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Parents, individualism and education: three paradigms and four countries

Ralph Fevre^{1,2} , Isabel Guimarães³ and Wei Zhao²

¹*School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales, UK,* ²*School of Sociology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China,* ³*Católica Porto Business School, Porto, Portugal*

Abstract The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) is an important indicator of the increased global importance of education. It defines the goal of education at the level of the child rather than the state, the community or household. The requirement that each child be treated as an individual who can expect to see their ‘personality, talents and mental and physical abilities’ fully developed, is an example of the individualism which features in three important theoretical paradigms for understanding the rise of education and training. We compare accounts of the global growth of education produced by functionalism, neoinstitutionalism and political economy with the help of qualitative research on children’s experience of parental influences. The research is drawn from semi-structured interviews with millennial graduates in Portugal, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It reveals weaknesses in the paradigms which are related to the way each theorises individualism and the role it plays in parental influence on education. The functionalist and neoinstitutionalist conceptions of individualism limit the usefulness of these paradigms for understanding changes in the way families around the world prepare children for education. The political economy paradigm is more promising; however, an approach which identifies only one, neoliberal, version of individualism has limited purchase on international differences in parental influences and the way these influences are changing. An approach which can draw on the contrast between a cognitive individualism associated with neoliberalism, and sentimental individualism which originates in social movements, is more promising.

Keywords political economy, neoinstitutionalism, functionalism, international comparative, individualism.

Introduction

The right to education which is ‘free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages’ appeared in the 1959 iteration of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The 1989 iteration required free and compulsory primary education, secondary education available to all at no cost or with a subsidy where necessary,

Corresponding author: Ralph Fevre, Thornfield, Llanquian Road, Aberthin, Cowbridge, CF71 7HE, United Kingdom. Email: fevre@cardiff.ac.uk

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and access to higher education for all who had the ability. We might infer that the global expansion of education is a process driven by supra-national organisations, governments, and their bureaucracies, rather than by parents. However, a great deal of research in the sociology of education suggests that parents have played a key role, especially where they have adapted to the increased significance of education, for example encouraging their children to be competitive and even entrepreneurial. This implies that parents play a supporting role in a highly rationalised process, but parents may also contribute precisely because families themselves are not rationalised institutions. From this viewpoint, only parents can give their children the values and emotional support they need to thrive when education has become so important.

Each of these views can be traced to a different theoretical paradigm. The idea that families are largely irrelevant is found in a neoinstitutional paradigm which sees the global expansion of education and training as part of the rise of 'world culture'. Middle-class families supporting the expansion of education are found in a political economy paradigm which understands the process as a key component in the spread of neoliberalism. Families with more than a subaltern role are most easily found in a functionalist paradigm which sees the underlying process as one of increasing structural differentiation. In the first part of this paper we explore the way in which each of these paradigms is equipped to deal with differences in the experience of parental influence around the world. In the second part, we test each paradigm with empirical data on differences in one aspect of parental influence in four different countries: the way parents encourage *individualism* amongst their offspring.

While its policy stipulations are for governments, the UNCRC (1989) defines the goal of educational provision at the level of the individual child rather than that of the state, the community or household. Its purpose is to develop 'the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential'. The requirement that each child should be treated as an individual who has the right to develop in this multi-faceted and ambitious way, is an example of the individualism which all three theoretical paradigms have come to acknowledge as accompanying the rise of education and training. This is not surprising since individualism is seen as a key characteristic of world culture, neoliberalism and increased structural differentiation. Parental attitudes towards individualism are therefore potentially important for explaining international differences in parental influence. However, the next section of this article will show that what is meant by 'individualism' in each of the three paradigms is sometimes quite different and that these differences affect, in turn, the way each paradigm theorises parental influence.

