

## Motivation for agreement with parental values: desirable when autonomous, problematic when controlled

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**Abstract** Two studies examined the well-being and parenting correlates of autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values. We hypothesized that autonomous motivation would be associated with subjective well-being, whereas controlled motivation would be associated with agitation and guilt. Study 1 involved 399 Israeli youth (mean age = 23.8) and Study 2 involved 131 Israeli adolescents (mean age = 16.9). Results of both studies supported the hypotheses. The findings suggest that only autonomous motivation for agreement with parents' values is positively associated with well-being. This effect is over and above the extent of agreement between offspring values and perceived parents' values, and highlights the importance of distinguishing between autonomous and controlled endorsement of values.

**Keywords** Autonomy support · Internalization · Parenting · Socialization · Values · Motivation

Value transmission from parents to children is often considered the hallmark of successful socialization (Grusec 1997); Indeed, most parents desire that their children develop values similar to theirs (Knafo and Schwartz 2001; Whitbeck and Gecas 1988). Given the importance of successful value transmission for parents, it can be argued that congruence between youth values and their perceptions of

their parents' values (i.e., perceived value congruence) is likely to enhance youth's well-being (cf. Higgins 1987), because it can reduce the possibility of value-related conflict, as well as feelings of rejection, anxiety or guilt associated with such conflict (e.g., Aronfreed 1968; Tangney and Dearing 2002). Congruence may also support expectations regarding parental acceptance and self-esteem based on such acceptance (Higgins 1987; Leary and Baumeister 2000). Indeed, adolescents' perceived congruence with parents relates positively to their reported closeness to parents (Knafo and Schwartz 2003b).

However, perceived child-parent value congruence may be less relevant to children's well-being than the quality of their motivation to agree with parents' values. Especially important is whether children agree with parental values because they consider these values inherently worthy or because they experience external or intra-psychic pressures to adopt them (Grusec and Goodnow 1994). As Grolnick et al. (1997, p. 135) note, "effective socialization requires something more than behavior in accord with parental demands. It involves an inner adaptation to social requirements so that children not only comply with these requirements but also accept and endorse the advocated values and behaviors."

Therefore, based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Ryan and Deci 2000), we propose that the motivation to agree with parental values because they are inherently worthy (i.e., autonomous motivation) contributes to youth subjective well-being, whereas the motivation to agree with parental values out of external or internal pressure (i.e., controlled motivation) contributes to the negative aspects of well-being. SDT also posits that autonomous motivation is promoted, and controlled motivation is reduced, by a socializing approach termed autonomy-supportive parenting (Grolnick et al. 1997).

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Presently, no study known to us has directly assessed autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values, their association to well-being, and the role of parenting as a predictor of motivation to agree with parents' values. Moreover, no study has tested the idea that offspring's subjective well-being is related not only to the "quantity" of congruence between the child's values and parents perceived values, but also the "quality" of the motivations to concur with parents' values (i.e., whether the motivation is autonomous versus controlled). Accordingly, we will examine whether the two types of motivation have a unique contribution to the prediction of youth well-being, above and beyond the potential effect of perceived child-parent value congruence.

To address this issue, we first present the notion of controlled versus autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values. Then, we discuss the relations expected between these motivations, perceptions of autonomy-supportive parenting, and subjective well-being. We next briefly explain the concept of perceived child-parent value congruence and the need to control for the effects of such congruence. These issues are then investigated with data from 399 Israeli young adults in Study 1, and 131 Israeli adolescents in Study 2.

### Autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values

SDT (Ryan and Deci 2000) posits that various processes motivating people to perform the same act may reflect different levels of perceived autonomy or coercion. In *identified* motivation, action is guided by understanding its rationale and/or moral desirability. In *integrated* motivation, action is guided by the understanding that it fits one's self-defined identity and by the perception of its importance relative to other actions. These two motivations are associated with enhanced feelings of autonomy (we do not focus here on a third autonomous motivation, *intrinsic* motivation, as it is relevant more to an individuals' inherent interest in the relevant activity or object, and less to the socialization process). In contrast, there are two motivational processes associated with a feeling of coercion and lack of autonomy. In *external* motivation, actions are perceived as controlled by the desire to obtain material rewards or avoid punishments. In *introjected* motivation, people perceive their actions as driven by an attempt to avoid guilt or shame and more generally by striving to maintain a satisfactory level of self-worth.

Agreement with parental values, like other behaviors, can be perceived as determined by autonomous or controlled motivations. Values, abstract goals important to

individuals as guiding principles in their lives (Schwartz 1992), are important to the way individuals see the world. But values do not necessarily originate from the self (Rohan 2000). Recent work has shown that individuals may perceive their goals (a construct related to values) as either autonomous (self-concordant, self-integrated) or controlled (self-discrepant, not integrated) (Sheldon and Elliot 1999). Kasser (2002) further argued that the same value could be held for both autonomous and controlled reasons. Chirkov et al. (2003) showed that both autonomous and controlled motivations could underlie value-related practices. We therefore hypothesized that individuals' agreement with their parents' values may be guided by both autonomous and controlled motivations, and that adolescents or young adults would be able to distinguish between these two main types of motivations.

### Parents' autonomy-support in relation to children's motivation to agree with parental values

According to SDT, parental practices aimed at enhancing children's sense of autonomy promote autonomous motivations and reduce controlled motivations in children (Grolnick et al. 1997). Accordingly, we now focus on the link between perceived parenting and motivation for agreement with parental values. Based on SDT research (e.g., Grolnick et al. 1997; Grolnick and Ryan 1989) and our own approach and research (Assor et al. 2002, 2005) we posited that autonomy support in relation to value internalization has three main components: (1) Considering the child's perspective and feelings regarding the values espoused by the parents, (2) Providing a rationale for parents' value-related expectations, and (3) Allowing choice regarding the extent and ways in which parents' values are adopted.

