Al played the right role in making himself the kind of person who values his children’s welfare, then the fact that he is practically unable to rid himself of this value does not count against the autonomous possession of the value. Imagine a parent who says to his child, “I love you and I strongly desire your happiness, but I could eradicate that desire at any time.” What would we think of such a person?

**I-Autonomy and Control**

I-autonomy is autonomy regarding the influence of pro-attitudes on an agent’s actions. I-autonomy does not require complete control, but it does require what psychologists call effective self-regulation, or self-control, where self-regulation is understood as “the ability to control or override one’s thoughts, emotions, and behavior” (Gailliot, et al. 2007, p. 325). Effective self-regulation “allows individuals to control and alter their behavior so as to resist temptations, stifle socially undesirable impulses, [and] follow rules” (Baumeister, et al. 2005, p. 603). One aspect of self-regulation is cognitive control, which is control over the “executive component of the self,” which includes the “aspect of the self that makes decisions, [and] initiates and interrupts behavior” (Muraven and Baumeister 2000, p. 248). Notice that one difference between Nora and Tammy is that Tammy, by hypothesis, retains the ability to override her desires to be a perfect wife. Nora lacks the ability override her desires to spend all of her time with Dr. X because the possession of those particular desires is sustained by the manipulation of Dr. X. Notice that an agent can be self-governing with regards to the influence of a pro-attitude that was not autonomously developed. It may also be possible to be autonomous with regards to the influence of a pro-attitude that an agent does not autonomously possess. A person could hold a preference, recognize that the preference is inconsistent with the way she wants to govern her life, be unable to eradicate or change the preference, and still exercise control in preventing herself from acting on that preference.
4.2 Authenticity and Control

I raised two questions with regards to control in the beginning of the previous section. First, I asked what psychological autonomy required agents to have control over. Second, I asked how much control an agent needs over these areas of her life for psychological autonomy. In this section, I begin addressing the second question by drawing connections between authenticity and control.

**Authenticity**

When we say that an agent is autonomous with regards to a particular pro-attitude, a preference for example, we are saying more than that it is a preference she *has*. We are saying that that preference is representative of her in a way that her non-autonomously held preferences are not. There is something about the relationship between an agent and her autonomously held pro-attitudes that makes those pro-attitudes her *own* and pro-attitudes that are the agent’s own could be described as authentic. In chapter 1 (1.2), I made a distinction between two ways of thinking about authenticity, which I revisit here, – authenticity in terms of identification and authenticity in terms of causal history.

According to the view of authenticity as identification, an agent makes a particular pro-attitude her *own* when she identifies with that pro-attitude. This view of authenticity is most famously adopted by Harry Frankfurt. Frankfurt states, “[T]o the extent that a person identifies himself with the springs of his actions, he takes responsibility for those actions and acquires moral responsibility for them” (1988, p. 54). While it is difficult to settle on exactly what identification amounts to, Frankfurt is clear that identifying with a particular pro-attitude is an active process on the part of the agent and “[w]ithout such identification the person is a passive bystander to his desires and to what he does” (1988, p. 54). Frankfurt goes on to characterize identification as a type of decisive commitment:

When the decision is made without reservation, the commitment it entails is decisive. Then the person no longer holds himself apart from the desire to which he has committed himself. …The decision determines what the person really wants by making the desire on which he decides fully his own. To this extent the person, in making a decision by which he identifies with a desire, *constitutes himself*. (1988, p. 170)
On Frankfurt’s model, it is wholehearted identification with a particular pro-attitude, via an active process of deciding, that turns a pro-attitude that an agent merely has into a pro-attitude that is the agent’s own. As we will see in section 3, the identification view of authenticity requires a relatively weak control condition—a condition that I will argue is too weak for psychological autonomy.

There is another view of authenticity according to which authenticity is understood in terms of causal history. To illustrate the point that historical considerations are, at least sometimes, relevant to authenticity, Mele asks us to consider the difference between a genuine U.S. dollar bill and a “perfect counterfeit made with plates and paper stolen from the United States Treasury Department” (1995, p. 147). It doesn’t matter that the counterfeit bill is a perfect replica of a genuine bill. The causal history of the counterfeit bill, the fact that it was not produced by the U.S. Treasury Department, excludes it from the realm of the authentic.

We can understand the relationship between causal history and authenticity in two ways. For some, the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude requires that pro-attitudes are produced in the “right way.” This is similar to the idea that a genuine U.S. dollar bill is only genuine if it has the right causal history. For Mele, however, the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude requires not “that the agent have a history of a certain kind, but rather that he lack a history of a certain kind” (1995, p. 172). In section 4, I defend a historical control condition for psychological autonomy, but for now I leave it open whether the control condition for psychological autonomy is a positive or negative condition.

**Internalist and Externalist Accounts of Psychological Autonomy**

Before moving on, it will be helpful to formally introduce the distinction between internalist and externalist accounts of psychological autonomy. I say formally introduce because, as will be made clear in a moment, the distinction has already been made. David Zimmerman describes philosophical internalism as “the thesis that certain phenomena are constituted or individuated solely in terms of elements internal to a person’s psychology, which themselves are individuated independently of any essential reference to items in the external world” (2003, p. 643). If we look back to Frankfurt’s view of authenticity, we see that in identifying with a particular pro-attitude, the agent makes that
pro-attitude his own and takes responsibility for that pro-attitude and the actions that spring from it. Frankfurt’s account is an example of an internalist, or structuralist\textsuperscript{22}, account of psychological autonomy. On an internalist account of psychological autonomy, “history is relevant only insofar as it yields functional capacities for such things as decision making, self-reflection, identification, and self-modification” (Mele 1995, p. 146). Identification, on Frankfurt’s account, is understood in terms of the psychological structure of the agent and not in terms of the causal history that gives rise to the pro-attitude in question.

Look back to Mele’s account of authenticity. According to Mele, causal histories of a certain kind undermine the control necessary for the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude. Mele’s historical account is an example of an externalist account of psychological autonomy. According to an externalist account of psychological autonomy, “there is more to being psychologically autonomous over a stretch of time than what goes on inside a person during that time” (Mele 1995, p. 146). Whereas internalists hold that the internal psychological structure of the agent sufficiently determines whether the agent is autonomous with regards to some pro-attitude, externalists “insist that genuine autonomy also requires that the content of the person’s motivations be fixed in the right sort of way by factors in the external world” (Zimmerman 2003, p. 643). In section 4, I will argue that an internalist control condition is too weak for psychological autonomy.

### 4.3 An Example of Internalist Control

In the previous section I introduced the distinction between internalist and externalist accounts of psychological autonomy in terms of the control necessary for the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude. In this section I focus on Frankfurt’s hierarchical theory as a paradigmatic internalist account of psychological autonomy. I begin with a brief explication of Frankfurt’s account. In chapter 1 (1.4), I explained that Frankfurt’s account is subject to three major objections – the Regress-cum-Incompleteness Problem, the \textit{Ab Initio} Problem, and the Manipulation Problem. In the

\textsuperscript{22} Frankfurt’s account is sometimes referred to as a structuralist account because autonomy is understood in terms of the agent’s internal psychological structure, which for Frankfurt is hierarchical.
following section I use the manipulation problem to argue that the control required by
internalist accounts, like Frankfurt’s, is too weak for psychological autonomy.

Frankfurt understands autonomy in terms of internal psychological structure – a
hierarchical structure of first- and higher-order desires. First-order desires are desires of
the form “S wants to X.” Susan’s wanting to go the bar is an example of a first-order
desire. Of course persons are not alone, as far as we can tell, in having first-order desires.
When my dog begs for table scraps, there is nothing odd about attributing to him a first-order
desire to eat “people food.” What sets persons apart from non-persons is the
capacity to form higher-order desires, or desires about desires, in general, and second-order volitions, in particular.

