

# Cultural Code-Switching: Straddling the Achievement Gap\*

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WHEN Barack Obama became the first African-American president of the United States he bolstered America's claim to be a nation of equal opportunity. Obama exemplifies an archetype of upwardly mobility for minorities, bridging the socio-economic achievement gap while remaining engaged with his African-American community; he appears as comfortable among his mostly white and affluent colleagues as among the mostly black and socio-economically diverse members of the congregation he attended. Obama's success appeared to be partially dependent on his ability to engage in cultural code-switching. Code-switching could be characterized as the ability to adapt one's behavior as a response to a change in social context much like bilingual speakers switch languages in response to a change in linguistic context. However, this statement of the ability is too general—every agent has to adapt her behavior in response to the different norms governing the various dimensions of her work, home, and social life. The case of upwardly mobile minorities is interesting because they exhibit an ability to switch between comprehensive and potentially conflicting value systems. Code-switchers appear able to navigate two (or more) distinct communities and reap the benefits of belonging to both.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, this kind of code-switching has become a topic of interest to scholars examining the achievement gap because it appears to be a way for low-income minorities to remain authentically engaged with the values of their communities, while taking advantage of opportunities for further education and higher incomes available to those that participate in the middle-class.

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<sup>1</sup>For the rest of the article, I assume that code-switchers are switching between the norms governing two communities, though, in reality, agents might be switching between many more.

Sociologists,<sup>2</sup> psychologists,<sup>3</sup> and educators<sup>4</sup> have made important contributions towards understanding code-switching. Yet, surprisingly little has been said about the ethical and normative dimensions of this phenomenon in the philosophical literature, even though it involves a normatively distinctive relationship between the agent and what she values. Though thoroughly completing that task is beyond the scope of this article, I take an initial step toward doing so by developing a moral psychological model of code-switching. The analysis I offer can be extended to think about the moral psychology of code-switching more generally; however, my concern here is with code-switching as a response to market pressures by members of disadvantaged minority communities. On the basis of my analysis, I argue that those who code-switch for the sake of better educational and career opportunities must subsume code-switching under a comprehensive normative perspective from which they confront and resolve value conflicts, if they are to avoid becoming ethically unmoored.

In Section I, I discuss recent empirical findings on the role that “non-cognitive skills”<sup>5</sup> play in achievement and why the potential conflict between two central commitments of a liberal egalitarian education—equal opportunity and respect for diverse conceptions of the good—lead us to code-switching as a strategy for bridging the achievement gap. In Section II, I argue that agents who rely on code-switching to achieve socio-economic success take on a perilous strategy, risking a loss of their moral bearings steered by the demands of the labor market. After identifying three models through which to understand cultural code-switching—pretense, compartmentalization, and subsumption—I argue that the only viable model subsumes code-switching under a comprehensive normative perspective. Such a strategy can allow members of minority communities to curb the potentially corrosive effect of the labor market on their communities. In the final section, I argue that code-switching is a response to non-ideal conditions, which affect different communities in different ways. The account I offer requires a justification that stresses, rather than obscures, the nature of the non-ideal conditions for which code-switching is a remedy. This

<sup>2</sup>One of the most evocative early descriptions of the phenomenon is by sociologist W. E. Dubois, when he describes “double-consciousness”; see his “Strivings of the negro people,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 80 (August 1897), 194–8.

<sup>3</sup>Teresa LaFromboise, Hardin L. K. Coleman, and Jennifer Gerton, “Psychological impact of biculturalism: evidence and theory,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 114 (1993), 395–412.

<sup>4</sup>Prudence Carter, *Keepin’ it Real: School Success Beyond Black and White* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup>“Non-cognitive skills” is the term used in the economics and psychological literature. In this article, I use the term “dispositions” instead of “skills” because I think their value is more complicated than the term “skills” suggests. Thanks to Randall Curren for asking me to clarify this point. I discuss the distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive in more detail in “The non-cognitive challenge to a liberal egalitarian education,” *Theory and Research in Education*, 9 (2011), 233–50, and “Molding conscientious, hard-working, and perseverant students,” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 31 (2014), forthcoming.

distinguishes it from citizenship accounts of education that aim for universal justification.

## I. THE NON-COGNITIVE CHALLENGE

### A. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND THE NON-COGNITIVE GAP

Though there has been considerable discussion in the literature about whether an “equal” opportunity requires making sure everyone has exactly the same educational resources or meets a fair minimum threshold,<sup>6</sup> there is general agreement that the systematic intergenerational disadvantage and lack of access to a college education and well-paying jobs confronting children born into disadvantaged communities is problematic.<sup>7</sup> Undeniably, part of the explanation for the socio-economic gap between Blacks and Hispanics in the United States can be attributed to structural factors.<sup>8</sup> However, the American educational system shares some of the blame in so far as it fails to provide students with the reading and math skills they need to be adequately prepared for the competitive job market, which currently places a premium on higher education.<sup>9</sup> Recent data shows that only 17% of Hispanic and 14% of Black 4<sup>th</sup> graders scored at or above proficiency level in reading skills, compared to 43% of White, and 46% of Asian/Pacific Islander 4<sup>th</sup> graders.<sup>10</sup> The statistics in mathematics achievement are similar.<sup>11</sup> Recently, some economists, psychologists, and other social scientists have posited a different kind of educational gap that stresses the important role that non-cognitive dispositions, or “soft skills,” play in socio-economic achievement.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Christopher Jencks, “Whom must we treat equally for educational opportunity to be equal?” *Ethics*, 98 (1988), 518–33.

<sup>7</sup>For an argument that inequalities among cultural groups are not unjust if they reflect a cultural group’s preferences, see Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup>Roberta Spalter-Roth and Terri Ann Lowenthal, “Race, ethnicity, and the American labor market: what’s at work?” *American Sociological Association Series on How Race and Ethnicity Matter* (ASA’s Sydney S. Spivack Program in Applied Social Research and Social Policy, 2005); William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

<sup>9</sup>Christopher Jencks and Margaret Phillips, “America’s next achievement test: closing the black-white test score gap,” *The American Prospect*, 40 (1998), 44–53.

<sup>10</sup>Susan Aud, Mary Ann Fox, and Angelina KewalRamani, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010), p. 54.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>12</sup>Lex Borghans et al., “The economics and psychology of personality traits,” *Journal of Human Resources*, 43 (2008), 972–1059; James J. Heckman and Alan B. Krueger, *Inequality in America: What Role for Human Capital Policies?* ed. Benjamin M. Friedman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); James J. Heckman and Y. Rubenstein, “The importance of noncognitive skills: lessons from the GED testing program,” *American Economic Review*, 91 (2001), 145–49; Angela L. Duckworth, Patrick D. Quinn, and Eli Tsukayama, “What no child left behind leaves behind: the roles of IQ and self-control in predicting standardized achievement test scores and report card grades,” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104 (2012), 439–51.