When youth perceive their parents as sensitive to their perspective on value-related issues they are less likely to react negatively to parents' value-related expectations and are more likely to be willing to listen to their parents' views (Knafo and Schwartz 2003a). Consequently, parents' tendency to provide rationale for their expectations increases the likelihood that youth will view those expectations as reasonable. Finally, parents' tendency to allow choice regarding the extent and ways in which values are adopted might help children fit those values to their personal beliefs and preferences, thereby helping children feel a sense of choice with regard to the internalization of those values. SDT research has shown that when parents act in these autonomy-supportive ways, children tend to identify with and integrate their parents' opinions, whereas when parents do not support autonomy, children tend to develop external regulation or, at best, merely to introject their

parents' standards (e.g., Assor et al. 2004, 2005; Grolnick and Ryan 1989; Grolnick et al. 1991).

Other research is consistent with this view. For example, children of authoritative parents, who act in autonomy-supportive ways, tend to identify with them and accept their values (Peterson et al. 1997). Similarly, Grusec and Goodnow (1994) suggested that parents who explain the reasons for their values are likely to make children accept these values because they understand the reasons behind these values. We therefore hypothesized that when parents are perceived as using autonomy-supportive practices (i.e., taking the child's perspective, providing rationale, and allowing choice), children's motivations for agreement with parents' values are more autonomous and less controlled.

### **Parenting, autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values, and well-being**

Autonomy-supportive practices are assumed to enable children to realize their basic needs and interests, feel a sense of autonomy, and fully accept themselves (Grolnick et al. 1997). Indeed, studies indicate that autonomy-supportive parenting and teaching is positively associated with indicators of well-being and negatively associated with indicators of poor well-being (e.g., Assor and Kaplan 2001). We therefore hypothesized that autonomy-supportive parenting in relation to values would relate positively to youth's subjective well-being.

According to SDT (Ryan and Deci 2000), autonomous motivations involve understanding the merits of one's actions and a sense of self-determination, thereby promoting well-being. Controlled motivations involve a sense of coercion and alienation from one's authentic self, leading to poor well-being (e.g., Sheldon and Elliot 1999).

In line with SDT and the studies supporting it, we reasoned that a feeling by youth that they truly and freely agree with parents' values promotes well-being because it allows them to feel both autonomous and related. Youth are motivated to agree with their parents' values because having similar values and attitudes is likely to enhance their feeling of closeness and connection with their parents, a feeling associated with positive adjustment (Allen et al. 1998). And, indeed research has shown that value and attitude similarity is associated with close parent-adolescent relations (e.g., Knafo and Schwartz 2003b). Yet, because of their need for autonomy, youth also want to feel that when they agree with their parents' values, they do it because they really want to do it and not out of external or internal pressure. The sense of authenticity and freedom that comes with such an autonomous pursuit of one's values then further contributes to youth feelings of

well-being. Thus, a mental state in which youth feel that they truly want to endorse and enact parental values is a positive emotional experience because it enables youth to feel that in their relations with their parents (and in their life) they can satisfy both their need for relatedness and their need for autonomy.

In contrast, the feeling that one has to comply with values that one does not truly endorse is likely to lead to agitation because one is likely to feel pressured, controlled, and unauthentic; and because this compliance is based on the threat of parental rejection or withdrawal of support if one fails to comply with parents' values. In addition, children are also likely to feel guilty because they do not really identify with parents' values and often feel tempted to act in ways that are inconsistent with these values. We therefore predicted that an autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values would relate positively to the positive aspects of youth well-being, whereas controlled motivation would be associated with the tendency to experience agitation and guilt frequently.

One of the interesting issues in socialization concerns the processes through which parenting affects children's well-being. Although multiple processes may mediate the effects of parenting on children's well-being, in the present study we test the hypothesis that autonomous and controlled motivation for agreement with parental values are two of the processes mediating the association of parenting with children's well-being. We propose that parental autonomy-support in relation to values helps children attain a sense of well-being by facilitating a motivational and self-regulatory process, allowing children to feel close to their parents, while retaining a sense of authenticity and autonomy (Grolnick et al. 1997; Ryan and Lynch 1989).

In contrast, when parents do not act in autonomy-supportive ways, children have to rely on external or internal controls in order to remain consistent with parents' values. Reliance on external or internal controls and pressures as a major motivational force then generates feelings of agitation and guilt. We therefore hypothesized that the relations of perceived autonomy-supportive parenting (in relation to values) with positive indicators of children's well-being would be mediated, at least partly, by autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values, whereas the relations of perceived autonomy-supportive parenting with agitation and guilt would be mediated, at least partly, by controlled motivation.

### **Controlling for the effects of perceived parent-child value-congruence**

Research on congruence between children's values and their perceptions of parents' values has shown a positive

association between perceived value congruence and children's feelings of closeness to their parents (Knafo and Schwartz 2003b). Given that feelings of closeness might promote well-being and that autonomy-support might promote value congruence (in addition to autonomous motivation), it is important to ascertain that value congruence does not in fact account for the association between motivations for agreement with parents' values and well-being.

Based on SDT, we propose that the extent of perceived congruence between children's and parents' values is unlikely to be the major determinant of children's well-being, as part of that congruence might be a product of highly controlling external or internal pressures. Therefore, we hypothesized that the two qualitatively different types of motivation for agreement with parents' values would have unique associations with the positive and negative indicators of well-being over and above the possible effect of perceived value congruence.