Frankfurt states, “No animal other than man… appears to have the capacity for
reflective self-evaluation that is manifested in the formation of second-order desires”
(1988, p. 12). Think about Susan’s desire to go the bar. If Susan has a big project due
tomorrow, she may wish she didn’t want to go to the bar because if she does go, she will
feel guilty for not working and if she doesn’t go, then she’ll be disappointed that she
missed out on a night out with friends. Susan’s desire not to desire to go to the bar is an
example of a second-order desire. When an agent identifies with one of her “second-order
desires, that desire becomes a second-order volition,” which is a desire that one of her
first-order desires move her to act (Frankfurt 1988, p. 53). As we saw in the previous
section, it is the act of wholehearted identification that makes the desire the agent’s own,
“regardless of whether the causes of his desires and of what he does are the work of
another agent or of impersonal external forces or of processes internal to his own body”
(Frankfurt 1988, p. 54). On this account, an agent is autonomous with regards to a
particular pro-attitude, p, when she has a corresponding second-order volition that p
move her to act.

4.4 The Manipulation Problem

In chapter 1 (1.4), I described Frankfurt’s theory as ahistorical because what
matters for autonomy, on his account, is not how the agent comes to possess the relevant
pro-attitudes, but the relationship between the agent and the particular pro-attitudes at a
given point in time.\(^{23}\) I also pointed out that theories like Frankfurt’s that are focused on an agent’s “synchronic psychological structure” (Zimmerman 2003, p. 639) are subject to the manipulation argument. In this section, I rely on two cases to demonstrate that the internalist control condition is too weak for psychological autonomy. In the next section, I argue for a particular externalist control condition.

Let us return again to the case of Nora, the workaholic whose values are directly manipulated by her brilliant, but extremely jealous neuroscientist boyfriend, Dr. X. While Nora is sleeping, her boyfriend replaces all of Nora’s values. In the morning she wakes up not only with new values, but also an entire new hierarchical structure that is engineered to support the newly implanted values. In replacing Nora’s values, Dr. X does not interfere with Nora’s capacities for reflection, evaluation, and identification. So, when Nora reflects on her newly acquired desire to skip work and spend time with her boyfriend instead, she wholeheartedly identifies with that desire.

Manipulation cases, like the one above, illustrate the manipulation problem for internalists like Frankfurt. Given that Nora’s value system has been engineered to be self-supporting and coherent, in what sense can we call Nora’s new values her own? On an internalist account, like Frankfurt’s, “the agent’s own adult intra-personal decisive wholehearted identification with a volition can trump any extra-personal autonomy-undermining causal origins” (Zimmerman 2003, p. 642). As David Zimmerman notes, however, historicists are concerned with holding accountable “persons who act upon preferences ‘implanted’ or ‘induced’ by post-hypnotic suggestion, neurological fiddling and other invasive procedures” (2003, p. 640).

Someone defending an internal control condition for psychological autonomy could respond by arguing that in appealing to the relevance of historical considerations, externalists are confusing two different conceptions of autonomy. Recall the conception

\(^{23}\) Fischer and Ravizza describe Frankfurt’s account as a current time-slice view (1988, p. 171), but there is a sense in which it is incorrect, strictly speaking, to characterize Frankfurt in this way. Zimmerman writes: ‘What divides structuralists from historicists is not whether the psychological facts that ground autonomous agency… are essentially historical in that they take time to happen. Frankfurt is perfectly aware of that. In that minimal sense everyone in the dispute is an “historicism.” The truly divisive issue is whether the conditions of autonomous agency are limited to features internal to a person’s attitude-system during the period of deliberation that proximally precedes action or also include facts about how the person acquired her responsibility-grounding properties during her distal history in the external world. (2003, p. 641 – 642)
of normative moral autonomy from chapter 1 (1.2). Normative moral autonomy encompasses an individual’s right to make her own decisions and “to be free from paternalistic intervention” (Arpaly 2003, p. 120). Nora’s normative moral autonomy is violated when Dr. X manipulates her values, but if her capacity for forming second-order volitions remains intact, her psychological autonomy is not affected. Decisive, wholehearted identification with her values (or some other internalist condition) is enough to make the values her own, no matter how she came to have them.

The above response might work, if the concept of normative moral autonomy adequately explained Nora’s lack of autonomy, but, unfortunately for the internalist, it does not. One certainly might, and probably would, object to Dr. X’s manipulation on the grounds that it violates Nora’s right to normative moral autonomy, but that is not the only violation in the Nora case. Consider the following case from Mele (1995):

Ann is an autonomous agent and an exceptionally industrious philosopher. She puts in twelve solid hours a day, seven days a week; and she enjoys almost every minute of it. Beth, an equally talented colleague, values a great many things above philosophy, for reasons that she has refined and endorsed on the basis of careful critical reflection over many years. She identifies with and enjoys her own way of life—one which, she is confident, has a breadth, depth, and richness that long days in the office would destroy. Their dean (who will remain nameless) wants Beth to be like Ann. Normal modes of persuasion have failed, he decides to circumvent Beth’s agency. Without the knowledge of either philosopher, he hires a team of psychologists to determine what makes Ann tick and a team of new-wave brainwashers to make Beth like Ann. The psychologists decide that Ann’s peculiar hierarchy of values accounts for her productivity, and the brainwashers instill the same hierarchy in Beth while eradicating all her competing values—via new-wave brainwashing of course. Beth is now, in a relevant respect, a “psychological twin” of Ann. She is an industrious philosopher who thoroughly enjoys and highly values her philosophical work. Indeed, it turns out—largely as a result of Beth’s new hierarchy of values—that whatever upshot Ann’s critical reflection about her own values and priorities would have, the same is true of critical reflection by Beth. Her critical reflection, like Ann’s, fully supports her new style of life. (p. 145)

Since Ann and Beth are psychological twins, the internalist, as I have characterized her above, must accept that if Ann is psychologically autonomous with regards to her work values, then Beth is too, but this seems clearly false. If Ann is psychologically autonomous and Beth is not, how do we explain the difference? The only relevant difference between these two women seems to be in how they acquired the values they
now hold. If Beth’s non-autonomy with regards to her newly implanted values is traced back to the cause of her new values, then historical considerations do, at least sometimes, matter for psychological autonomy.

Return to Nora for a moment. She, like Beth, lacks a level of control over the acquisition of her relevant values, as well as how those states are put to work in the production of her actions. Nora’s lack of control can be traced directly back to the way that her newly acquired values were produced and how these states are being sustained. If, however, historical considerations do not matter, then the facts that i) Nora’s values were implanted in her without her knowledge or permission and ii) she cannot, given her new set of mental states, voluntarily produce conditions that would lead to her eradicating or significantly weakening these states are not sufficient to undermine her autonomy.24 If an agent is compelled25 to hold certain values, how can this be a case of self-rule?