The term “non-cognitive disposition” is used as an umbrella term for the behavioral, social, and emotional dispositions, such as extroversion, aggression, assertiveness, and grit, that are distinguished from cognitive skills, such as those measured by IQ, reading, and mathematical ability tests. The data here is complex because it varies in methodology (quantitative to qualitative), demographic focus (race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic class), measured variables (personality measures, parenting skills, cultural capital), and measured outcomes (school achievement, graduation rates, income, and job performance). Furthermore, some oversimplification inevitably occurs when we are discussing a “labor market advantage” since labor markets are complex and diverse.<sup>13</sup>

Though these complexities are important and significant, research suggests that non-cognitive dispositions, or “soft skills,” have a significant effect on future earnings potential. Research also suggests that parenting styles and neighborhood effects play a role in the transmission and entrenchment of the non-cognitive skills that advantage children born to middle and upper class families.<sup>14</sup> Annette Lareau’s influential research shows that middle-class parents teach many of the dispositions valued by the labor market to their children that poor and working-class parents often do not.<sup>15</sup> Finally, research into preschool intervention programs that have a significant focus on the development of non-cognitive skills, shows that participants have diminished rates of incarceration, lower unemployment, and better health than control groups, as adults.<sup>16</sup>

If the research is right in showing the importance that non-cognitive skills play in achievement, and the role that parents and schools can play in shaping them, then educational institutions must do their part to mitigate these effects by teaching children the dispositions rewarded by the labor market, if they are not learning them at home.

<sup>13</sup>I am grateful to Debra Satz for raising this point. The diversity of labor markets means that some markets reward dispositions that others do not. For example, interpersonal skills are more valuable in service professions. Consequently, these markets end up with a higher proportion of employees from groups that exhibit more highly developed interpersonal skills. (See Lex Borghans, Bas ter Weel, and Bruce A. Weinberg, “Interpersonal styles and labor market outcomes,” *Journal of Human Resources*, 43 (2008), 815–58.) However, this does not fully address equality concerns; we need to consider how well represented minority groups are in markets with positions of economic and political power. Data suggests that minority groups are under-represented in having ownership stakes in the market; see Robert W. Fairlie and Alicia M. Robb, *Race and Entrepreneurial Success: Black-, Asian-, and White-Owned Businesses in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup>Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, ch. 3; Melissa Osborne Graves, “Personality and intergenerational transmission of economic status,” *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success*, eds. Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne-Graves (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 208–31.

<sup>15</sup>Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup>James J. Heckman et al., “The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program,” *Journal of Public Economics*, 94 (2010), 114–28. Frances A. Campbell et al., “Early childhood education: young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian Project,” *Applied Developmental Science*, 6 (2002), 42–57.

## B. LIBERAL RESPECT FOR CONCEPTIONS OF THE GOOD

It is the other central commitment at the heart of liberal egalitarianism—respecting those who hold the diverse conceptions of the good that a multicultural society fosters—that leads to a challenge to the straightforward solution suggested above to the relationship between labor market rewards, equal opportunity, and education. Rawls characterizes a conception of the good as a person’s “conception of what is valuable in human life,” as well as her relationships and attachments to particular groups and associations.<sup>17</sup> A liberal egalitarian society’s institutions show respect for its citizenry, in part, by respecting their various conceptions of the good. They do so by setting limits to the conceptions of the good they accommodate—wide enough to allow for a flourishing of diverse conceptions of the good—and, most importantly, by offering a liberal justification when they do curtail those limits. Those limits are contested in the literature.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, it’s clear that a liberal society need not respect every cultural practice or conception of the good. It can offer a cogent justification, based on liberal tenets, for failing to accommodate those who hold views that are unjust, racist, or intolerant. However, if it is to show respect for those who belong to minority cultures that are not unjust or intolerant, it must be able to offer a suitable justification when it uses its institutions to undermine those ways of life.

The difficulty in applying this liberal ethos to the case of education is that children do not, yet, have fully formed mature conceptions of the good. Children generally do value particular persons (usually, family, and peers) and some groups and associations (for example, sports teams or classmates), but they haven’t yet autonomously committed themselves to a particular set of ideals. The literature has framed the liberal dilemma for education as one about who has authority to shape the child’s developing conception of the good, pitting the parents’ conception of the good against the state’s interest in its future citizens. However, even if a liberal society is only committed to fostering those conceptions of the good that are within the domain of reasonable conceptions of the good compatible with the core tenets of liberalism, and we grant that parents have a limited right to inculcate children with their own conception of the good, most liberal theorists would agree that a *liberal* educational system should not intend to educate students towards one single set of values or cultural practices.<sup>19</sup> A liberal state is legitimate, in part, because citizens who have diverse and reasonable conceptions of the good would consent to it; inculcating future

<sup>17</sup>John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 19.

<sup>18</sup>Harry Brighouse, “Civic education and liberal legitimacy,” *Ethics*, 108 (1998), 719–45; Eamonn Callan, “Political liberalism and political education,” *Review of Politics*, 58 (1996), 5–33; William A. Galston, “Two concepts of liberalism,” *Ethics*, 105 (1995), 516–34.

<sup>19</sup>Harry Brighouse, *School Choice and Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 1.

citizens with a comprehensive conception of the good would threaten to undermine its legitimacy.<sup>20</sup>

An account of liberal education need not endorse a value-free education but, in order to retain its liberal credentials, the values it encourages ought to be *normatively* justified on the basis of *liberal* tenets, in a way that shows respect for its citizenry and their diverse conceptions of the good. Educational institutions are not exempt from justification because they are serving children who do not yet have fully worked out conceptions of the good.

### C. THE CHALLENGE

The dilemma regarding liberal neutrality and opportunity in the school system is often couched as a conflict between the school's authority in educating future citizens, and the parents' authority over educating their own children.<sup>21</sup> But thinking of the tension between liberalism and equal opportunity in this way obscures the role that the market plays in structuring the choices facing educators, whether parents or institutions. The non-cognitive challenge arises because the value of non-cognitive dispositions is not limited to educational or labor markets; social and emotional dispositions are also part of how human beings engage with their conceptions of the good.