## Study 1

The hypotheses were tested with Israeli students in the third decade of their lives. We chose this age group because we sought a life period in which a substantial part of youth has already reassessed their position regarding parental values through an identity-exploration process (e.g., Knafo and Schwartz 2004; Waterman 1999). We assumed that by this age, youth would have already formed opinions as to whether they agree with their parents' values due to autonomous or controlled motivations (Study 2 focuses on mid-late adolescents).

In this study we focused on several subjective well-being aspects. As concerns negative aspects of well-being, we examined agitation and guilt because controlled motivations are often associated with such feelings (e.g., Assor et al. 2004). We examined happiness feelings because they are likely to be aroused by autonomous motivations (Ryan and Deci 2001). In addition, for a sub-sample of respondents, using the life satisfaction scale (Diener et al. 1985), we captured a relatively cognitive aspect of subjective well-being.

We expected the autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values to be associated with youth well-being, and that a controlled motivation for agreement with parental values would be associated with agitation and guilt. These two associations were also expected to hold when the effect of perceived child-parent value congruence was controlled for. In addition, we also predicted that the perception of parenting as autonomy-supportive would relate positively to well-being and negatively to agitation and guilt. Finally, we examined the role of autonomous and

controlled motivations as potential mediators of the relations between perceived parental autonomy-support and the positive and negative indicators of well-being.

## Method

### Participants

Respondents were 399 Israeli undergraduate university and college students (aged 18–30,  $M = 23.8$ ,  $SD = 3.33$ ) in business, accounting, education, psychology, or economics. Classes were selected based on the availability of student course credit for participation. Most respondents (71%) were female, as in Israel most education and psychology students are female, whereas fairly even proportions of males and females are found in the business, accounting and economics courses. We therefore controlled for gender in our initial analyses.

Most (84%) participants have never been married. Of the 63 who were married or divorced, 33 (52%) were parents. The majority of participants (61%) have been employed at least partially at data collection. About 54 participants were not born in Israel, of which 40 (73%) originated in the former Soviet Union. Finally, 44% of the participants were still living with their parents, while 56% lived without their parents. In the analyses we assessed whether controlling for these variables affected the relations among the study variables.

### Procedure

All participants responded in a classroom setting to questionnaires assessing motivations for agreement with parents' values, perceived parental autonomy-support, agitation, guilt and happiness. In some classes it was possible to administer a life satisfaction measure for additional credit ( $N = 187$  students, that did not differ from the rest of the sample on demographic variables or on any of the study variables). Participants provided written consent after being notified of their right not to participate or to stop participation at any time. The study was approved by the Ben-Gurion University behavioral sciences review board.

When describing their parents' parenting practices and their own motivations for agreement with parental values, participants were instructed to respond in regards to both of their parents. However, in case they had been raised only by one parent or otherwise did not feel that they could use one response to describe both parents they were instructed to refer to the parent they saw as more relevant. Only a very small number of participants actually followed this instruction and responded to the questionnaire as if it was about one parent. Further questioning of participants at the



end of the session indicated that most participants did not have a problem with referring to both of their parents at the same time.

### Instruments

*Perceived autonomy-supportive parenting in relation to values.* Five 4-point agree-disagree items measured this construct. The scale focuses on three autonomy-support aspects (Grolnick et al. 1991; Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2005; Vansteenkiste et al. 2005), which according to SDT and previous research (e.g., Assor et al. 2005) contribute to autonomous internalization of parental values: Providing choice, perspective taking, and providing rationale. An item reflecting perspective taking is: “When my parents make decisions, they try to consider what I want;” choice: “My parents enable me to find my own personal way to express the principles they believe in,” provision of rationale: “My parents try to answer seriously the questions I have regarding their principles or the behaviors important to them.” Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this five-item scale was 0.75.

*Subjective well-being* was assessed, in the complete sample, with a list of 10 feelings, drawn, in part, from the work by Assor et al. (2004) on well-being correlates of introjection. Respondents indicated on a 4-point scale the degree to which they have experienced each of the feelings during the past few weeks. This was done because the accumulation of negative or positive feelings over several weeks, rather than at a specific point in time, is likely to give more accurate descriptions of individuals’ overall subjective well-being. As noted, for a sub-sample of respondents, well-being was assessed also with the Diener et al. (1985) Satisfaction with Life scale ( $\alpha = 0.70$  in this study). Agitation was indexed by four items (e.g., “nervous;”  $\alpha = 0.82$ ), guilt (e.g., “guilty;”  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) and happiness (e.g., “happy,”  $\alpha = 0.75$ ) by three items. In an exploratory factor analysis with an oblique rotation, all items had loadings of 0.69 or more on their respective factor. Agitation and guilt correlated positively with each other, as did happiness and life satisfaction (Table 1), while correlations among the positive and negative well-being measures were negative, supporting their construct validity.

*Autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values.* In SDT research (e.g., Ryan and Connell 1989), the extent to which participants’ motivation for a certain action is autonomous or controlled is often assessed by asking participants concerning the reasons for their action. Accordingly, we constructed the present instrument with the format of the Perceived Locus of Causality measure (Ryan and Connell, 1989; Roth et al. 2006). A simple definition of values, “Values are goals in life with which we decide what is good and what is not”),

was followed by “people differ in the extent to which they agree with their parents’ values,” to reduce the potential for responses based on perceptions of what is socially desirable. Respondents then read the following introductory statement: “When you agree with your parents, it is because...” Next followed 14 possible reasons that have been constructed based on scales assessing controlled and autonomous motivations in other domains (in particular, Ryan and Connell 1989) and on conceptual considerations regarding the specific topic of values.