At this point, the internalist could respond by accepting that it is a consequence of her theory that both Ann and Beth are psychologically autonomous with regards to their work values. Frankfurt considers the possibility of something akin to Beth-style manipulation. He writes:

…[Suppose] the D/n [Demon/neuroscientist] provides his subject with a stable character or program, which he does not thereafter alter too frequently or at all, and that the subsequent mental and physical responses of the subject to his external and internal environments are determined by this program rather than by further intervention on the part of the D/n. In that case there is no reason for denying that instances of the subject’s behavior may be members of W [the class of free actions]. Nor, in my opinion, are there compelling reasons either against allowing that the subject may act freely or against regarding him as capable of being morally responsible for what he does. He may become morally responsible, assuming he is suitably programmed, in the same way others do: by identifying himself with some of his own second-order desires. (1988, p. 53)

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24 Mele 1995, p. 153
25 Mele points out that it is possible for an agent to arrange autonomously “for his own subjection to a mode of external manipulation viewed as autonomy-thwarting (or -diminishing)…, and the manipulation might have autonomy-enhancing effects” (1995, p. 165). Compulsion of this kind does not undermine the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude. Rather it is compulsion that is not arranged by the agent that may undermine the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude, what Mele calls compulsion*. Mele offers the following attempt at a sufficient condition for compulsion*:

If an agent S comes to possess a pro-attitude P in a way that bypasses S’s (perhaps relatively modest) capacities for control over his mental life; and the bypassing issues in S’s being practically unable to shed P; and the bypassing itself was not arranged (or performed) by S; and S neither presently possesses nor earlier possessed pro-attitudes that would support his identifying with P, with the exception of pro-attitudes that are themselves practically unsheddable products of unsolicited bypassing; then S is compelled* to possess P. (1995, p. 172)
Since Beth’s identification with her implanted values is “in effect ‘engineered’ by the brainwashers” (Mele 1995, p. 169), the above response yields the unsatisfactory conclusion that an agent who is heteronomous with regards to her values is also autonomous with regards to those same values.

Another possible response is that the cases I have presented above aren’t relevant in a discussion of psychological autonomy for actual human agents. An internalist might claim that the cases are so far from reality that if the externalist has to rely on cases of this kind to motivate her position, then so much the worse for externalism. Of course, the externalist need not appeal to science fiction to support her position. Consider the very real case of the man from Virginia who exemplified behaviors of sexual addiction and pedophilia after a brain tumor overstimulated the pleasure center of his brain. The man “went to great lengths to conceal his activities because he felt they were unacceptable…, [but] he continued to act on his sexual impulses… [because] ‘the pleasure principle overrode’ his urge restraint” (Burns and Swerdlow 2003, p. 437). Once the tumor was removed, the urges disappeared.26

Since the case study states that the patient felt alienated from his sexual desires, the man in the actual case does not appear to meet Frankfurt’s criteria for autonomy, but we can imagine a similar case in which the agent identifies with his new desires. Recall that Frankfurt contends that identification is a feature of agent’s synchronic psychological structure “regardless of whether the causes of his desires and of what he does are the work of another agent or of impersonal external forces or of processes internal to his own body” (Frankfurt 1988, p. 54; my emphasis). If changes of values are caused and sustained by a brain tumor, or some other neurological malfunction, how can the new values be said to be the agent’s own?

The lesson we learn from the cases above is that the authenticity of a particular pro-attitude, whether it is an agent’s own, is historically sensitive. There is nothing in Frankfurt’s internalist account that rules out decisive wholehearted identification with implanted or induced values, even values that are induced by brain tumors. Of course, the

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26 It should also be noted that in the actual case the tumor grew back and the urges and behaviors returned. When the second tumor was removed, the urges and accompanying behaviors disappeared again.
externalist need not claim that manipulation of any type is sufficient to undermine authenticity. The externalist only needs to show that there are cases in which conditions external to the agent undermine autonomy with regards to a particular pro-attitude. So long as internalist accounts are vulnerable to the manipulation problem, they remain too weak to capture the control needed for psychological autonomy.

4.5 Violence, Oppression, and Control

As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, I am interested in the control needed for psychological autonomy in the face of pervasive social influence, in general, and oppressive socialization, in particular. In section 4, I argued that an ahistorical, internalist control condition is inadequate for psychological autonomy because agents can be manipulated, or otherwise compelled, to identify with particular pro-attitudes and other aspects of their characters. The control condition for psychological autonomy needs a historical constraint.

Given the picture of control painted above, it is reasonable to ask just how the internalization of oppressive norms can undermine an agent’s control over the autonomous possession of pro-attitudes based on those particular norms. One may accept the general claim that psychological autonomy requires a historical control condition without accepting the claim that oppressive socialization and the internalization of oppressive norms ever violates the control condition.

In manipulation cases the agent’s psychological autonomy is undermined by the intervention of the manipulator. The manipulator either implants some irresistible desire or engineers the agent’s desires in such a way as to guarantee the continued possession and implementation of the implanted values. Cases of oppressive socialization, however, do not feature mad (or jealous) neuroscientists and evil demons. The forces at work in these cases are impersonal, like the brain tumor case above (4.4), but also more diffuse. In this section, I focus on violence as one of the mechanisms of oppressive socialization to demonstrate how social and historical circumstances can undermine psychological autonomy.

Violence as a Mechanism of Oppressive Socialization
Most obviously, an agent’s autonomous possession of a pro-attitude is undermined when the acceptance of the norms on which that pro-attitude is based is brought about in such a way that the agent’s ability to accept as her own or alter those pro-attitudes has been bypassed or destroyed. The reader will recall that I am interested in autonomy as the actual condition of self-government (1.2). An agent whose capacities to accept or alter a pro-attitude have been destroyed is no longer capable of self-government with regards to that pro-attitude. Violence is one of the most visible and efficient mechanisms of oppressive socialization. Following Cudd (2006), I define violence as “the intentional, forceful infliction of physical harm or abuse on one or more persons or their material or animal possessions” (p. 87). For violence to be considered a mechanism of oppression, it must be systematic and group-based (p. 88). In this section, I focus on an example state-sanctioned violence to illustrate the ways that violence can work to undermine psychological autonomy.

Consider a theocracy with laws that restrict the lives of the women in that society. The laws are, of course, based on an interpretation of the society’s religious texts. Let us suppose the law requires women to wear a garment that covers them from head to toe. They are only allowed to show their faces. Let us also suppose that it is illegal for these women to engage in pre-marital sex. Furthermore, it is illegal for any woman to be in the unsupervised company of a man who is not a relative. The least severe, state-sanctioned punishment for a violation of these rules is incarceration. The most severe, state-sanctioned punishment is death. One might think that the effectiveness of such laws would depend on the state’s ability to enforce them. So, the state employs morality police who go around “looking for violators, compelling women to submit to arbitrary and humiliating searches, including ‘virginity checks,’” in which the women are subjected to medical exams to confirm their virginity (Cudd 2006, p. 107).

Now imagine a woman, we will call her Aludra, who grew up under such circumstances. Aludra was told as a child not only that god wanted her to be a good girl and accept the rules that were in place, but also that she would be severely (and eternally) punished if she did not. Let us imagine that Aludra has seen women incarcerated and

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beaten for breaking the laws. Imagine further that she has seen her friends subjected to the arbitrary searches of the morality police and forced to confess to sins they did not commit. Aludra lives under constant threat of physical punishment on Earth and eternal damnation for breaking any of the laws governing the behavior of women in her society.

It should be clear that Aludra does not autonomously develop her pro-attitudes about the roles of women in her society. As she grows up, Aludra comes to accept the norms that govern her world, including the oppressive norms that dictate women’s roles and the limits thereof, but her acceptance of these norms is not based on reflection or deliberation. Aludra’s acceptance of her society’s oppressive norms of femininity is brought about through a campaign of violence and fear. In fact, the tactics used to secure her acceptance completely destroy her ability to either accept as her own or change the values she now holds.