In the second part of this article we explore the strengths and weaknesses of these three paradigms by using new international comparative evidence on the way parents have prepared children for participation in education and the labour market. Rather than interviewing parents, we interviewed those on the receiving end of parenting, since it is the *experience* of this parental influence that is most relevant to our concerns. We decided that this required interviewing those children as adults, even though the parenting they were describing took place in the past, and parenting practices may well have changed in each of the societies where we undertook research. Readers should be aware of this possibility throughout, although they will also recognise, we hope, that the kind of data we have managed to gather would not have been produced

by interviews with children. In this article we concentrate on the experiences of parental influence during the years of compulsory education, including accounts of parental influence on informal and extra-curricular education.

Three theoretical paradigms

Neoinstitutionalism

The key elements of the paradigm which sees parental influence as irrelevant to the global expansion of education are the neoinstitutional theories of world culture, individualism, and the interpretation of Weber's theory of rationalisation which underpins them (Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012). John Meyer posits that the institutions which bureaucratic organisations nest within are directly affected by rationalisation (Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012). This *organisation of organisations* means that they become increasingly isomorphic, adopting the same policies and practices as rationalisation tightens its grip. As a result, cultural differences between countries disappear and a world culture arises (Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012). The spread of an isomorphic education system epitomises this process (Meyer *et al.*, 1977). This theory has important implications for the way neoinstitutionalists view the influence of parents.

Neoinstitutionalists usually see the family as a primordial group which plays no role in the development of world culture (Boli and Meyer, 1987; Meyer, 1987; Meyer and Bromley, 2013). In the past, people lived as members of groups, including family groups of various kinds, and did not behave in the way the institutions of world culture required. For example, if a young person was motivated solely by short-term obligations to their parents and siblings, they would not see the point in extending their schooling or excelling in examinations. World culture demands that such obligations disappear so that they do not impede our participation in 'the public institutionalisation of the individual life course' (Meyer, 1987:243), a predictable and near universal progression through the stages of life, including various educational phases followed by employment and eventual retirement. Stages are usually marked by publicly available evidence of our progression, such as examination certificates.

According to Meyer, we are no longer influenced by our parents because world culture requires us to comport ourselves as individuals making rational decisions in pursuit of our own goals. Meyer points out that this subjective experience of world culture also requires us to ignore the institutions which forcefully shape our lives. Indeed, he refers to this conception of the individual as a *myth* to which we all subscribe because this is how the institutions describe us. The institutions say we have rights and agency as individuals; so, for example, we imagine we actively choose our own occupations (Meyer, Boli and Thomas, 1987; also see Scott and Meyer, 1994). World culture requires the marginalisation of parental influence, yet it is a beguiling, but false, individualism that delivers this. We do not ignore our parents because we have replaced one institution (the family) with others (within work and education), but because we believe we, and not the new institutions, are shaping our lives.

The institutions of education, labour market and workplace confirm that people are right to subscribe to the myth of individualism. This is the effect of the right to

education set out by the UNCRC, cited at the beginning of this article. Similarly, labour markets and workplaces around the world are increasingly governed by laws which say people will be treated as individuals and not according to their group membership. These laws are nested in the laws enshrining human rights, including the rights of the child, which neoinstitutionalists see as integral to world culture because they affirm individualism (Thomas *et al.*, 1987; Scott and Meyer, 1994; Elliott, 2007; Matthias, 2013; Amahazion, 2016). These laws also give individuals direct encouragement to defy family authority, for example over issues affecting women, such as differential access to education, forced marriage and genital mutilation.

While modern institutions confirm that we are right to subscribe to the myth of individualism, this is not the initial reason for our endorsement. This requires a conception of 'self' which does not begin with modern, rationalised institutions. Meyer (1987) says this 'subjective' dimension of individualism must logically precede our immersion in the institutionalised life course. Without the founding myth of individuals with their 'own' wishes and feelings, the rationalised myth of an individual navigating the public sphere would be inconceivable.