The scales were intended to represent two controlled motivations (external and introjected), and two autonomous motivations (identified and integrated). Respondents rated each reason on a 7-point agree-disagree scale. Based on participants’ reactions, we dropped two items that were not fully understood. Given the theoretical focus of the present research, and following the approach taken by Sheldon and Elliot (1999), the six integrated and identified items were averaged to yield a measure of *autonomous motivation* ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). The six external and introjected items yielded together a measure of *controlled motivation* ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

*Perceived congruence with parental values.* We used a measure devised by Knafo et al. (in press). Respondents read short descriptions (Knafo and Schwartz 2003a) of 10 values and rated their importance to themselves and to their parents on a four-point importance scale. These 10 values (security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, and conformity) have been found to essentially cover the full motivational range of values in extensive cross-cultural work by Schwartz (1992) (Schwartz and Rubel 2005). Perceived congruence was measured by computing a within-person correlation between respondents’ own 10 values and the values they perceived as important for their parents (Knafo and Schwartz 2004). Since these indexes are correlations, we used transformed  $r$  to  $Z$  scores for the analyses.

### Results

Preliminary analyses showed two gender differences. Female participants experienced more autonomy-supportive parenting than males ( $M = 2.28$ ;  $SD = 0.50$ , vs.  $M = 2.07$ ;  $SD = 0.54$ ),  $t = 3.56$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $D = 0.36$ , and reported more perceived congruence with parental values ( $M = 0.91$ ;  $SD = 1.18$ , vs.  $M = 0.65$ ;  $SD = 0.87$ ),  $t = 1.97$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $D = 0.20$ . As our focus was on the motivation for agreement with parental values, we also compared participants living with their parents to those living without them. Participants living with their parents tended to have more controlled reasons for agreeing with their parents’ values ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ , vs.  $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ),  $t = 2.46$ ,

**Table 1** Correlations among measures of subjective well-being, autonomy-supportive parenting, autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement and perceived congruence with parents' values

	2	3	4	5	6	7	Perceived congruence with parents' values
1. Guilt	.56**	-.12**	-.25**	-.24**	-.21**	.24**	.01
2. Agitation		-.23**	-.31**	-.18**	-.06	.18**	-.04
3. Happiness			.59**	.14**	.15**	.07	.15**
4. Life satisfaction				.32**	.36**	-.07	.17*
5. Autonomy-supportive parenting					.46**	-.14**	.26**
6. Autonomous motivation for agreement						.06	.17**
7. Controlled motivation for agreement							.01

Note. The results for life satisfaction are based on 187 respondents. Other results are drawn from the full sample of 399 respondents

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$ , 1-tailed

$p < .05$ ,  $D = 0.25$ . Despite these significant differences, in none of the regression analyses presented below did controlling for gender and living with parents affect the results. We therefore did not include these variables in further analyses.

*Distinguishing autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parents' values*

Our first hypothesis, that participants would distinguish between autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values, was strongly supported. In an exploratory factor analysis with an oblique rotation two factors corresponded to the hypothesized autonomous motivation and controlled motivation constructs, as demonstrated by the factor loadings in Table 2. The autonomous and controlled motivations were unrelated ( $r = .06$ , ns), indicating that the two types of motivations are distinct from each other. Therefore, in our analyses we studied them separately.

*Parenting, motivations for agreement with parental values, and well-being*

Table 1 presents the correlations among all study variables. In accordance with the hypotheses, autonomy-supportive parenting related positively to autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values and negatively to controlled motivation. Also as hypothesized, autonomy-supportive parenting related positively to happiness and life satisfaction, and negatively to guilt and agitation. As expected, controlled motivation for agreement with parental values related positively to guilt and agitation, whereas autonomous motivation related positively to happiness and life satisfaction. In addition, it also related negatively to guilt. In further analyses, controlling for the demographic variables of age, gender, migration status, marriage status,

parenthood, work status, and living with parents had little effect.

Finally, we tested whether the correlations of well-being with agreement with parental values, autonomy support, and motivations for agreement, differed for males and females and for participants living with or without their parents. Two gender differences were found in the magnitude of the correlations, as the relationships between guilt and agitation and controlled motivation were stronger for males than for females (guilt,  $r = 0.47$  vs.  $.18$ , both  $p < .01$ ,  $z = 2.80$  for correlations difference; agitation,  $r = 0.36$ , vs.  $0.14$ , both  $p < .01$ ,  $z = 2.01$ ). The only significant difference between the correlations obtained for participants living with or without their parents was for autonomy-support, which correlated more positively with happiness for participants living with their parents ( $r = 0.27$ ,  $p < .01$ , vs.  $r = 0.06$ , ns,  $z = 2.01$ ).