Insofar as Aludra’s continued acceptance of the oppressive values is guaranteed and maintained by violence and the threat of violence, she is not autonomous with regards to the possession of these values. Aludra is effectively compelled to hold her values. As Cudd points out, “Violence and the threat of violence work to maintain an effective prison around the oppressed” (2006, p. 86). The idea of violence as a compelling force raises a question, however. How does violence and the threat of violence compel agents to hold certain values?

Research confirms that exposure to violence can affect individuals emotionally and cognitively. Exposure to community violence has been linked to internalizing disorders, such as depression, as well as decreased self-esteem and a decreased sense of self-worth. Depression and decreased self-esteem can adversely affect not only an agent’s reflective and deliberative capacities, but also her confidence in herself to make decisions about how she wants to live her life. Studies have also shown a correlation between exposure to community violence in children and “disruptions in children’s capacities for self-regulation and control” (Cummings et al. 2009, p. 18). Impulse control

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28 Community violence can be state-sanctioned, as in the Aludra case, or not sanctioned by the state, as in the case of violence perpetrated by groups like the KKK.
30 Cudd 2006; Margolin and Gordis 2000.
problems can affect an agent’s control over the influence of her values on her actions, undermining her I-autonomy.

Exposure to violence in childhood has also been linked to cognitive development issues and “poor academic performance” (Margolin and Gordis 2000, p. 462). Recent research suggests that witnessing violence “may result in damage to the hippocampus…, [which] is involved in memory integration,” as well as “left hemisphere abnormalities affecting memory functioning and verbal skills” (Margolin and Gordis 2000, p. 462). If these studies are correct, then witnessing violence may undermine control by literally damaging the brain. One set of studies, for example, builds on primate research where “glucocorticoids, which are secreted during stress have been found to cause damage to the hippocampus” (Margolin and Gordis 2000, p. 462). Another set of studies suggests that increased “norepinephrine activity [as experienced in times of stress] is likely to cause hippocampal damage” (Margolin and Gordis 2000, p. 462). If simply witnessing violence causes physical damage to the brain, then being a victim of violence or being faced with the threat of violence can undermine psychological autonomy by diminishing the deliberative and reflective capacities required.

Objections and Responses

Before I move on to the discussion of the effects of social exclusion and stigma on control, I consider some possible responses to the case of Aludra. One might object to the case I present in the following way. The case of Aludra seems to rule out the control required for psychological autonomy not just for Aludra, but for any woman living under such circumstances. That is, it seems impossible that any person could be subjected to such circumstances and retain the control needed for any of the three types of psychological autonomy. If this is the case, however, how do we explain women like Azar Nafisi who not only reject the oppressive norms of their societies, despite the costs, but also turn the eyes of the world on these practices through their work? The above case seems to rule out such autonomy.

Notice that I do not make the claim that no woman under such circumstances could ever be psychologically autonomous. Rather I give a general description of the society and then tell a specific story about one woman within that society. History has shown us that autonomous individuals can rise out of oppressive situations – Mahatma
Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela, for example. While oppressive socialization is certainly not going to foster the development of the capacities necessary for psychological autonomy, it is possible for (perhaps extraordinary) individuals to effectively reflect on and deliberate about their values, even in light of (and maybe in spite of) oppressive social forces.

My response to this first objection opens me up for another objection. The individuals I cite above are all examples of agents who reject the oppressive norms of their society. It seems then that agents are only capable of psychological autonomy when they reject the objectionable norms, but I argued in chapter 3 that there is not a unique characteristic or group of characteristics of oppressive norms that justifies that claim that individuals cannot be autonomous with regards to pro-attitudes that are based on those norms. If individuals in oppressive social contexts can only be autonomous when they reject the oppressive norms, why not just admit, then, that there are substantive constraints on the content of autonomously held pro-attitudes?

First, it is not the objectionable nature of the norms that rules out autonomy for Aludra in the above case. As I showed in chapter 3, agents can be self-governing with regards to good or corrupt values. Rather it is the way in which she is socialized to accept the norms as her own. It should be clear that any history in which the agent is brought to accept some values through such a campaign would be autonomy undermining. Recall from chapter 2 (2.1), that one goal of socialization is that agents internalize, or come to accept as their own, the various rules, values, and norms of their particular societies. I have maintained that influence alone is not enough to undermine psychological autonomy. Standard forms of social influence may incline agents toward accepting these norms, but they do not determine their acceptance.

In societies like Aludra’s, agents are coerced into accepting the various values and norms through a campaign of violence. Violence and the threat of violence are coercive instruments of socialization, bordering on social control. Groups that employ these methods as a means of coercing agents into internalizing, without reflection, the groups’ norms and values. In cases where the above methods are effective, agents are coerced into accepting the values of the group. Their acceptance is guaranteed by the threat of future violence. In the above case, Aludra comes to accept the oppressive norms through
fear and terror, but we can imagine a case where violence and fear are used to instil good values in individuals. Even if the values instilled in the agent are good, the method undermines her autonomy with regards to them.\textsuperscript{31} So long as the agent’s continued acceptance of the values is guaranteed by either actual physical violence or the threat of violence, she lacks p-autonomy with regards to those values.

Aludra’s psychological autonomy is clearly undermined with regards to her values about women’s roles because of the way she comes to hold those values. Aludra’s D-autonomy is undermined because she is brought to accept those values through a systematic, and state-authorized, campaign of violence and fear. Her P-autonomy is undermined because her continued possession of those values is secured by the constant threat of violence and the destruction of any practical ability to identify with or alter those values.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

In this chapter, I argued that an externalist, historical control condition is necessary for psychological autonomy. In cases of brainwashing and manipulation, an agent’s autonomy is undermined because her control over the development and possession of particular pro-attitudes is directly bypassed by the secret machinations of the manipulator. In manipulation cases where the agent is compelled without her consent to hold certain pro-attitudes, it is clear that the agent is not autonomous with regards to the possession of those pro-attitudes. Manipulation and brainwashing, however, are not the only ways to undermine the control condition on psychological autonomy. Mechanisms of oppressive socialization, like violence and the threat of violence, can also undermine the control required for psychological autonomy by bypassing or even destroying the capacities\textsuperscript{32} needed for self-government, thereby rendering the

\textsuperscript{31} Mele imagines a case where a father uses the fear of God to instill a value for the well-being of others into his son. We can imagine that the value is instilled “in such a way that the son permanently lacked the practical ability to shed it” (1995, p. 168). Mele continues, “If that is the source of the son’s value and practical inability, the son is not responsible for possessing the value, and he does not autonomously possess it” (1995, p. 168).

\textsuperscript{32} In some ways, it is difficult to separate discussion of the control condition for psychological autonomy from discussion of the capacities agents need to be in the actual state of self-government. As the Aludra case above demonstrates, violence as a mechanism of oppressive socialization undermines the control.
development, and sometimes the possession, of relevant pro-attitudes non-autonomous. In the next chapter (5), I consider the effects of other mechanisms of oppressive socialization – social exclusion, stigma, and stereotyping – on psychological autonomy. I build on recent empirical work from social psychology to argue that these mechanisms can undermine psychological autonomy through their affects on the capacities needed for psychological autonomy.

condition in part by undermining some of the capacities needed for psychological autonomy. Mele discusses the capacities agents have for controlling their mental lives. He writes:

In ideally self-controlled agents, these capacities are considerable. Such agents are capable of modifying the strengths of their desires in the service of their practical, evaluative judgments, of bringing their emotions into line with relevant judgments, and of mastering motivation that threatens (sometimes via the biasing of practical or theoretical reasoning) to produce or sustain beliefs in ways that would violate their principles for belief acquisition and retention. They are capable, moreover, of rationally assessing and revising their values and principles, of identifying with values of theirs on the basis of informed, critical reflection, and of intentionally fostering new values and pro-attitudes in themselves in accordance with their considered evaluative judgments. Presumably, most readers of this book have each of these capacities in some measure. All such capacities are bypassed in cases of pro-attitude engineering of the sort at issue. (1995, pp. 166-7)

The capacities that Mele identifies are essential for the autonomous development and possession of particular pro-attitudes. In the next chapter, I focus on the affects of oppressive socialization on individual capacities and argue that the mechanisms of oppressive socialization can undermine psychological autonomy by undermining one or more of the capacities needed for self-government.
CHAPTER 5
COMPETENCY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTONOMY

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I argued that there is an externalist, historical control condition on psychological autonomy. Oppressive socialization practices undermine psychological autonomy when these practices bypass or otherwise disable an agent’s control over the development, possession, or influence of pro-attitudes that are based on oppressive norms. I argued that in order for agents to be in the position of directing their lives according to their own designs, their identification with their pro-attitudes must be uncompelled. Freedom from compulsion, however, is only one condition of psychological autonomy. In this chapter, I present the second part of my explanation of the effects of oppressive socialization practices on psychological autonomy.