I propose that a useful way to understand an agent's conception of the good is to use a notion of *valuing* drawn from the philosophy of action. This notion of valuing allows us to make sense of agents as valuing particular people, relationships, and groups as well as abstract ideals, thereby capturing more of what Rawls meant by a conception of the good.<sup>22</sup> Valuing has both cognitive elements (associated beliefs) and non-cognitive elements (behavioral, social, and emotional dispositions). These latter elements are central to the present topic. For example, if a person values sharing, at least part of what that entails is that she has the disposition to act in particular ways when she is in abundant possession of a good that others need or want. She will not be disposed to take as much as she can get, without regard for what others need. Similarly, if an agent values a particular person, she will be disposed to take the well-being of that person into account. Teaching values to children involves encouraging the patterns of behavior constitutive of engaging with those values, and discouraging incompatible patterns of behavior. The father who encourages his daughter to

<sup>20</sup>Brighouse, "Civic education and liberal legitimacy."

<sup>21</sup>Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, "Legitimate parental partiality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 37 (2009), 43–80.

<sup>22</sup>The concepts of *caring* and *valuing*, in the philosophy of action literature, both capture what I have in mind here. Though there are important differences between the two, they are not relevant to the discussion here. See Michael E. Bratman, "Valuing and the will," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 14 (2000), 249–65; Samuel Scheffler, "Valuing," *Reasons and Recognition*, edited by R. Jay Wallace, Rahul Kumar and Samuel Freeman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 23–42.

allow others to play with her toys is teaching her the value of sharing. The father who encourages his daughter to take her brother's feelings into account is teaching her to value her brother's well-being.<sup>23</sup>

Consider a family that has a reasonable conception of the good that de-emphasizes individuality and individual accomplishments, in favor of a collectivist orientation that values seeing oneself as a member of a community, taking very seriously one's commitments and relationships to extended family, and putting the interests of the group over those of the individual. There is extensive evidence that cultures do divide themselves between collectivist and individualist orientations in this way, and that these orientations have an effect on personality, cognition, and motivation.<sup>24</sup> The American labor market rewards assertiveness, competitiveness, and other dispositions, which are in tension with this family's focus on community. If a child raised in such a family is to have as many educational and career opportunities as those for which her talents make her eligible, she would benefit from learning these dispositions. However, learning the dispositions in question will undermine this child's engagement with her family's values.<sup>25</sup> For example, evidence from studies of Latino immigrants' children shows that as these children become more assimilated into mainstream American culture, parent-child conflict increases and the children's attitude towards family cohesion decreases.<sup>26</sup> Ideally, the market would not make such a demand of this family, but this particular child is growing up in these particular circumstances. Parents and educational institutions have to confront how to weigh these competing considerations. Furthermore, educational institutions must justify making this trade-off in ways that are sensitive to their coercive power in shaping future citizens.

To be more precise, we need to remember that teaching a value to a child involves encouraging the dispositions constitutive of engaging with that value, and discouraging the dispositions that are contrary to it. Consider some value  $V$ , which is one of the values that is part of a way of life that a liberal society wants to allow to flourish, and a disposition to  $D_1$  that is partially constitutive of valuing  $V$ . And now consider a disposition to  $D_2$ , valued by the labor market, but

<sup>23</sup>For a particularly thoughtful discussion of how caring figures in our understanding of marginal agents, including children, see Agnieszka Jaworska, "Caring and internality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 74 (2007), 529–68.

<sup>24</sup>See Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the self: implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation," *Psychological Review*, 98 (1991), 224–53; Harry C. Triandis and Eunhook M. Suh, "Cultural influences on personality," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53 (2002), 133–60.

<sup>25</sup>It might still be reasonable for such parents to decide that they want their child to forego this advantage. However, this trade-off would only appear reasonable if this family has enough resources to give the parents confidence that their child will do well regardless. I return to this point in the final section.

<sup>26</sup>Ruben G. Rumbaut, "Children of immigrants and their achievement: the roles of family, acculturation, social class, gender, ethnicity, and school context," *Addressing the Achievement Gap: Theory Informing Practice*, ed. Ronald D. Taylor (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2005), pp. 23–59.

contrary to a disposition to  $D_1$ , such that if the agent exhibits behavior  $D_2$ , she is not exhibiting behavior  $D_1$ . The challenge is that, in teaching her  $D_2$ , we risk undermining her engagement with  $V$ . Return to our example, this child's family values their tight knit connection to their extended family ( $V$ ), which requires being disposed to often place greater weight on the interests of one's extended family and community over one's individual accomplishments ( $D_1$ ). However, teaching this child the dispositions that will enable her to succeed in the labor market involves teaching her to be disposed to prioritize her individual accomplishments and long-term goals ( $D_2$ ) and learning this disposition would undermine her ability to engage with  $V$ .<sup>27</sup> Depending on how this trade-off is negotiated, the child would confront situations in which she has to prioritize competing commitments differently.

To be clear, the possibility that learning a disposition can potentially undermine a student's relationships or her commitment to her family's cultural practices is not sufficient to constitute an unanswerable challenge for a liberal egalitarian education. Cultures and related conceptions of the good are not static; it is unavoidable that as the child develops and goes through the public school system, she will develop different ideals, relationships, and associations that will alter her conception of the good. A liberal egalitarian educational system is not committed to preserving cultural practices, but it is committed to respecting those who hold reasonable conceptions of the good. Therefore, what the non-cognitive challenge raises is a burden of *justification*. For example, comprehensive liberal accounts of education offer a normative justification for the dispositions they seek to inculcate by arguing that some conceptions of the good, those that are illiberal, are justifiably undermined by liberalism's own lights. In the case we are considering, appealing to the market value of a particular disposition does not constitute an appropriate justification, because it threatens to allow the state to use educational institutions as a vehicle through which economic and labor markets shape the diversity of conceptions of the good, in our society. The problem isn't that there are fewer conceptions of the good for individuals to choose from; conceptions of the good might fall out of favor because adult individuals exercise their freedom to reject conceptions of the good they grew up with that they no longer find fulfilling.<sup>28</sup> The problem arises if reasonable conceptions of the good are eroded through educational institutions that are educating children towards those rewarded by the labor market, because they are so rewarded. Given that those labor market pressures already benefit groups in positions of economic and political power, using educational institutions to entrench their conceptions of the good—at the expense of the conceptions of

<sup>27</sup>Jennifer M. Morton "The non-cognitive challenge to a liberal egalitarian education," *Theory and Research in Education*, 9 (2011), 233–50.

<sup>28</sup>Thanks to Eamonn Callan for raising this challenge and asking me to clarify this point.

the good of those who lack economic and political power—is manifestly disrespectful.