*Autonomous agreement as mediator of the parenting and well-being relationship*

We next tested the hypothesis that autonomous or controlled motivations for agreement with parents' values would mediate the effect of parenting on well-being. To reduce the number of mediation analyses we combined the two negative well-being indicators (guilt and agitation) and the two positive measures (happiness and life satisfaction), by standardizing each scale and then averaging the positive and negative scales separately. Preliminary analyses ascertained that the basic mediation conditions were met (significant relationships among the independent and dependent variables and the mediator), and the mediation effects were tested using Sobel's test (Baron and Kenny 1986), where motivation can be considered a mediator of the relation between autonomy-supportive parenting and well-being if introducing that motivation results in a significant reduction of the latter relation. We also tested the

**Table 2** Items reflecting different reasons for agreement with perceived parental values and their factor structure

Item content	Motivation	Study 1		Study 2	
		Factor 1 loading	Factor 2 loading	Factor 1 loading	Factor 2 loading
Controlled motivation					
2. Because it's profitable	External	0.15	0.77	0.19	0.70
8. So that my parents will give me what I want	External	-0.04	0.79	-0.18	0.70
11. Because I don't want my parents to scold me	External	-0.06	0.82	-0.05	0.71
3. Because otherwise I would feel bad about myself	Introjected	0.08	0.73	0.23	0.78
5. Because sometimes I feel there is something inside me that forces me to agree with my parents' values	Introjected	-0.02	0.66	0.08	0.69
9. Because I don't want to disappoint my parents	Introjected	0.02	0.75	0.11	0.77
Autonomous motivation					
1. Because I think my parents' values are just (moral)	Identified	0.72	-0.03	0.44	-0.23
4. Because I understand the logic behind my parents' values	Identified	0.74	0.03	0.76	0.02
12. Because my parents' values seem right to me	Identified	0.84	-0.10	0.85	0.11
6. Because my parents' values fit the kind of person I am	Integrated	0.83	-0.03	0.82	0.06
7. Because my parents' values match my natural tendencies	Integrated	0.83	0.03	0.84	0.12
10. Because I am like my parents by nature	Integrated	0.70	0.25	0.65	0.27
Proportion of the variance accounted for by the factor		0.31	0.29	0.31	0.24

*Note.* Items are English translations of the original Hebrew items. Respondents reacted to the items in response to the question "When you agree with your parents, it is because..." Factor loadings are based on exploratory factor analyses using oblique rotation

mediation with a procedure involving bootstrapping by selecting samples with replacements and repeating the analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2004).

We first tested whether controlled agreement, that related to the negative aspects of well-being ( $B = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $\beta = 0.25$ ,  $t = 5.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) mediated the relationship between autonomy-supportive parenting and negative aspects of well-being ( $B = -0.39$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $t = -4.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The association of parenting with negative aspects of well-being was significantly reduced when controlled agreement was introduced as a mediator, as noted in the drop in the standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients (from  $\beta = -0.23$  to  $\beta = -0.20$ ;  $B = -0.39$  vs.  $B = -0.34$ ; Sobel test,  $z = -2.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The bootstrapping procedure supported these findings by drawing a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of autonomy-support on well-being (-0.01 to -0.10) that did not include zero.

We next tested whether autonomous agreement, which relates to the positive aspects of well-being ( $B = 0.17$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 3.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ), mediated the relationship between parenting and positive aspects of well-being ( $B = 0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $t = 3.94$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The association of autonomy-supportive parenting with positive well-being was significantly reduced when autonomous agreement was introduced as a mediator

( $\beta = .19$  vs.  $\beta = 0.13$ ;  $B = 0.35$  vs.  $B = 0.24$ ;  $z = 2.32$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Again, the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of autonomy-support on well-being did not include zero (0.02–0.21).

In sum, the mediation hypothesis was supported. It should be noted, however, that the mediation effects were fairly small and partial, and parenting had a direct predictive effect on subjective well-being over and above controlled or autonomous agreement.

#### *Autonomous agreement, congruence with perceived parental values, and well-being*

Perceived congruence with parental values related positively and significantly to happiness and to life satisfaction (Table 1). Since perceived congruence correlated positively with the autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values, it could be argued that perceived congruence might account for the relations between autonomous motivation for agreement with parents' values and well-being. We therefore examined whether autonomous motivations would have unique effects on well-being also when the effects of perceived congruence were controlled for. Table 3 presents the result of multiple regression analyses, in which each well-being measure was regressed on three predictors: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation,

**Table 3** Regression of subjective well-being on autonomous and controlled motivation for agreement and perceived congruence with parental values

	Subjective well-being measure			
	Guilt	Agitation	Happiness	Life satisfaction
Standardized regression coefficients for:				
Autonomous motivation for agreement	-.23**	-.07	.12*	.18*
Controlled motivation for agreement	.27**	.19**	.07	.01
Perceived congruence with parental values	-.05	-.04	.10*	-.02
<i>F</i>	15.83**	5.01**	5.01**	9.78**
<i>df</i>	3,389	3,389	3,389	3,174
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.12	.04	.03	.03

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ 

and perceived congruence with parental values. In all analyses, either autonomous or controlled motivation for agreement with parental values predicted well-being over and above perceived congruence with parents' values. Only for happiness did congruence have an independent contribution to the variance explained,  $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $t = 2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

The results support the notion that there are both autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values, and that youth clearly distinguish between them. As hypothesized, a motivation for agreement with parental values guided by the perception of these values as inherently worthy (autonomous motivation) was associated with subjective well-being, whereas a motivation for agreement driven by fears of punishment or loss of self-esteem (controlled motivation) was linked with feelings of agitation and guilt. Also as expected, perceptions of autonomy-supportive parenting in relation to values related positively to an autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values and well-being, and negatively to a controlled motivation for agreement. The findings are consistent with the view that the effect of parental autonomy-support on youth well-being is, at least in part, mediated by autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parents' values. However, the mediation effects were modest, indicating that parental autonomy-support is mainly associated with well-being either directly or through additional mediators. Finally, it is important to note that the expected relations between the two types of motivation for agreement with parents' values and the well-being indicators were detected also when the effect of congruence with perceived parents' values was controlled for.