If we are to take the idea of psychological autonomy as an actual condition of self-government seriously, then we must consider what capacities are needed for an agent to either autonomously develop or endorse a particular pro-attitude in the face of pervasive social influence. Recent empirical studies in social psychology demonstrate the effects of some of the mechanisms of oppressive socialization practices, such as stereotyping, stigma, and social exclusion, on agents’ executive and cognitive capacities. In this chapter, I argue that an agent’s psychological autonomy is undermined when oppressive socialization practices significantly impact, or undermine, one of the executive or cognitive capacities needed for psychological autonomy.

I argued in Chapter 3, that there is no unique feature or group of features possessed by oppressive norms that justifies the feminist intuition that agents can never be autonomous with regards to pro-attitudes that are based on oppressive norms. Oppressive socialization does, however, sometimes undermine psychological autonomy. My main goal in this chapter is to argue that mechanisms of oppressive socialization, like social exclusion and stereotyping, can function to undermine the skills and capacities
needed for the autonomous development and possession of pro-attitudes, as well as autonomy regarding the influence of these pro-attitudes on actions. In section 1, I present a view of autonomy competency as a bundle of cognitive skills and capacities needed for self-direction and self-government. In the sections that follow my discussion of autonomy competency, I build on recent empirical studies to demonstrate the autonomy-undermining effects of oppressive socialization. In section 2, I offer an explication of the methods used to manipulate social exclusion in the laboratory. In section 3, I focus on the effects of social exclusion on self-awareness and argue that reduced self-awareness can compromise an agent’s autonomy by undermining an agent’s ability to effectively reflect on and deliberate about her pro-attitudes. In section 4, I argue that oppressive socialization practices can undermine psychological autonomy by diminishing cognitive capacities necessary for intelligent thought and critical reasoning.

Before I move forward, I think it will be helpful to note that I am presenting a bundle of capacities that are necessary for psychological autonomy given oppressive socialization. I am not arguing that these skills are necessary for psychological autonomy in all circumstances. Insofar as oppressive socialization practices significantly diminish or undermine one or more of these capacities, an agent’s autonomy may be significantly compromised or undermined.

5.1 Autonomy Competency

Psychological autonomy, the reader will recall, is “autonomy regarding various aspects of one’s mental or psychological life, including one’s pro-attitudes (e.g., one’s values and desires)” (Mele 1995, p. 138). The idea of psychological autonomy is neatly captured by Diana Meyers when she writes, “When people are clear about what they truly want, who they deeply care about, what they genuinely believe in, and so forth, and when they are able to act on these desires, affections, and values, they may attest to their own autonomy” (2000, p. 151). My goal in this section is to clarify which capacities are needed for agents to exhibit psychological autonomy and effectively direct their lives in the face of pervasive social influence, especially oppressive socialization.
Meyers characterizes autonomy competency as “the repertory of coordinated skills that makes self-discovery, self-definition, and self-direction possible” (1989, p. 76). As we saw in Chapter 1 (1.3), there are three distinct species of psychological autonomy\textsuperscript{33} - the autonomous development of a pro-attitude (D-Autonomy), the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude (P-Autonomy), and autonomy regarding the influence of pro-attitudes on actions (I-Autonomy). The mechanisms of oppressive socialization can affect each of the three species of psychological autonomy differently by undermining the capacities required for psychological autonomy. In this section, I argue that psychological autonomy requires that agents effectively exercise the following capacities: imagination, critical reflection and evaluation, self-worth, and self-regulation. When one or more of these capacities is bypassed or significantly diminished, psychological autonomy is undermined.

**Imagination**

Psychological autonomy requires that agents have a good sense of who they are and of which pro-attitudes they would like to direct their lives. The process of self-discovery, therefore, is important not only for the autonomous development of a pro-attitude (D-Autonomy), but also for the autonomous possession of a pro-attitude (P-Autonomy). Our capacity for imagination, which can be understood as the ability to imagine our selves otherwise, is essential for psychological autonomy, given oppressive socialization. Imagination helps us to discover which values are really important to us, which pro-attitudes are really representative of who we are and how we want to live. Imagination also provides us with an opportunity to create plans to guide our lives based on our autonomously held pro-attitudes by providing a context for evaluation and judgment.

In “Imagining Oneself Otherwise,” Catriona Mackenzie argues that “a variety of different kinds of representational and imagistic thinking play a central… role in the process of self-reflection and deliberation” (2000, p. 125). As we have seen, both self-reflection and deliberation are essential for psychological autonomy. Mackenzie argues further that it is the “affective force and cognitive power” of imagination that is “crucial to the various processes by means of which we try to sort out what we want; what matters

\textsuperscript{33} Mele 1995.
to us; and what ideas, goals, and commitments shape our lives” (2000, p. 125). As a tool for self-discovery, imagination provides us with a context to reflect on the ways that we come to hold certain pro-attitudes, to imagine ourselves holding different values, or to imagine living our lives according to different plans.

Consider “counterfactual speculation” as one mode of imagination (Mackenzie 2001, p. 132). Counterfactual speculation combines the exercise of memory with iconic imagination, which occurs when “we imagine ourselves, either as ourselves or as someone else, doing what we want or hope to be doing or being the kind of person we might want to be” (Mackenzie 2001, p. 126). During counterfactual speculation, we remember certain parts of our lives and we consider how our lives might have been different. Counterfactual speculation is more than mere fantasy. When an agent performs counterfactual speculation, she imagines herself living a different life, but it is still a life that is recognizably her own.34

In the face of oppressive social influence, imagination can be a powerful tool for self-discovery. It is a way to test hypotheses about ourselves and “develop a self-portrait” (Meyers 1989, p. 80). Counterfactual speculation, as one mode of imagination, provides us with a context for understanding why we hold the views we hold and also how we might have been different.35 While counterfactual speculation can aid in self-discovery and self-direction, it requires a certain amount of self-awareness and willingness to explore one’s past and one’s values. Some agents are unable or unwilling to subject themselves to such imaginative speculation. In section 2, I will build on recent work in social psychology to argue that social exclusion, as a mechanism of oppressive socialization, can undermine psychological autonomy by eroding an agent’s capacity to imagine her self otherwise.