## II. CODE-SWITCHING

Code-switching can be seen as a strategy that could potentially allow liberal egalitarians to bypass the uncomfortable position of promoting equal opportunity only at the cost of failing to respect reasonable conceptions of the good. In “No Citizen Left Behind,” Meira Levinson advances a theory of civic education according to which students should be explicitly taught to code-switch as a tool to effectively engage with and change the dominant power structures that oppress them.<sup>29</sup> Just as bilingual children switch between languages, children could be taught to switch between the dispositions valued by the labor market and those valued at home, thereby allowing students to stem the effect of the market on their engagement with other values, while retaining the economic benefits of learning the dispositions valuable in the labor market. A child might be instilled with the disposition to  $D_2$  in one context, without undermining her ability to be disposed to  $D_1$  in a different context, thus preserving her ability to engage with value  $V$  and allowing the way of life of which that value is a part to flourish. This alternative would appear to allow liberal egalitarian educational institutions to bypass the need for further justification, since they would no longer be instrumental in allowing the market to undermine reasonable conceptions of the good.

Code-switching also allows us to understand how successful minority students navigate the tension between mainstream and minority cultural values and styles. This tension has been used to explain the achievement gap for some minority groups. John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham have famously argued that African-American students underachieve because of a fear of “acting white,”<sup>30</sup> and, though this research has been called into question,<sup>31</sup> the kernel of truth in this theory is that minority children who do succeed appear particularly adept at negotiating mainstream ways of behaving. Prudence Carter’s study of minority students in New York City public schools finds that many of the academically successful students are cultural-straddlers—minority students who “negotiate schooling in a way that enables them not only to hold on to their native cultural styles but also to embrace dominant cultural codes and resources.”<sup>32</sup> However,

<sup>29</sup>Meira Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). Lareau, in *Unequal Childhood*, ch. 12, also recommends code-switching as a way of mitigating the effects of disadvantage.

<sup>30</sup>Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu, “Black students’ school success: coping with the ‘burden of acting white’,” *The Urban Review*, 18 (1986), 176–206.

<sup>31</sup>Karolyn Tyson, William Darity, and Domini R. Castellino, “It’s not ‘a black thing’: understanding the burden of acting white and other dilemmas of high achievement,” *American Sociological Review*, 70 (2005), 582–605.

<sup>32</sup>Carter, *Keepin’ it Real*, p. 13.

Carter also documents the tension students feel between adopting mainstream ways of behaving and negotiating peer relationships. The best way to understand the tension, for some of these students, might not be as a clash of values—thought of as abstract ideals—but rather as a tension between the behavior required by the mainstream for academic and socio-economic success, and that required by students' relationships, associations, and groups.

Though emerging empirical research will give us a clearer picture of the various factors at play in biculturalism,<sup>33</sup> the existing research is suggestive enough, and the implications for political and ethical theory important enough, that we need a clearer picture of the ethical and normative dimensions of code-switching as a strategy for minority students, who aspire to the educational and labor market opportunities open to the middle-class. My analysis will focus on elucidating code-switching from a normative perspective, in order to show how it could be used as a strategy to deal with the Non-cognitive Challenge, as it applies to the education of minority children. However, given that code-switching is often used by adults, parents, teachers, or members of minority communities who need to be successful in the mainstream labor market, what I say here can also help us start to get a better picture of the normative dimensions of code-switching in the case of adults. I start by describing the Integration model, which serves as a foil for the other three models of code-switching: Pretense, Compartmentalization, and Subsumption. I analyze each model in general terms and discuss its application to the case of education.

## A. INTEGRATION

The example I use here, while hypothetical, is based on empirical data concerning the status of Latinos in the United States.<sup>34</sup> Consider Julia who grew up in a Latino family, with a collectivist cultural orientation in which relationships and obligations to family, and extended family are primary. Her childhood neighborhood was composed of mostly poor Black and Latino families with lack of access to good schools, public transportation, and other community resources. Julia is one of the very few who manages to succeed in her dismal school, win a scholarship to her state's university, attend law school, and become a lawyer at a prestigious law firm. Throughout this process, Julia increasingly develops an

<sup>33</sup>Code-switching is a strategy employed by many bicultural individuals, and there is an extensive body of empirical research on biculturalism and acculturation, detailing its psychological costs and benefits. See John W. Berry, "Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation," *Applied Psychology*, 46 (1997), 5–34; LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, "Psychological impact of biculturalism"; Michael Aronowitz, "The social and emotional adjustment of immigrant children: a review of the literature," *International Migration Review*, 18 (1984), 237–57.

<sup>34</sup>The example is meant to be illustrative of the larger issues at stake for members of disadvantaged groups. Though there are important differences between the two ethnicities that are most in danger of being disadvantaged educationally, Latinos and African Americans, many of the points I make apply to suitably modified examples of African-Americans.

individualist mindset, placing more and more importance on her career and individual achievements, at the expense of honoring commitments to her extended family. During high school, she reluctantly prioritized studying over family commitments.<sup>35</sup> She makes these trade-offs with more ease as an adult, for example, by choosing to attend the firm's luncheon over tending to her sick cousin's children. She moves to a neighborhood that is closer to work and develops relationships with college friends and colleagues. Julia seeks to maintain relationships with her extended family, but finds it increasingly difficult to do so.

I do not mean to suggest here that a collectivist orientation explains why Julia's community is poor or why most of the other members of her community will fail to be upwardly mobile. There is ample evidence from some Asian immigrant communities that a collectivist orientation does not necessarily have economically deleterious consequences. The challenges for minority groups participating in the mainstream vary depending on the ethnic group, socio-economic background, parental educational background expectations, gender dynamics, and so on. A large part of the explanation here is structural. The segregation of disadvantaged communities certainly plays a role since individuals in those communities rarely have relationships that extend into the mainstream.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, some of these effects are magnified by the influence of stereotyping in the labor market; for example, evidence suggests that employers perceive black women as underperforming due to conflicting loyalties between the demands of their families and those of their jobs.<sup>37</sup> At the foreground of these larger structural factors are individuals, like Julia, who seek a path out of poverty and into the American middle-class, and find that they must adapt their behavior in order to do so.

Two ideas can help us make sense of Julia's case. The first is assimilation, according to which a member of a minority group adopts the culture, habits, language, and ways of interacting of the majority group so as to fully integrate into the mainstream. This does not adequately characterize Julia; her childhood values and relationships haven't been completely replaced, but rather rearranged as new values, relationships, and cultural practices have come to be integrated into her normative perspective. Julia has assessed the importance of helping with her nieces and nephews relative to the importance of advancing in her career and has decided that the latter matters more to her. This is not to say that Julia no longer feels the tension between them; though she still recognizes the importance

<sup>35</sup>Lisa Delpit notes that the educational system often ignores "the significance of human connectedness in many communities of color," which can conflict with the solitary pursuits required by the mainstream educational system in *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 95.