Several aspects of Study 1 prompted us to replicate the results in a second study. First, the sample included youth who for the most part did not live with their parents any more. Youth still living with their parents were higher on controlled motivation for agreement with their parents' values, and perception of autonomy-supportive parenting correlated with happiness more strongly for youth living with parents than for youth not living with their parents. One possible interpretation of this is that youth who still live with their parents are more dependent on external rewards from their parents, and therefore tend to have more controlled motivations to agree with their parents' values. Yet, if their parents are autonomy-supportive it is more beneficial for them, as they are in daily contact with their parents.

The findings obtained with youth living with their parents suggest that perhaps the relations between autonomy-support, motivations for agreement with parents' values and well-being might differ as a function of living conditions and developmental phase. For example, it is possible that for adolescents who live with their parents and are more dependent on them economically and legally, perceived congruence with parents' values is much more important than is autonomous motivation to agree with parents' values. However, based on SDT we would predict that autonomous motivation should have an independent effect on well-being also among adolescents. Thus, while extent of agreement with parents' values might be important for adolescents, they would still strive to feel authentic and autonomous when they act in ways that are consistent with parents' values.

Based on these considerations, we ran a second study with mid-to-late adolescents, living with their parents and still in high-school. Replicating the results with adolescents also addresses the issue of age differences in identity formation patterns. Study 1 examined a sample of young



adults. By this age, participants have already undergone an important part of their identity formation process and have explored personal goals and values at some depth (cf. Waterman 1999). From a developmental perspective, it is important to study these processes also with younger individuals, who may be less clear on their personal values.

## Study 2

Study 2 sought to replicate the main findings of Study 1, replacing a relatively homogeneous student sample with a heterogeneous community sample. Most of the research instruments used in this study were identical to those of Study 1. The main change is the replacement of the general well-being measures of Study 1 with self-acceptance, a more specific aspect of well-being, that theoretically should be particularly related to autonomous motivations. Self-acceptance can be expected to be particularly related to the identified and integrated motivations as they generate a feeling that one is doing what is important and consistent with one's authentic self. Individuals acting in such ways are more likely to experience self-acceptance. We expected the second study to reconfirm our hypotheses, thus showing that our findings are stable and apply across different ages and measures.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Study 2 included 131 Israeli Jewish high school students, participating as part of a larger study on values and violence (Knafo et al. in press). Their ages ranged from 15 to 19 ( $M = 16.8$ ;  $SD = 0.76$ ). They were recruited by telephone using phone numbers taken from high school student directories and answered the questionnaire at home. Participants were notified of their right not to participate or to stop participation at their discretion. Adolescents who agreed to participate with their parents' permission (46%) provided written consent. They were assured that their responses would be anonymous and confidential, and required to answer the questionnaires alone, without parental intervention. The study was approved by the Hebrew University psychology review board.

About half (47%) of the respondents were female. All but one were living with one (15%) or both of their parents (85%). Twenty-one participants were not born in Israel, of which 18 (86%) originated in the former Soviet Union. In the analyses we assessed whether any of these attributes related to the study variables, and whether controlling for these demographic variables affected the relations among the study variables.

## Instruments

*Perceived autonomy-supportive parenting* was measured with the same scale used in Study 1. In this sample Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.77.

*Subjective well-being* was assessed with the 14-item self-acceptance subscale of the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff and Keyes 1995). This scale taps a positive attitude and a sense of satisfaction with regard to the self and a low degree of disappointment with one's personal qualities and with past behavior and decisions (e.g., "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out;" "In general, I feel confident and positive about myself"). This scale has been widely used in previous research (e.g., Gross and John 2003), and correlates positively with life satisfaction and happiness, and negatively with depression and other negative affect (Ryff and Keyes 1995). Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.85.

*Autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values* were assessed with the 12 items used in the final version of the scales developed in Study 1. Again, yielding a measure of *autonomous motivation* ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) and of *controlled motivation* ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ).

*Perceived congruence with parental values.* The same measure as in Study 1 was used.

## Results

Preliminary analyses showed no significant difference on any of the study variables due to gender, age, migration status or belonging to a single-parent family. Table 4 presents the intercorrelations among all study variables. Controlling for the demographic variables had little effect on these correlations.

In replication of Study 1 results, factor analysis supported the distinction between autonomous and controlled

**Table 4** Correlations between autonomy-supportive parenting, autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement, perceived congruence with parents' values, and self-acceptance

	2	3	4	Self-acceptance
1. Autonomy-supportive parenting	.47**	-.02	.27**	.27**
2. Autonomous motivation for agreement		.12	.34**	.20**
3. Controlled motivation for agreement			-.13	-.15
4. Perceived congruence with parents' values				.19*

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$ , 1-tailed

motivations for agreement with parental values (Table 2) yielding two independent factors,  $r = .06$ , ns.

Although the samples in the two studies were not fully comparable (Study 1 included university students, Study 2 adolescents reached through the general community), comparing the scores of adolescents and young adults on the main study variables can reveal interesting differences. First, note that perceived congruence with parental values did not differ in the two groups, (adolescents,  $M = 0.68$ ,  $SD = 0.81$ ; young adults,  $M = .71$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ),  $t = 0.37$ , ns. Adolescents ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ) experienced somewhat more autonomy-supportive parenting than young adults ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ),  $t = 4.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $D = 0.36$ , and were slightly higher on their autonomous motivations for agreement with parental values ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ , vs.  $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ),  $t = 4.02$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $D = 0.35$ . The major difference between the two groups was in the controlled motivation for agreement with parental values, which was much higher among adolescents ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ , vs.  $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $t = 10.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $D = 0.90$ .