34 Mackenzie 2001, p. 132
35 Psychological autonomy does not require that an agent be able to imagine herself in every possible situation or different in every possible way. The ability to imagine oneself otherwise does not entail that the agent be able to conceive of every possibility, but rather that the agent sees herself as open to a number of possible ways of living. A devoted mother, for example, does not need to be able to imagine herself as the kind of person who would brutally murder her own children in order to autonomously hold her values for her children’s well-being. It is entirely consistent with psychological autonomy that there may be some imaginings that are simply outside of the agent’s reach.
Critical Reflection and Evaluation

Imagination is an essential tool for self-discovery, but knowing oneself is not sufficient for being autonomous with regards to one’s pro-attitudes. After all, one might be fully aware of her characteristics, her values, and her preferences and yet wish that she were directed by different pro-attitudes. She may feel alienated from her pro-attitudes or she may simply wish to live her life differently, but lack the capacities needed to guide her life according to her wishes. “People who know what they are like but despise themselves or systematically suppress their own desires, attachments, values, and so forth, lack integrated personalities and are not autonomous” (Meyers 1989, p. 80). So, in addition to the process of self-discovery, which is aided significantly by imagination, self-definition is an essential element of psychological autonomy. Gerald Dworkin characterizes autonomy as “a second-order capacity of persons to reflect critically upon their first-order preferences, desires, wishes, and so forth and the capacity to accept or attempt to change these in light of higher order preferences and values” (1988, p. 20). The second-order capacity Dworkin describes is the capacity for critical reflection and evaluation. Critical reflection and evaluation are the cornerstones of self-definition because it is through the exercise of critical reflection and evaluation that “persons define their nature, give meaning and coherence to their lives, and take responsibility for the kind of person they are” (Dworkin 1988, p. 20).

Exercising critical reflection and evaluation is essential for agents “whose identities are shaped by structures of domination and subordination” (Meyers 2001, p. 153). The theory of the intersectionality of identity recognizes that “people are categorized according to gender, sexual orientation, race, class, ethnicity and that these multiple ascriptions interact – sometimes compounding one another’s effects and sometimes creating inner divisions and conflicts” (Meyers 2001, p. 153). Through critical reflection and evaluation, agents can come to understand the impact of social influence on their pro-attitudes. An agent can “analyze the social significance” of her community of origin, recognize “the ways in which associated norms have become embedded in ... [her] own cognitive and motivational structure,” and “assume responsibility for the ways” she may put those norms into action (Meyers 2001, p. 159). Effectively exercising one’s capacity for critical reflection and evaluation requires, among other things, that the
reflection and evaluation take place under circumstances in which the agent is free from factors that would significantly impair reflection.

**Self-Direction and Self-Worth**

Autonomy, as the actual condition of self-government, requires more than self-discovery and self-definition. Self-discovery and self-definition are important for agents to be able to resist social forces and the influences of those around them. Their resistance is futile, however, if agents lack the resolve to actually direct their lives. Agents must also have the ability to actually guide their actions. Psychological autonomy requires “volitional skills that enable individuals to resist pressure from others to embrace a conventional self-concept and that enable them to maintain their commitment to the self-portrait that they consider genuinely their own” (Meyers 2001, p. 166).

Self-direction and self-government require self-regulation in that agents need to be able to put their autonomously held pro-attitudes into action effectively. I-Autonomy, autonomy regarding the influence of a pro-attitude on actions, is particularly dependent on effective self-regulation. If an agent’s self-regulation is undermined so that she lacks the ability to put her autonomously held pro-attitudes into action, then her I-autonomy is undermined.

Effective self-direction requires not only self-control, but also a sense of self-worth. Paul Benson, for example, argues that in addition to capacities for reflection and evaluation, agents need to hold themselves as competent to direct their own lives and to give reasons for the values that they hold. This is normative competency and it is directly tied to an agent’s sense of self-worth. Self-worth entails recognition of myself as an agent capable of, and entitled to, making her own decisions and directing her life. According to Benson, agents “who have internalized the prevailing norms” of an oppressive society “and who are unfortunate enough” to be assigned to one of the oppressed groups “will feel, and will be given much reason to feel, that it is not their place to answer for their conduct” (2001, p. 80). If an agent’s self-worth is undermined to the extent that she no longer holds herself to be competent to answer for her own actions or to make decisions about how to live her life, then she lacks psychological autonomy.

Self-worth does not imply complete confidence in one’s ability to guide her life or to answer for actions. After all, an agent can acknowledge that her judgments are fallible.
and still want to be ruled by her own judgments. Self-worth is about the assessment that the agent is worthy of guiding her own life and this sense of worthiness entails a sense of moral standing and responsibility for one’s actions. It should be noted, however, that “one’s sense of worthiness to account for one’s actions can reasonably vary from one domain … to another” (Benson 2001, p. 88). An agent who lacks normative competency in one area of her life may feel competent to account for her actions in another area of her life.

In this section I have defended a bundle of capacities needed for psychological autonomy in the face of oppressive social influence. Imagination provides agents with a context for understanding the development of pro-attitudes and creating an accurate self-portrait. Critical reflection and evaluation are the cornerstones of self-definition. Self-regulation helps agents resist the influence of others and put their autonomously held pro-attitudes into action. Self-worth entails recognition of an agent’s own authority to answer for actions and direct her life. In the following sections I build on recent empirical work in social psychology to argue that social exclusion and stigma, as mechanisms of oppressive socialization, undercut psychological autonomy by undermining one or more of the capacities identified in this section.

### 5.2 Measuring the Effects of Social Exclusion in the Lab

A number of recent studies in social psychology have tested the effects of social exclusion on various executive and cognitive capacities. In this section, I present some recent studies on the effects of social exclusion on the cognitive and executive skills needed for psychological autonomy. These studies demonstrate that, among other things, social exclusion leads subjects to avoid self-awareness. “[M]ost people desire to gain social acceptance and maintain satisfying relationships with others,” but “an experience of social exclusion could signify that something is wrong with the self” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 412). Agents might then seek to avoid self-awareness, in part, because reflection in light of experiences of rejection and exclusion “would focus attention on the individual self as not part of the group and possibly having socially undesirable traits” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 412).
Psychological autonomy does not require complete self-knowledge; such a requirement would be outside the reach of all actual human agents. Psychological autonomy does require a level of self-awareness, however. Agents cannot be expected to be in an actual condition of self-government if they are unaware of their commitments, values, and plans. I build on the empirical studies documenting the effects of social exclusion on self-awareness to argue that social exclusion, as a mechanism of oppressive socialization, can undermine psychological autonomy by undermining the capacities needed for self-discovery, including imagination and critical reflection and evaluation.

**Manipulating Social Exclusion**

The studies that measured the effects of social exclusion on agents’ cognitive and executive capacities used two methods to create social exclusion. In one set of cases, subjects were “told that the study involved completing personality questionnaires and learning about one’s personality” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 418). Subjects completed the questionnaires and were randomly assigned to one of four groups – future alone, future belonging, future misfortune, or the no feedback group. Subjects in the future alone group were given the following feedback:

You’re the type who will end up alone later in life. You may have friends and relationships now, but by your mid-20s most of these will have drifted away. You may even marry or have several marriages, but these are likely to be short-lived and not continue into your 30s. Relationships don’t last, and when you’re past the age where people are forming new relationships, the odds are you’ll end up being alone more and more. (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 416)

Rejection and isolation for subjects in the future alone group mimic the experience of social exclusion because they are based on supposed involuntary personality traits rather than on voluntary actions of the subject. In direct contrast to the future alone group, subjects in the future belonging group were told they “were the type who has rewarding relationships throughout life” and that “the odds are you’ll always have friends and people who care about you” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 416). Subjects in the future misfortune group were told that:

You’re likely to be accident prone later in life – you might break an arm or a leg a few times, or may be injured in car accidents. Even if you haven’t been accident prone before, these things will show up later in life, and the odds are you will have lots of accidents. (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 416).
The future misfortune condition was included to ensure that the responses to the future alone condition were related to the social exclusion and not merely the result of negative affect. Subjects in the no feedback group were not given any phony feedback.