<sup>36</sup>Wilson, *When Work Disappears*; Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>37</sup>Irene Browne and Ivy Kennelly, "Stereotypes and realities: images of black women in the labor market," *Latinas and African American Women at Work: Race, Gender, and Economic Inequality*, ed. Irene Browne (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), pp. 302–26.

of her relationships with her extended family, her commitment to invest time in them has weakened. Integration, which is a better characterization of Julia's case, is distinguished from assimilation in so far as more of the minority culture's values, habits, and ways of interacting are maintained. Nonetheless, both assimilation and integration take the agent to have arrived at an assessment of the relative importance of many of the potentially conflicting values, relationships, and cultural commitments at play, to develop a *unified* and full-fledged normative perspective that she brings to bear to particular situations.

According to this model, one cannot acquire a new disposition that is contrary to a value one holds, without thereby altering one's normative commitments or, at least, undermining one's engagement with the values with which that disposition is in tension. Of course, particular cases are much more complex. First, working through this confrontation of values can be more or less difficult depending on the communities involved, and the individual undertaking it. Second, this model assumes, for the sake of simplicity, that there are two sets of static values which are, after reflection, integrated into a coherent whole.<sup>38</sup> In reality, people often have various sets of values and commitments because they see themselves as members of various ethnic, geographical, or national groups, as being of a particular gender, and/or as subscribing to certain political and ethical ideals. Furthermore, the values of particular groups are themselves dynamic; some minority communities are themselves undergoing profound transformations due to demographic, geographic, and socio-economic changes. Finally, the process of acquiring or rejecting many of these values is often not the outcome of reflection. Nonetheless, a philosophical analysis of this normative process requires some abstraction, and the model I present here is not inimical to the complexities presented by the particular situations confronted by individuals.

Applying this model to the case of education presents two difficulties. The first is that integration, in this case, would be a response to market pressures by minorities who are excluded from the mainstream, rather than genuine engagement with a different comprehensive conception of the good with which the agent also identifies, as might be the case for other bi-cultural individuals. The second is that we are dealing with children. An adult, when confronted with a situation that calls for such normative reevaluation, can meet this challenge and emerge with a more refined understanding of her own normative perspective. Children do not have a full-fledged normative perspective; they have not resolved which values are central to their lives, how to adjudicate conflicts between them, or weigh the interests of their families and communities against their own. In her wonderfully nuanced discussion of the moral status of children, Tamar Schapiro

<sup>38</sup>I am grateful to Eamonn Callan for asking me to acknowledge the dynamic nature of this phenomenon.

argues that the child's task is to develop such a normative perspective.<sup>39</sup> She concludes that adults have an obligation to assist children in this task by allowing them to try out different perspectives, encouraging them to exercise their autonomy, and refraining from hindering them. According to the integration model, the trade-off between conflicting values and economic opportunities cannot be avoided, and if children are not up to the task, someone, the family or an educational institution, must undertake this process for the child.

## B. CODE-SWITCHING AS PRETENSE

In order to resist facing this conflict of values, an agent might choose to engage in code-switching as a kind of pretense. According to this model, undertaking a new non-cognitive disposition is compatible with withholding one's endorsement of an accompanying value. Returning to Julia, she might reject the values upheld in the competitive, individual-achievement oriented environment she works in, while recognizing that the accompanying behavior is required to succeed in her career path. She might see herself as truly being committed to the community oriented values she grew up with, but feel forced to act as if she weren't when she is working.

The limitations of this approach are evident; acting in the context of a pretense cannot completely shield our behavior from normative evaluation. Julia might refuse to help her cousin take care of her sick children when it conflicts with her work commitments on the grounds that she has to act as if she values her career over her familial commitments. However, if Julia continues to act this way, her family might rightly object that her actions are inconsistent with highly valuing family relationships. An agent might have good reasons to engage in pretense for the sake of a job, but those reasons will not override competing reasons stemming from her other commitments in any situation she confronts within the context of her job, even if she doesn't identify with her behavior in a professional context. Valuing her family relationships requires that Julia feel the force of the demands they make on her and act accordingly in most contexts. In order to avoid becoming ethically unmoored while pretending, an agent must be sensitive to how the values she endorses impinge on the situation at hand; she cannot simply cordon them off. I return to a modified version of pretense that is meant to deal with this worry when discussing code-switching as subsumption.

Pretense as a strategy for students straddling the achievement gap is even more problematic than for adults. We would have to presume not only that children can adequately distinguish pretense from genuine engagement with a value, even when they are performing for many hours a day, but we also have to assume they will be able to adequately assess the limits when the performance comes into

<sup>39</sup>Tamar Schapiro, "What is a child?" *Ethics*, 109 (1999), 715–38.

serious conflict with other values that they might not yet have a firm hold on. It is an open question whether, for example, a child could be assertive and competitive in the school system, while being community- and consensus-driven at home, and not have this switching back and forth affect which values he espouses. This is not to deny that children cannot benefit from pretense in developing a normative perspective—Schapiro suggests that it is an important part of their development. However, engaging in pretense in order to develop a normative perspective, under the guidance of a parent or educator, is different than being taught to engage in pretense in order to avoid resolving the conflicts between the values governing their school, and those governing their home. The latter is a risky and ethically problematic strategy.

### C. COMPARTMENTALIZED CODE-SWITCHING

A second alternative model is for the agent to undertake code-switching as compartmentalization. According to this model, an agent can learn a new non-cognitive disposition and even accept the accompanying value, but only within a certain context. The analysis this model offers of Julia's situation is that she truly values the relationships she cultivates at home and, in that context, she prioritizes the interests of her community over her individual success, but at work she values her individual success and, in professional contexts, she authentically prioritizes her career objectives over her community's interests. She is not merely pretending to do so. But how are we to understand this model as different from integration or pretense? One way of doing so is to suggest that Julia has two normative perspectives. From her normative perspective at work, succeeding at her job trumps many other values, including the interests of her community and developing deep relationships with her extended family. From her normative perspective at home, family obligations and relationships play a central role, often trumping her career. In this way, the two perspectives are shielded from one another so as not to be mutually undermining. Though this kind of splitting raises questions of integrity and alienation that deserve more careful attention, it is not unfamiliar. Sometimes, we find ourselves forced to adopt two perspectives, both of which we endorse even if they might be in tension with one another. For example, Cheshire Calhoun argues, drawing on an example from Lugones' work about being both a Latina and a Lesbian,<sup>40</sup> that integrity need not require resolving inconsistencies in one's values, since agents sometimes have good reason not to resolve value conflicts.<sup>41</sup> In such cases, the agent is committed to two potentially conflicting normative perspectives, and she has to negotiate conflicts between them as they arise.