Just as the conception of 'self' must precede immersion in the institutional life course, so the conviction that all human life matters (despite all the evidence to the contrary with social inequality) precedes the commitment of rational organisations to human rights. In fact, this conviction is just as much a product of the conception of self as our hopes and aspirations, because when we conceive of self, we must allow that others do so too (Meyer, 1987). Nor would there be widespread agreement on institutional arrangements—such as the UNCRC—to protect human rights since these are built on the same foundations of a belief in egalitarian individualism.

The source of the 'subjective' dimension of individualism is not the rationalised institutions, yet nor is it the family. To be sure, Meyer associates it with conceptions of the soul and the human spirit in the non-rationalised sphere. This allows him to argue that the 'subjective' dimension can be conceived as the stimulus to institutionalisation: 'life course institutions have evolved to link the sacred Western self with rationalised society' (Meyer, 1987:257). At this point, Meyer draws our attention to family obligations, as examples of what was previously seen as 'sacred or natural' were rationalised with 'the incorporation of individuals as members into expanding rationalised collectivities' (1987:246). Meyer sees beliefs about the soul and the human spirit as the origin of the subjective dimension, but the only role for the family in the inculcation of the myth of the individual is as an early model of the way modern institutions shape behaviour through the 'non-subjective' dimension. The early model is a 'primordial group' differing from those institutions (typically formal organisations) which have shaped modernity. Primordial groups grow weaker as 'the rights, authority, and responsibility of the individual human being' grow stronger (Meyer and Bromley, 2013:230).

This change in relative strength is one of the core elements in the cultural shift which has made world culture possible and it is implicated in another—the global expansion of education. It now becomes possible to rationalise the 'sacred or natural' phenomena, relying on modern institutions to reproduce *both* dimensions of individualism, including the idea that we have wishes and feelings that matter. Thus, institutions draw on modern psychological theories to develop individuals who generate

hopes and ambitions which will give them the motivation to participate in ‘life course institutions’ (Frank, Meyer and Miyahara, 1995; Frank and McEneaney, 1999). The family plays no role in the development of the ‘subjective’ dimension and cannot defend it when modern institutions undermine it by confounding its universal principles with evidence of individual differences in achievement.

In sum, families and parental influence are, at best, irrelevant to the development of either the sense of self or participation in the institutionalised life course. Drawing on Berger, Berger and Keller (1974), neoinstitutionalist theory posits the ‘under-institutionalisation’ of the family while other institutions, particularly in education, grow stronger. Compulsory universal education increases precisely because the new global culture requires a person who is no longer anchored in a family and community. It is often a measure of ‘individual empowerment’ (Meyer and Bromley, 2013) that people do not feel constrained by duties and obligations to such primordial groups (Meyer, 1987). It is through the work of educational institutions, rather than families, that the rights, authority and responsibilities of individuals are affirmed. Only if they are cut loose from family obligations can people fulfil ‘the central social obligation of the subjective self—to find meaning and satisfaction in the life course situation in which it is located’ (Meyer, 1987:253).

Providing the sense of self which is required for our participation in the institutionalised life course might be a suitable task for the institutions, if not the family, who are responsible for early years schooling and, perhaps, for the institutions which organise parallel after-school activities where children engage in sport and hobbies. Neoinstitutionalists explore the role of textbook publishers, private tutors and providers of enrichment programmes, only rarely considering the role that families might play in preparing children to be receptive to the individualism promoted by other institutions (Davies, Quirke and Aurini, 2006; Meyer and Rowan, 2006). They have generally argued that the effect of parental socio-economic background is weak and only becomes visible with advanced educational institutions which require high-stakes examinations, where results might be affected by parental interference (Baker, 2006).

However, one study has suggested that family influence over achievement is also evident in developing countries (Baker and Le Tendre, 2005). This same study identified families as playing a key role in the growth of supplementary remedial and enrichment education, which might well be a new phase in world culture. This new phase had begun in East Asia but there was now increasing evidence of ‘shadow education’ in the West, including the United States. Mori and Baker (2010) argued that the combination of family influence and private tutoring organisations would be increasingly accepted as part of mainstream institutional arrangements for extending the mass education required for world culture.