As hypothesized, autonomy-supportive parenting related positively to autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values,  $r = 0.47$ ,  $p < .01$ , although in this study it did not correlate with the controlled motivation for agreement with parents. Also as hypothesized, autonomy-supportive parenting related positively to self-acceptance (Table 4).

As expected, autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values related positively to self-acceptance (Table 4). The expected negative relationship between self-acceptance and the controlled motivation was weaker, although this correlation turned out to be significant and negative when the demographic variables were controlled,  $r = -0.17$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Analyses did not support the mediation of the relationship between parental autonomy-support and self-acceptance through autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values. The association of autonomy-supportive parenting with self-acceptance was reduced, but not significantly so, when autonomous agreement was introduced as a mediator,  $\beta = 0.27$  vs.  $\beta = 0.22$ ;  $B = 0.19$  vs.  $B = 0.16$ ; Sobel's test,  $z = 1.02$ , ns. This lack of replication may represent the reduced power in Study 2 to detect a mediation effect of small magnitude.

Perceived congruence with parental values related positively both to self-acceptance and to the autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values. Again, we examined whether perceived congruence with parental values accounted for the relationship between autonomous motivation and well-being. In a multiple regression analysis, both autonomous motivation ( $B = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $t = 2.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and controlled motivation

( $B = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $\beta = -0.19$ ,  $t = -2.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ) had independent contributions to self-acceptance ( $R^2 = .07$ ), but perceived congruence with parental values did not ( $B = 0.21$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ,  $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $t = 1.22$ , ns), indicating that perceived congruence had little effect on self-acceptance beyond that of the autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values.

## General discussion

Two separate studies showed a clear distinction between autonomous and controlled motivations for agreement with parental values, and that autonomous motivation was positively associated with positive aspects of subjective well-being, independent of the effect of perceived congruence with parental values. As expected, in both studies autonomy-supportive parenting related positively to autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values and well-being. The replicated findings linking autonomous motivation for agreement with parents' values with well-being underscore the importance of the experience of autonomy in youth formation of values and in intergenerational value transmission processes.

The present research is the first to specifically address the motivations underlying children's agreement with parents' values. Past research has generally addressed parent characteristics as predictors of the overall parent-child agreement (e.g., Knafo 2003; Schönplflug 2001). Following Grusec and Goodnow (1994), an increased importance has been given to the way children perceive, interpret, and adopt parents' values (Knafo and Schwartz 2004; Padilla-Walker and Carlo 2004). This study increases our understanding of the processes by which youth take on the values they believe their parents espouse. Our findings suggest that traditional ways of reporting value agreement may include two components—a controlled one and an autonomous one. Whether the first or the second component is more dominant may be traced back to parental autonomy-support, and is associated with the well-being of youth and adolescents.

There are several open questions regarding the motivations for agreement with parental values and the processes through which parent-child value congruence is established. First, in both studies perceived congruence with parental values correlated positively with autonomous motivation for agreement with parental values, but not with controlled motivation. Adolescents may be more willing to accept parents' perceived values if motivation for this agreement is autonomous. These findings are clearly consistent with the SDT notion that the positive feelings and sense of authenticity associated with autonomous motivation for agreement with parents' values enhances youth

tendency to accept their parents' values across time. Similarly, SDT suggests that as time passes, the negative feelings associated with controlled motivation might lead youth to disagree with and reject their parents' values. Future research should examine these predictions longitudinally.

Second, the perceived congruence assessed in this study refers to agreement with perceived parental values. Agreement is just one step on the way to actual parent–child value congruence. To share their parents' actual values, children first need to accurately perceive these values (Grusec and Goodnow 1994; Knafo and Schwartz 2003a, in press). Future research should address these issues more fully. For example, it is possible to use a longitudinal design to see whether actual and perceived congruence with parents' values are more stable across time when the motivation for agreement is autonomous rather than controlled.

Value content is another important aspect of value development not included in this study. Adolescents ascribe more legitimacy to parental demands in some domains than in others (Smetana 1995); parental opinions regarding values that reflect the “personal” domain (Smetana 1995) such as achievement, hedonism, and stimulation (Schwartz 1992) were less accepted by adolescents than values reflecting the social, moral and prudential domains (e.g., benevolence, universalism, and security) (Knafo and Schwartz in press). Future studies should test the notion that the degrees of autonomous or controlled motivations for agreement with parental values may differ by value content, with controlled motivations more relevant for domains in which adolescents see parental influence as less legitimate.

Another important avenue for future research is an investigation of the psychological dynamics of autonomous versus controlled motivation for agreement with parental values. We have shown that the overall affective states associated with these divergent motivations are different, but the emotional and cognitive processes that transpire when youth experience each motivation as they deliberate upon their values are still in need of further investigation. For example, it is possible that for youth who agree with their parents' values for controlled reasons values are more like “truisms,” that are grounded in a fairly shallow conceptual system and which can be easily manipulated (Maio and Olson 1998). For youth who agree with their parents' values for autonomous reasons, values may be grounded in a more elaborate conceptual system (e.g., Assor et al. 2005), more self-central, and therefore also more strongly related to behavior (Verplanken and Holland 2002). If this is the case, the meaning and implications of agreeing with or even ascribing importance to a certain value may be different in the case of controlled versus autonomous motivations.

The processes through which an autonomous agreement with parental values may affect youth well-being should be further pursued. Youth who agree with their parents' values for autonomous reasons may feel they have more control over their lives by autonomously regulating their own values. The sense of authenticity and psychological freedom associated with such an autonomous pursuit of one's own goals could in turn increase their well-being.