The second set of studies employed a method of acceptance/rejection manipulation. Subjects in these studies “performed a get acquainted task,” after which they were taken to individual rooms and asked to name the people “they would like to work with individually” (Baumeister et al. 2005, p. 593). Subjects were then randomly assigned to one of two groups – the rejection group or the acceptance group. Subjects in the rejection group were told that no one had chosen them as a partner and, therefore, they would have to complete the next task alone. Subjects in the acceptance group were told that everyone had chosen them as a partner, but there could not be more than a certain number of members in each group and so they would have to complete the next task alone. Although the subjects completed the subsequent task alone in both groups, subjects in the rejection group believed that they were completing the task alone because no one desired to work with them; they were excluded from the group.

A Potential Worry

Before I move on to discussion of the results of the studies themselves, I would like to address a potential worry about the attempt to measure the effects of social exclusion. Researchers are limited in that there are “practical and ethical constraints” that limit their ability to study the effects of long-term social exclusion (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 817). The subjects in the studies I discuss in this chapter are all college students and one might argue that, given their already privileged status, we cannot generalize from studies that measure their reactions to social exclusion to the conclusions about the effects of social exclusion on targets of oppressive socialization, as in the case of Aludra (4.5). The worry, then, is that while the studies may tell us something about the effects of social exclusion on executive and cognitive capacities, it does not tell us anything about the experiences of agents who are themselves the targets of oppressive socialization. The worry is, I think, misplaced because, as the researchers note, “if such a small brush with social rejection can make life seem more meaningless, long-term experiences of ostracism and exclusion are likely to produce deep-seated feelings of meaningfulness and despair” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 421).
5.3 Social Exclusion and Self-Awareness

Social exclusion is one of the mechanisms of oppressive socialization. Individuals are rejected, excluded, and ostracized on the basis of their membership in one, or more, oppressed groups. Social exclusion hinders our drive “to be accepted by other people” and produces a number of negative effects, including decreases in physical health, “increases in stress and anxiety”, decreases of self-esteem, self-defeating behavior, and increases in aggression (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 409). Researchers hypothesized that “if social exclusion thwarts a basic human drive [for acceptance] and challenges one’s self-worth, then people might prefer to escape from self-awareness” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 410). Some socially excluded individuals respond to rejection and exclusion by entering into a state of “cognitive deconstruction, which is marked not only by a lack of emotion but also by an altered sense of time, an immersion in the present rather than past or future, a relative absence of meaningful thought, and lethargy, all of which may be driven by the attempt to escape from aversive self-awareness” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 409). Modes of imagination, like counterfactual speculation, are tools for self-discovery, self-knowledge, and self-awareness. Insofar as social exclusion leads to a deconstructed state, which “is essentially an avoidance or rejection of meaningful thought,” the exercise of such imaginative capacities will be significantly diminished (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 414).

In one study, researchers directly measured “whether people avoid or seek self-awareness” in the face of social exclusion and rejection (Twenge, Catanese, Baumeister 2003, p. 418). This study utilized the future alone manipulation condition. Subjects completed their personality questionnaires and were given feedback based on random assignment to one of the four groups – future alone, future belonging, future misfortune, or no feedback. Subjects were instructed that the personality study “was being combined with another ‘unrelated’ experiment that would only take a few minutes” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 418). Subjects were led to a room with two chairs, “equidistant from the wall in front of it” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p.
One of the chairs faced a blank wall and one of the chairs faced a wall with a mirror.

Upon entering the room with the two chairs, the first experimenter feigned surprise that the second experimenter was not present and instructed the subject to have a seat and wait for the second experimenter, who should be back any moment. In the meantime, the subject was asked to complete a questionnaire that, among other things, “assessed the strength of the participant’s seating choice” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 419). The subjects also reported “the prediction they had received for the future (if any) and how much they thought this prediction might describe their future” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 419).

The results of the study are significant. Looking at one’s self in a mirror is a “self-focusing cue” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 421). Subjects in the future alone condition showed an overwhelming preference for the chair facing away from the mirror, but subjects in the control groups “apparently chose their seats randomly” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 419). Only one subject in the future alone condition chose the chair facing the mirror. “The future alone participants consistently chose to avoid self-awareness by looking at a featureless blank wall rather than their own reflection in a mirror” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 419).

As noted above, the state of cognitive deconstruction includes avoidance or rejection of meaningful thought. “Meaningful thought is an important basis for self-awareness and emotion, as these depend on interpreting one’s current situation and comparing it with standards” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 411). Evading meaningful thought is one method of “warding off aversive self-awareness” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 411). Experimenters measured subjects “perceived meaningfulness of life,” as a way of testing the effects of social exclusion on meaningful thought (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 411). In this study, participants were subjected to the acceptance/rejection manipulation conditions. Subjects completed the getting acquainted exercise and were randomly assigned to either the acceptance group or the rejection group. After being assigned to their groups, subjects were asked to indicate “their agreement or disagreement with the statement ‘Life is meaningless’” on a
nine-point Likert scale where 1 = not at all true and 9 = very much true (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 414).

The results of the study were significant. None of the subjects in the acceptance condition agreed with the statement “Life is meaningless,” but twenty-one percent of the subjects in the rejection condition indicated agreement with the statement by circling a five or higher on the Likert scale (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 415). Although “seventy-nine percent of the rejected participants indicated disagreement with the statement by circling a number below the midpoint of 5…, rejected participants did not disagree… as strongly as accepted participants did” (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 415). The study demonstrates that social exclusion significantly threatens meaningful existence.

Even when participants were randomly assigned to experience rejection by a group of strangers, their views of life were affected. The possibility that life has no meaning became more probable. This fits the view that social exclusion produces a state incompatible with meaning—thus, a deconstructed state. (Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003, p. 421)

The experience of social exclusion in the above study is relatively benign in comparison with the experiences of members of oppressed groups. If such short-lived social exclusion can have such a pronounced affect on meaningful thought, then long-term and repeated social exclusion is likely to significantly undermine meaningful thought.

**Linking Self-Awareness with Imagination**

I argued above that imagination, understood as the capacity to imagine oneself otherwise, is one of the cognitive capacities needed for psychological autonomy in light of oppressive socialization. Imagination provides agents with a context for examining their commitments, values, and plans, but it requires a willingness to consider the ways in which agents come to hold their various pro-attitudes and also to explore alternative ways of living. The above studies demonstrate that social exclusion leads agents to avoid self-awareness. Self-awareness, however, is necessary for psychological autonomy. When social exclusion leads agents to avoid engaging in activities that require meaningful thought or enhance self-awareness, such as counterfactual speculation and critical reflection, then psychological autonomy is, at the very least, significantly impaired. Social exclusion, in the above studies, undermines motivation for the exercise of
cognitive capacities that enhance self-awareness. Prolonged avoidance of self-awareness, which may result from long-term exposure to the mechanisms of oppressive socialization, can undermine psychological autonomy by undermining the exercise of cognitive capacities like imagination and critical reflection and evaluation.

5.4 Social Exclusion and Cognitive Performance

In the previous section I argued that reduced self-awareness could compromise psychological autonomy by undermining either an agent’s motivation or ability to exercise cognitive capacities, like imagination. In this section, I build on recent empirical work to argue that the effects of social exclusion on cognitive performance can undermine psychological autonomy by inhibiting the intellectual processes needed to adequately reflect on and deliberate about one’s pro-attitudes. Recent studies measured the effects of social exclusion on intelligent thought, understood as the higher-level cognitive functioning needed for “complex cognitive tasks such as effortful logic and reasoning” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 817). These studies support the thesis that human intelligence is a tool for facilitating “social group membership” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 817). “Intelligence,” on this view, “is designed to help the individual satisfy the need to belong… [and] being excluded from social groups” can lead to a reduction in higher-level cognitive functioning (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 817).