Political economy

Theories of neoliberalism and competitive individualism are key elements of the paradigm which sees some parents playing an important role in the global expansion of education. They are underpinned by a theory that the world is being remade, albeit unevenly, on the model of American capitalist society (Bourdieu, 1998; Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012). When families outside the US play a key role in spreading

competitive individualism, this is taken as evidence of the conversion of their ruling elites to neoliberalism (Teo, 2011, 2012; Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012). The style of parenting which promotes individualism in such countries may be a result of 'neoliberal pressures to raise entrepreneurial children who are ready to compete in a post-industrial market of talents and ideas' (Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik, 2015:92). However, and in contrast to the neoinstitutional paradigm, the political economy paradigm allows for variations in parental influence within and between countries. This goes hand in hand with the elaboration of more flexible and nuanced understandings of individualism. For example, such understandings appear in the sociologies, and particularly anthropologies, of the way families relate to the individualism required by neoliberalism.

In the US, the individualism of children in middle-class families is 'feted' and children's rooms bulge 'with toys, clothes, and trophies engraved with their names' (Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik, 2015: 94). American parents apparently celebrate every achievement of their children, while air-brushing their own contribution to their success. Many of the studies reviewed by Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik (2015) focus on the way parents interact with education institutions, for example not only supervising, but helping children with homework and laying on 'enrichment' activities outside school hours. Other approaches to parenting exist where neoliberalism is not hegemonic.

Thus, in their comparative anthropological study of Italy and the US, Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante (2015) found Italian parents tried to safeguard the freedom and autonomy of their children, not just from their own enthusiasms and concerns about their children's futures, but also from over-demanding schools. In the US, families were enrolled in a partnership with schools which had been labelled as 'concerted cultivation' by Lareau (2003). This involved parents in many of the extra-curricular activities designed to spur the development of their children and give them extra skills. American parents were particularly focused on strategies, such as adding a language, a sport or a community activity to their child's resumé which would give them an advantage in the intense competition for places at the best higher education institutions. This sense of competition was absent from the Italian system and parents lacked this focus (Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante, 2015).

Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante (2015) concluded that the Italian approach to parenting had a lot in common with the parenting style which Lareau thought more common in working-class families in the US. The differences Lareau observed were strongly linked to differences in social and cultural capital, and class (Brown, 1995; Bourdieu, 1996). This was also the case with the 'soft individualism' described by Kusserow (2004), in which de-emphasising competition and promoting pro-social values had become normal for the parents and teachers of more affluent middle-class children in the US. Similar patterns were observed by Reay (2008) in the UK and by Butler, Ho and Vincent (2017) in Australia. 'Soft individualism' is not necessarily inimical to neoliberalism since neoliberal ideology makes a range of promises beyond mere material comfort, ranging from self-efficacy and self-fulfilment to self-expression and self-actualisation (Dardot and Laval, 2014; Brown, 2015).

Fevre (2016) argues that, in the West, the neoliberal corporation's guarantee to fulfil such promises within a framework of rights and equal opportunities cemented support for neoliberalism and diffused political opposition to it, for example weakening

the opposing social movements which were the original source of all of these aspirations. For Fevre (2016), the key to a political economy of neoliberalism is to understand that there are two kinds of individualism in play. This offers a potential solution to the problem of the proliferation of different labels for types of individualism. Fevre's distinction recalls Meyer's two dimensions of individualism, as well as John Dewey's (1929/30) account of US society in which economic individualism had come to dominate an older, more obviously moral, individualism of the kind Durkheim [(1898)1969] described. The essence of Fevre's approach is that both individualisms can be present at the same time, for example in attitudes to parenting. It is the relative importance given to each type which produces the variations observed by Kusserow and other researchers. For example, parents in one country, or of a particular class, may have a different mix of economic and moral individualism to those in another country or of another class.