<sup>40</sup>Maria Lugones, "Hispaneando y lesbiando: on Sarah Hoagland's lesbian ethics," *Hypatia*, 5 (2009), 138–46.

<sup>41</sup>Cheshire Calhoun, "Standing for something," *Journal of Philosophy*, 92 (1995), 238–40.

It is important to reiterate here the scope of my article. Cultures are dynamic and bicultural individuals are uniquely positioned to be a part of the changes that cultures undergo, as they come into contact with each other. However, the challenge here is not that educational institutions are failing to preserve cultures as intact artifacts, but rather that they are being used to corrode minority cultural values on the basis of market forces. The compartmentalization model, in this case, would have an agent adopt a set of dispositions, not because she endorses and identifies with those values, but *for the sake of labor market success*. Some bicultural individuals might be fortunate enough to endorse a set of values that happen to be rewarded by the labor market. However, for agents who come from minority cultures and feel alienated from mainstream culture, code-switching would require adopting a whole new set of cultural repertoires, habits, and associated values in order to have better economic opportunities, not because those values genuinely come to be seen as valuable. Compartmentalizing as a mode of code-switching, in this case, requires that one of the agent's perspectives be guided by the labor market and shielded from critical evaluation from her other comprehensive ethical perspective.

The danger of this proposal is magnified when we consider compartmentalization as a strategy for children to bridge the gap between the dispositions constitutive of engaging with their home values, and the dispositions that open up socio-economic opportunities. Cultural code-switching for the sake of equal opportunity would involve encouraging a child, in particular contexts, to behave in ways that allow her to succeed socio-economically, while putting aside the values she engages with at home. For example, the Latino child we have been discussing would be taught to prioritize her individual interests at school and do whatever is required to succeed, but to prioritize her family's interests, her role in the community, and empathizing with her extended family's needs when she is at home. Though I will not elaborate on this point here, it is important to note that such code-switching makes it increasingly difficult for the child to develop a unified and integrated normative perspective, which many have thought is an important part of a good life.<sup>42</sup> The main challenge, however, is that in asking children to adopt a normative perspective guided by labor market pressures in a way that shields that perspective from the values they are learning at home, we run the risk of leading them to lose their moral bearings before these are even fully developed.

It is helpful to contrast the case of instilling non-cognitive dispositions for the sake of giving children an equal opportunity at competing for the positions rewarded by the labor market with instilling non-cognitive dispositions for the

<sup>42</sup>Harry Frankfurt's notion of *wholeheartedness* and Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of *narrative unity* would seem to conflict with this kind of compartmentalization. See Harry G. Frankfurt, *Necessity, Volition, and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

sake of a liberal education that aims to inculcate core liberal values. If we adopt the integration model, the student who learns about the value of autonomy and tolerance at school has to eventually come to terms with how those values square with her values at home. It might well be that she finds a conflict there that she will have to resolve, eventually. But according to non-neutral accounts of liberal education, the possibility that values contrary to those of autonomy and tolerance might lose out is justifiable, rather than regrettable. Since such accounts of liberal education promote the full-blown adoption of core liberal values, they do not need to appeal to pretense or compartmentalization. In contrast, the reason to appeal to compartmentalization and pretense in the case of the non-cognitive dispositions associated with labor market success is to reap the opportunity benefit of adopting such non-cognitive dispositions without incurring the normative cost of allowing the labor market to erode cultural values that we have reason to respect. This strategy, however, either leads to a potentially alienating pretense that is not adequately anchored in one's normative perspective, or to a splitting of one's normative perspective that dangerously shields the agent's behavior from critical evaluation in light of her other values.

#### D. CODE-SWITCHING AS SUBSUMPTION

The final model to consider is one that attempts to navigate the demands of the labor market by engaging in some kind of performance, while remaining firmly subsumed under the agent's normative perspective.<sup>43</sup> As in pretense, an adult agent adopts a disposition in one context, because it is valued in that context, without fully adopting the accompanying value. However, in so doing, the agent adopts an overarching narrative or project that justifies code-switching from her full-fledged normative perspective, and subjects her behavior within the performance to normative scrutiny.<sup>44</sup> This narrative or project can take many forms, but what is important is that it is not dictated by the whims of the market—it is anchored in a comprehensive conception of the good. Return to Julia's case. She could see her competitive and individualist behavior as a kind of performance that will help her secure a position with enough power to help her community. Suppose, for example, that budget cuts are being disproportionately apportioned on the already poor schools in the district in which she grew up. Julia wants to be in a position of economic and political power to stop this process, and sees her advancement in the legal world as part of that larger

<sup>43</sup>Thanks to Meira Levinson for suggesting I pursue this model.

<sup>44</sup>I will not take a stance here on whether ground projects or narratives are necessary to have a comprehensive normative perspective; both could serve the role I have in mind. For a discussion of the importance of ground projects, see Bernard Williams, "Persons, character, and morality," *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley, 1984), pp. 197–216.

project.<sup>45</sup> Levinson appears to have something like this model in mind when she suggests that students be taught to code-switch in the language and culture of those in power, in order to seek avenues to reform the system that oppresses them from the inside.<sup>46</sup>

However, before we turn to consider the difficulties of applying this model to children, four important aspects of the subsumption model must be noted. The first is that it requires a justification internal to the values espoused by the agent—the performance is subsumed under a comprehensive conception of the good. Unlike the two other kinds of code-switching, which seek to shield one's behavior from a conflicting and comprehensive conception of the good, this model requires that the agent locate and justify her behavior in light of such a conception. In some cases, this might not be possible. If the behavior demanded of an agent in a particular context is too antagonistic to her conception of the good, and the benefit accrued from engaging in it is not valuable enough, code-switching might not be justified. Even if she has a justification, the agent has to remain attuned to the balance of reasons favoring code-switching because the balance might change. For example, the agent could come to believe that she might not be successful at achieving her goals through code-switching and, consequently, she would no longer have a reason to code-switch.