The nature of youth striving for autonomy in value formation and the role of parents

Some psychoanalytically oriented theorists portray youth as attempting to develop beliefs and values that are very different from those of their parents in order to feel autonomous and differentiated from their parents (e.g., Blos 1979). A. Freud (1958) argued that the development of opinions divergent from parents' opinions is a marker of satisfactory development in late adolescence. However, this study suggests that it is possible for youth to perceive themselves as accepting parents' values in an autonomous manner. Thus, the striving for autonomy, as conceptualized in the present study and in SDT (e.g., Assor et al. 2002; Chirkov et al. 2003; Ryan and Lynch 1989), does not necessarily guide youth to develop values different from those of their parents. However, it does cause young people to question the justification for their parents' values, to examine the extent to which these values allow the expression of their own authentic dispositions, and to reject attempts to impose parental values using controlling strategies such as conditional love (see Assor et al. 2004). A perfect replication of values across generations is not possible, nor is it necessarily desirable (Goodnow 1997). The need to feel autonomous in relation to values espoused by the older generation appears to guarantee at least some change in values across the generations.

The results highlight the potential role of parents in the value formation process. Perceived autonomy-supportive parenting relates positively to autonomous agreement with parental values, and for young adults also negatively to controlled agreement. This suggests that when children feel that their parents respect their attempts to form values in reflective and exploratory ways, they can also experience their striving for autonomy as compatible with their need to remain closely related to their parents. In fact, in such cases, the relationship with one's parents can serve as a framework that actually enhances the growth of a value-orientation and an identity that are experienced as autonomous and authentic.

Autonomy-supportive parents do not cede attempts to influence their children. Rather, they try to present a convincing case for their own values by providing a sound rationale, by demonstrating these values through their own

behavior, and by exemplifying the sense of meaning and satisfaction that successful realization of the relevant values produces (e.g., Assor et al. 2002). Parents can help children to integrate parental values into children's authentic sense of self and identity by showing flexibility in their value-related expectations, permitting children to express their own personal dispositions within the general orientation presented by their parents.

Autonomy-support, autonomous and controlled motivations, and well-being

Most of the correlations were not very large in size and no variable accounted for over 13% of the variance in any of the well-being measures. This reflects in part the fact that subjective well-being is determined by additional factors, such as personality and life events (Diener et al. 2003). Similarly, the motivation behind agreement with perceived parental values is likely to be influenced, besides parental autonomy-support, by factors such as parents' reasoning ability, and the truth-value children ascribe to their parents' values (Grusec and Goodnow 1994). The mediation effects were not large either, as might be expected when the effects of a global variable such as parenting are mediated by a more specific mediator such as motivations to accept parents' values.

Comparing the results of youth living either with or without their parents may provide an increased understanding of the role of life stage in the development of different motivations for agreement with parental values. In Study 1, youth living with their parents tended to have more controlled reasons for agreeing with their parents' values, as compared to youth living without their parents. Study 2 adolescents had even higher levels of controlled motivation for agreement with parents' values. As children grow up and become increasingly independent from their parents, the role of controlled motivations for agreement may become weaker, possibly because parents have fewer opportunities to critique, praise, or administer sanctions.

Limitations and future directions

The current study assessed perceived parenting, motivations for agreement with parental values, and subjective well-being, entirely with youth and adolescent reports. Subjective well-being and motivations for holding values are, by definition, phenomenological constructs, therefore, assessing them via self-reports is reasonable. As for parenting, although the replication of the main findings in the two samples is encouraging, it is important in future research to employ additional indicators of parents' behaviors.

As noted, we adopted a phenomenological perspective, seeking to first examine the way youth perceive the

variables of interest, and how these perceptions are related to each other. However, correlations obtained among self report measures can be a product of a general response bias such as social desirability. Although this is possible, it is important to note that other studies have shown that the relations between measures similar to those used in the present research could not be accounted for by social desirability or a general positivity bias (Roth et al. in press; Kaplan et al. 2003).

According to SDT, whether children agree with their parents' values for autonomous or controlled reasons is likely to affect their well-being. However, the findings bearing on this notion should be interpreted with caution because our correlational analyses were not based on longitudinal data. Longitudinal research (Kaplan et al. 2003) did show that a measure of autonomous motivation similar to the one used here was more a product than a determinant of autonomy-support, and was more a determinant than a product of youth well-being.

Yet, in the present study, it is possible to construct an alternative causal interpretation, in which autonomy-supportive parenting is more a product than a cause of motivation for agreement with parents' values. According to this account, when youth have intrinsic tendencies to develop values that are similar to what parents want, parents may find it easier to behave in autonomy-supportive ways. In contrast, children who tend to behave in ways opposed to parental values may lead their parents to act in coercive ways (e.g., Knafo and Plomin 2006). Longitudinal studies are needed to allow more rigorous examination of the causal relations between parenting, motivations for agreement with parental values, and subjective well-being.

## Conclusions

This is a first attempt at studying the motivations of youth and adolescents for agreement with parental values, a topic of great importance to the fields of family studies, socialization, and personality development. This study suggests that youth and adolescent autonomous rather than controlled motivation for agreement with parental values relates to their subjective well-being. Therefore, it appears that parents concerned with youth well-being should not limit their value education efforts merely to achieving youth agreement with parental values. Consistent with the notion of autonomy-supportive parenting, such parents may try to promote autonomous internalization of their values by being sensitive to the child's viewpoint and feelings, by explaining their expectations, and by allowing choice regarding the extent and ways in which their values may be embraced by their children. To the extent that parents act in such ways, it is likely that they would not



only succeed in transmitting most of their values to their children, but that the autonomous way in which their children would internalize their values would contribute to their children's well-being.

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