Fevre's nomenclature for the two kinds of individualism—sentimental and cognitive—draws our attention to their different epistemological foundations. Fevre argues that moral individualism should be thought of as 'sentimental' because it relies on beliefs about individuals, for example about their capabilities and potential. They are examples of a range of sentiments, or secular beliefs about humanity, which are often deeply held and associated with strong emotions. When American parents give their children non-contingent praise and tell them they are unique and wonderful human beings (Sorkhabi, 2005; Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik, 2015), they are drawing on their awareness of sentimental individualism. They are also doing this when they pass on pro-social values (Bellah *et al*, 1985) and when they assert their faith in their children's abilities, and the importance of their happiness, in opposition to neoliberal individualism (Butler, Ho and Vincent, 2017).

Sentimental individualism fuels the appetite for human rights as well as the subjective hopes and ambitions of each individual. According to Fevre (2016), sentimental individualism is a product of an array of social movements, particularly those campaigns against child labour and for factory education which closely followed the example of the anti-slavery movement in Britain in the 19th century. These movements promoted the growth of beliefs about the limitless potential of all human beings to attain autonomy and self-development, despite a lack of concrete evidence of that potential. A century and a half before the UNCRC, the public relations experts within the movement for children's rights—Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley—did much to spread these beliefs within the British population and then throughout the English-speaking world.

Rather than describing the alternative to sentimental individualism as 'economic' after Dewey, Fevre prefers the term 'cognitive', because it is an individualism which requires evidence of children's achievements, including the results of public examinations. It was the growth of cognitive individualism amongst families in the US that fuelled the competitive education, credential inflation and educational expansion which took off in the late 19th century (Fevre, 2016). This was the 'American standardised individualism' which looked to the life courses of individuals as proof of the effectiveness of a rationalised society (Meyer, 1987:259). Fevre describes the changes in political economy in the US—industrialisation bringing accelerated immigration, urbanisation and changes in the class structure—which accompanied this

change. The increasing subordination of sentimental individualism to cognitive individualism thus laid the groundwork for the development of neoliberalism in the US and its ensuing diffusion around the world, beginning with the UK. In the UK, the swing from sentimental to cognitive individualism was even more dramatic, proceeding apace after the changes to educational provision which reached fruition in the 1970s and created the conditions for the competition between families over credentials, and credential inflation, which had got under way decades earlier in the US (Fevre, 2016).

This account reminds us that the political economy paradigm does not assume other countries have simply copied the US neoliberal model. Other researchers have investigated the way in which governments other than those in the US and UK have tried to adapt neoliberal individualism to their own political economies, and policies on families and parenting have often been at the heart of their responses. For example, Kuan (2011), an anthropologist, studied dual-income middle-class Chinese parents who were very child-centered but felt drawn in opposite directions by more traditional parenting methods, and parenting manuals and advice (see also Fong, 2007). Along with other parents, they were the focus of a Chinese government which was concerned that a relentless focus on the hard work and long hours of study deemed necessary to excel in examinations was stifling the creativity and innovation China now required. The Chinese government saw authoritarian parenting as a strategic weakness, and institutional experts and government campaigns exhorted parents to have the patience to allow their children the freedom to be curious and creative (Kuan, 2011, 2015).

Kuan (2011) found that Chinese families expected unconditional obedience, and responded to disobedience by smacking and losing their temper. Yet, while institutional representatives blamed over-emotional mothers for the persistence of outdated methods of parenting, leaving their children to their own devices was not an option when the odds were against their children's chances of success and the stakes were terrifyingly high. Extra-curricular activities which might encourage nonconformity and creativity—ruled out by the very large classes and intense competition in Chinese schools—might be fitted in around school. For example, fathers would lend a hand with extra-curricular activities which included dance, art, English, Olympic math and ping-pong at the weekends.