The second related point is that subsuming code-switching in a comprehensive conception of the good allows the agent to monitor and limit how far to take her performance. Even if there is a justification to engage in code-switching, such a justification does not give the agent *carte blanche*. For example, Julia might decide that she cannot provide counsel to a political candidate whose record shows a disregard for the needs of her childhood community. There are delicate issues here about how far to take the performance within a particular context and where to draw the boundaries. However, in order for code-switching to be subsumed, the agent's behavior has to continue to be guided at some level by her comprehensive conception of the good.

This leads us to the third point. This mode of code-switching is a careful and delicate balancing act that can easily turn into assimilation, pretense, or compartmentalization. As noted, the agent must be regularly attuned to the overall narrative or project in negotiating the different situations she confronts. In addition, she must be careful not to let herself unwittingly buy into conflicting values. We should not underestimate how repeated performances of behavior that is in tension with our values can affect our normative perspective in the long run. Julia might come to forget what her ultimate goal was when she started and to lose sight of the values that initially motivated her. The final point to consider

<sup>45</sup>I am grateful to Eamonn Callan for inspiring this version of the example.

<sup>46</sup>See Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*, ch. 2. Another example of this kind of code-switching is that of some immigrants who see their work as part of a project to financially assist their families back home.

is that the agent might be misunderstood by others in her community, at school, or at her job, and risk undermining some of those relationships. In particular, agents who see code-switching as a path to subverting power structures might encounter resistance from fellow students or coworkers who authentically value those mainstream values.

Let's turn now to apply the code-switching model outlined to the case of students. Subsumption requires a comprehensive conception of the good that generates a narrative, project, or goal that justifies code-switching. For the remainder of this section I will focus on considering two conceptions that could play this role. But, first, there are two additional points we need to note. If we are to recommend code-switching to minority students as the most normatively viable strategy, then they should have a reasonable chance of success. Code-switching can only be justified internally if it does, in fact, help students achieve their goals. Even if students from impoverished backgrounds master code-switching, they have little chance of success if schools are too overcrowded for effective instruction, unemployment is so high that even those with a college education cannot find jobs, and if students cannot afford to attend college. Second, the cost that code-switching has on the students' relationships must be taken into account. This is an extremely important point that I will not be able to fully explore here, but which deserves further consideration.

There are two viable alternatives that could play the role of being the conception of the good under which code-switching is subsumed: the student's home culture or a non-neutral account of liberal education that espouses education for citizenship or autonomy. Let's consider the second of these alternatives first.

The appeal of code-switching is that it appears to be a way to limit the corrosive effect that market pressures can have on various reasonable conceptions of the good, which ought to be able to flourish in a liberal society. Subsumption allows an agent to code-switch, while relying on an underlying conception of the good that limits and controls the effect the market has on that conception of the good. The problem with non-neutral liberal accounts is that they are not comprehensive enough to limit and control the corrosive effect of the market. This is due to the nature of liberal accounts of education.<sup>47</sup> As Eamonn

<sup>47</sup>There is a lot to be said in favor of non-neutral liberal accounts of education serving as a foundation for code-switching. For example, it could be argued that code-switching is autonomy enhancing, since it allows students to try on different possible values without adopting them. It might also be argued that code-switching is necessary for citizenship, because it allows students to learn to talk to fellow citizens from different cultural backgrounds. Finally, it could be argued that code-switching allows students to find out what it is like being a member of a different community, and become more tolerant and empathetic. Versions of this argument can be seen in Rob Reich, *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*. Note, however, all of these justifications for code-switching are not justifications to code-switch in order to open socio-economic opportunities, but rather to cultivate the dispositions that promote autonomy, make one a better citizen, or promote tolerance.

Callan notes, non-neutral accounts of education face the challenge of “conceiving the ends and means of civic education in a way that does not wrongly impair diversity.”<sup>48</sup> Accounts that are able to meet that challenge and call themselves liberal are those that are limited enough to allow for the flourishing of a variety of conceptions of the good. But, precisely because of that feature, those accounts cannot guide an agent in navigating conflicts between the demands of the labor market and those of her home culture, unless the market or her home culture is making blatantly illiberal demands. What a liberal account of education can do is offer a filter on illiberal demands made by a student’s home culture or the labor market. By including liberal principles of education into the curriculum, a school can be sure that the conceptions of the good it aims to respect are compatible with liberalism. For example, conceptions of the good that demean women would not pass this test. However, when two reasonable comprehensive conceptions of the good compatible with liberalism clash, liberal accounts cannot choose between them. Therefore, a liberal conception of the good that is limited enough to be called liberal cannot serve as the sole ground in which to anchor code-switching, because it does not have the resources to resist the threat of the market in undermining the diverse conceptions of the good we want to protect, though it can filter out some illiberal conceptions of the good.<sup>49</sup>

The alternative is to rely on the family’s conception of the good. The educational approach that tailors teaching practices to a student’s home culture is known as “cultural congruent education” and its premise is that education is more effective if children do not feel alienated from the school’s culture.<sup>50</sup> Children do not arrive at school empty vessels. As Dewey noted, the child’s world is one of “personal contacts. Things hardly come within his experience unless they touch, intimately and obviously, his own well-being, or that of his family and friends.”<sup>51</sup> Dewey warns against developing a curriculum that is not sensitive to this fact; the more foreign an educational program is to the student’s experience, the less likely it is to be effective in engaging the student. On other hand, Levinson makes a forceful argument for why minority children are not served by ethno-centric education that doesn’t equip students to participate in the mainstream.<sup>52</sup> Students do not have an equal opportunity if they are not also taught the dispositions rewarded by the middle-class.<sup>53</sup> Code-switching as

<sup>48</sup>Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 12.

<sup>49</sup>Thanks to Eamonn Callan for bringing up this point and to Debra Satz for helping me clarify it.

<sup>50</sup>Meira Levinson, “Mapping Multicultural Education,” *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Harvey Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 428–50. For a defense of this view see Delpit, *Other People’s Children*.

<sup>51</sup>John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (New York: Cosimo Books, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>52</sup>Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*.

<sup>53</sup>Some schools, notably Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP), have been taking this lesson to heart by explicitly teaching poor, largely minority, students middle-class behavior, from how and when to make eye contact to full-blown character education. For a take on KIPP’s success, see Paul

subsumption attempts to combine an approach that respects the elements of a conception of the good that students bring to school, since this conception of the good serves to justify code-switching, while teaching them the dispositions that give them a better opportunity at socio-economic success. This justification will have to acknowledge the unjust conditions that necessitate code-switching—code-switching is a matter of necessity because mainstream economic opportunities cannot easily accommodate the student's burgeoning conception of the good.