The three studies that measured the effects of social exclusion on intelligent thought utilized the future alone manipulation condition explained above (5.2). Subjects completed the personality questionnaire and were randomly assigned to one of three groups – future alone, future belonging, and future misfortune. The subjects were given feedback on their personality questionnaire on the basis of their random group assignment. Then they were asked to complete a subsequent task that measured the effects of social exclusion on intellectual abilities.

36 The studies of the effects of social exclusion on intelligent thought did not include a no feedback condition.
In the first study, students were given six minutes to complete as many items as they could on the “General Mental Abilities Test,” which is a standard IQ test (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 819). The experimenters recorded the number of correct answers, the number of wrong answers, and the number of questions attempted. The results of the study were significant. Subjects in the future alone condition attempted to answer fewer questions and had significantly fewer correct answers than subjects in either the future belonging or future misfortune group. There was no significant difference in the number of attempted questions or the number of right answers between the future belonging and future misfortune groups, which indicates that “only the bad feedback that pertained specifically to social exclusion produced a significant drop in intelligence test scores” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 820).

The second study measured the effects of social exclusion on the encoding of new information and the “retrieval of stored information from memory” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 821). Subjects in the “encoding affected condition” were given feedback on their personality questionnaires based on their random group assignments (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 821). Then they were asked to read two passages from the verbal section of the GRE. One passage was long and quite difficult. The other passage was shorter and easier. Subjects were given three minutes to read the passages.

After reading the passages, subjects “were told the exclusion feedback was not true” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 821). After the debriefing, the subjects were asked to answer a series of questions about the passages they read. The goal was to measure the effects of social exclusion on the encoding of new information. “Participants encoded the information under conditions of exclusion, but retrieved the information under normal conditions, after hearing the exclusion feedback was not true” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 821).

Subjects in the “recall affected condition” were given the social exclusion feedback after first reading the GRE passages to measure the effects of social exclusion on the ability to recall information (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 821). “Participants encoded the information under normal conditions, but retrieved the
information under the influence of the exclusion feedback” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 821).

The results of the second study were striking. “Future alone participants in the recall affected condition performed significantly worse on the difficult task [answering questions about the difficult passage], as compared with participants in all other conditions” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 822). There was no significant difference in performance on the easy passage and “no significant differences were found within the encoding affected condition” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 822). These results indicate that “participants in the future alone condition showed deficits” in recalling complex information, but not in encoding new information; the subjects appeared “quite capable of processing information into memory storage despite having received a message of social exclusion, but social exclusion impaired their ability to retrieve information from memory and use it to answer difficult, thought-provoking questions” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 822).

The third study set out to clarify the results of the second study. “One way of interpreting the [above] results is that social exclusion feedback impairs recall rather than encoding,” but the second study can also be interpreted as showing that social exclusion “affects complex cognitive tasks that require active thinking, whereas simple and basic information processing remain unaffected” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 823). Subjects completed the personality questionnaire. Then they were assigned one of two tasks. The first group of participants were given the social exclusion feedback and then had twelve minutes to answer twelve questions from the Analytical section of the GRE. The second group of participants “were given 60 s to memorize a 15 nonsense syllables that varied in how easy they were to pronounce” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 823). They were given the social exclusion feedback and then given ninety seconds to “recall as many syllables as they could” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 823).

Subjects in the future alone condition performed significantly worse “than other participants on questions drawn from the GRE Analytical test” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 824). There was no significant difference, however, on the ability to recall nonsense syllables. These results indicate that a “forecast of future social exclusion can
cause a significant reduction in logic and reasoning ability,” but there is not a reduction in the “ability to recall simple information” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 824).

**Linking Intelligent Thought with Critical Reflection and Evaluation**

The above studies are important for our understanding of the ways that social exclusion, as a mechanism of oppressive socialization, affects psychological autonomy. Individual members of oppressed social groups may be the actual targets of social exclusion, but there is also an expectation of social exclusion – an expectation of rejection on the basis of one’s membership in a particular group. Taken together, the above studies demonstrate that “the prospect of social exclusion reduced people’s capacity for intelligent thought” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 825). Of course, “not all cognitive functions were uniformly impaired” by the predictions of social exclusion (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 825). While simple tasks, such as rote memorization and recall, were unaffected, effortful and controlled tasks, “such as engaging in logical reasoning or extrapolating from information in memory,” were undermined (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 825).

Critical reflection on and evaluation of one’s pro-attitudes are processes that require attention and control, but the empirical studies on the effects of social exclusion indicate that “social exclusion specifically impairs controlled processes” (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 826). Identification with a pro-attitude as something that is really representative of the agent is an active process that requires sustained attention and the use of higher-level, controlled cognitive capacities. As Frankfurt writes, “Without such identification, the person is a passive bystander to his desires and to what he does” (1988, p. 54). When an agent’s controlled cognitive capacities, such as the capacities for “reasoning and logic,… controlling feelings, controlling thoughts, resisting temptation, making choices, and responding actively rather than passively,” are significantly impaired, then the agent’s psychological autonomy is undermined (Baumeister, Twenge, and Nuss 2002, p. 826).
Conclusion

At the beginning of this project, I set out to address worries about the effects of socialization, especially oppressive socialization, on psychological autonomy. The socialization compatibilist claims that socialization is at some times, but not always, compatible with autonomy. Mechanisms of oppressive socialization, such as violence, stereotyping, and social exclusion, can significantly reduce or undermine autonomy. In chapter 3, I argued that there is no single characteristic or group of characteristics of oppressive social norms that is sufficient to undermine psychological autonomy. In chapter 4, I presented the first part of my explanation of the autonomy-undermining effects of oppressive socialization. I argued that socialization undermines psychological autonomy when an agent’s control over the development, possession, or influence of her relevant pro-attitudes is bypassed. In this chapter, I presented the second part of my explanation of the undermining effects of oppressive socialization on psychological autonomy. I argued that psychological autonomy, as the actual condition of self-government, requires that agents can effectively exercise a bundle of skills and capacities including, imagination, critical reflection and evaluation, self-worth, and self-regulation. When the mechanisms of oppressive socialization significantly diminish or destroy the exercise of any of the above skills and capacities, some species of psychological autonomy is undermined.

In closing, I wish to point out again that I have neither argued, nor claimed, that either the control condition, as I presented it in Chapter 4, or the autonomy competency condition is metaphysically or logically necessary for psychological autonomy. The account that I have presented is specific to the requirements for psychological autonomy for actual human agents facing the very real and pervasive influence of socialization. It is, I think, entirely possible to imagine agents that are not captured by the socializationist’s worries. But, as I stated in the beginning, I am interested in the conception of autonomy as the actual self-governing of actual human agents.

The conditions that I have identified in these last two chapters (4 and 5), sufficiently address the worries of the socialization compatibilist and I think that these conditions go some way toward addressing the concerns of the hard social determinist.
More work is needed, however, to fully address the hard social determinist’s worries and to determine whether the picture of psychological autonomy I have presented here is compatible with determinism. If, for example, the control condition I have argued for is the same as the control condition for moral responsibility and free will and the condition identifies a type of control that agents can have even if determinism is true, then we have grounds for directly addressing the hard social determinist. This is a project that I would like to take up in future work.
REFERENCES


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