Some theorists have stressed that code-switching should not be limited to minority students.<sup>54</sup> The elites and those in dominant positions of power must also bear some responsibility for closing the achievement gap. Lareau suggests that teachers should be taught to code-switch in order to understand and adapt to those students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>55</sup> It could be argued that elite students should be taught to code-switch as a way of enriching their understanding of themselves and others. Notice, however, that these justifications are of a markedly different kind than that offered to socio-economically disadvantaged minority students. Disadvantaged students are taught to code-switch as a way of opening socio-economic opportunities for themselves that are otherwise closed because socio-economically dominant institutions are not accommodating of their home culture. The difference in justification reveals the power asymmetries obscured by a naive appeal to code-switching. Therefore, one benefit of this last model of code-switching is that it does not hide the nature of the conflict it is attempting to remedy.

### III. CONCLUSION

Many political, institutional, and structural factors lead to the concentration and segregation of poverty in predominantly minority communities, with little access to educational and health services, reliable public transportation, or jobs. Giving the members of these communities a better chance at a decent life will require radical changes in economic and political policy that extend far beyond changes in educational policy. Nonetheless, education is often a primary site in which these battles are played out; many see education as a way in which a new generation could be given the skills and knowledge they need to be on a more equal footing with their middle-class peers in attaining the educational and career opportunities that will enable them to lead a decent life. Against this background, individuals are caught between being members of disadvantaged communities

Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

<sup>54</sup>Levinson, *No Citizen Left Behind*; Elizabeth Anderson, "Fair opportunity in education: a democratic perspective," *Ethics*, 117 (2007), 595–622.

<sup>55</sup>Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, p. 255.

and aspiring to access the opportunities for better employment available to the middle-class.

All agents, in navigating changing contexts, adapt to differences in normative expectations. Children are taught early on that what is appropriate at home might not be appropriate in other contexts. For some, adapting involves making minor adjustments, being attuned to differences in ways of address, dress codes, or norms governing the office or school. For large segments of the economically disadvantaged minority population, the distance between the world in which they grow up and that of educational institutions and well-paying careers is vast.<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, not only do they have to navigate differences in modes of address, language, and dress codes, but switch dispositions to ones that are often foreign, and in conflict with the dispositions and values central to their homes. In order to straddle the achievement gap, they have to learn to switch between considerably different and often conflicting *ways of being*. This is not, in itself, a problem. There are benefits to code-switching. Multicultural societies are characterized by the vibrant intermingling of cultural communities; individuals who belong to different communities are in a unique position to foster new relationships between them. However, when educational institutions are being used to shape students to adopt dispositions that potentially alienate them from their communities' values and relationships as a response to labor market pressures that unfairly favor the dispositions and habits of those who already hold positions of economic and political power, such institutions have become a site of further injustice.

Whether educational institutions are justified in undertaking the task of rectifying this injustice by shaping a student's non-cognitive dispositions, depends on the socio-economic conditions of the community at stake. For example, the potential disadvantage imparted by an orientation towards collectivism depends on the socio-economic position of the relevant community. In our current non-ideal situation, the harm to some minority groups in the form of entrenched poverty, poor health, and loss of dignity is alarming. The potential prevention of this harm might be enough to lead us to take considerations arising from equal opportunity to outweigh considerations of liberal respect. However, in doing so we are failing to respect these populations twice—by failing to provide them with a minimum standard of decent living and, because of it, by failing to respect their conception of the good in our educational institutions. In cases in which the harm is not of such a magnitude—as in the case of wealthier Asian-Americans, who are not adequately represented in positions of economic and political power, but whose average income is above that of white Americans—considerations of liberal respect are not clearly outweighed by

<sup>56</sup>This is also probably true for poor whites and their complaint, though slightly different in character, would not be different in kind.

considerations stemming from equal opportunity.<sup>57</sup> To put the problem bluntly, under non-ideal conditions, educational institutions appear more justified in rectifying problematic inequalities, by fostering the non-cognitive dispositions rewarded by the market among children of impoverished disadvantaged minority communities, even if, in doing so, they are potentially undermining reasonable conceptions of the good, because the socio-economic prospects of those children are so dire.<sup>58</sup> It should not come as a surprise that considerations stemming from equal opportunity in education will be weightier, and more likely to undermine our other liberal commitments, against a background of a non-ideal distribution of political and economic power.

This brings me to an additional reason to be wary of citizenship or autonomy accounts of education as a foundation for code-switching. These accounts support an educational vision composed of a core set of dispositions, values, and practices that are necessary for any good citizen, but non-ideal socio-economic conditions do not affect the opportunity prospects of different groups of citizens equally. An account that argues that we should all learn to code-switch to be better citizens, might have a point to make about what is required for good citizenship, but it obscures the fact that, for some students, code-switching is a necessity born of unjust socio-economic conditions. However, if we propose to respond to the achievement gap, we should not obscure this fact.

Cultural code-switching strikes many as an appealing model for fostering upward mobility, because it would appear to allow agents to inhabit both worlds without paying the price of resolving conflicts between them. However, cultural code-switching as a means to remedy the achievement gap is essentially a response to non-ideal conditions. Furthermore, as I have argued, once we analyze what it requires from a normative perspective, code-switching is a sensitive endeavor, even in the case of adults. An agent can engage in pretense or compartmentalization, but, thereby, shields her behavior from normative scrutiny and is easily swayed by the demands of the labor market, even if they run counter to her home values. Subsumed code-switching offers a delicate balance between integration and pretense, but it does not allow us to bypass confronting the conflict of value that motivated the adoption of code-switching in the first place.

Educational institutions play a powerful role in shaping future citizens and must exercise that power carefully. If the harms done to certain communities necessitate that we teach children the dispositions rewarded by the labor and

<sup>57</sup>However, it has been suggested that it is a difference in social and emotional dispositions that leads Asian-Americans to confront a “bamboo ceiling”—that is, not occupying proportionally as many positions of power and authority as their white counterparts, despite outperforming them on measures of educational achievement. See Jane Hyun, *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: Career Strategies for Asians* (New York: Harper Business, 2005).

<sup>58</sup>Complicated issues arise here about how finely to carve out the relevant groups. I do not deny that the weighing might come out differently for impoverished Asian-Americans.

educational market, the damage to disadvantaged communities should be minimized. The first element in doing so is to adopt code-switching as subsumption. The second is to offer a justification that acknowledges the non-ideal conditions that put certain communities and their way of life in a vulnerable position. If the state is going to take it upon itself to teach children how to behave in ways that will open up economic opportunities for them, but which will potentially undermine their engagement with ways of life we have reason to respect, we must be willing to engage in the normative work of confronting the value conflicts that arise in that process, and offer the appropriate kind of justification to those vulnerable communities.