Singapore has been a particularly fruitful site for research on the way governments have tried to adapt neoliberalism to their own political economies. This research does not assume that Singapore is amongst the least individualist of countries as some social psychologists have argued (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Chua (1995) showed how, in the mid-1980s, Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP) reformed family policies in pursuit of an adjustment to the individualism it had itself encouraged. Singaporeans had learned to work hard for rewards which they could enjoy without sharing them with their families. The PAP had seen this culture as a necessary condition of economic growth and a good fit with the culture of the ambitious Chinese immigrants who made up the bulk of Singapore's population. However, the leadership became worried about housing shortages and the effects of high labour turnover on productivity and growth. After a short-lived attempt to encourage Confucianism, the PAP government settled on promoting 'Asian values'

as an antidote to the problems of excessive Western individualism, as diagnosed by Lasch (1995) Bell (1979) and Berger (1987). These problems included too much competition at school and work, as well as hedonism and conspicuous consumption. The Singaporean meritocracy was to be kept in place, but Singaporeans now had to learn 'to defend their own actions, demanding of them to demonstrate the absence of malice against the collective and/or conversely, the presence of self-sacrifice for the same collective.' (Chua, 1995:187).

In recent years, research within the political economy paradigm has continued to investigate the way neoliberalism has been received in Singapore. Teo (2011, 2012, 2017) found that Singaporeans were no longer worried about demonstrating their absence of malice towards, or readiness to sacrifice themselves for, any kind of collective, including their own families. Instead, they were focused on consumption and competition and doing whatever was necessary to succeed in the sort of neoliberal market described by Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik (2015).

According to Teo (2011), the PAP produced a Singaporean hybrid in which neoliberalism had, not without contradiction, been adapted to the idea of Asian values within families. However, as in the 1980s, the PAP was not happy with all the results of its policies. Teo (2011) argued that pro-family rhetoric headed off the demands for more welfare just as the PAP had planned, but it was clear in the 2000s that neoliberalism was producing its own problems. Singaporeans might have accepted the moral primacy of family values, but their commitment to neoliberal individualism meant that they were unwilling to enter earlier marriages, and the PAP fretted over the resulting low birth rates and the consequences of an ageing society. When they did have children, Singaporeans were still torn between subscribing to collectivist Asian values and desperately searching for help from crammers, tutors and enrichment programmes which would help their children to get a competitive edge. Teo (2017) described an explosion of commercial enterprises for parents wanting to offer enrichment opportunities to their children.

Functionalism

The key elements of the paradigm which insists on the importance of the values and emotional support given by parents, as education expands around the world, are theories of family form and function and of the way individual personalities are integrated into society. They are underpinned by a theory of increasing structural differentiation, which elaborates the social implications—such as individuation—of a complex division of labour and increasing specialisation.

Parsons [(1966); (1951) 1991] saw the modern, nuclear family as the primary means of socialising members of a structurally differentiated society. Each person acquired a place in the occupational order which reflected their achievements as measured by universally applicable criteria, and which was not assigned to them by their membership of any social group or ascribed category. Parsons [(1951) 1991] observed that families in modern Western societies with this system were separated from production, and even from the processes which allocated people to productive roles, to an extreme degree. This segregation went hand in hand with specialisation in the affective and expressive functions of kinship groups.

The kind of kinship group that integrated most easily with a modern occupational structure was the narrow, conjugal family with a male breadwinner. If the function of the family was concentrated on affectivity, this would prevent the development of kinship types which would threaten the allocation of roles by judging individual achievement according to universal criteria. At the same time, the family was a safe place for the affective displays and attachments which would be problematic in the occupational field. It also provided primary socialisation in the appropriate achievement values for such a society. This created ‘selves’ (or personalities in Parson’s terms) who received gratification from taking part in society (by achieving goals) outside the family.

Following Durkheim [(1898) 1969], Parsons recognised the distinction between individualism and collectivism as an ‘ideological problem [which] concerns the mode of integration of the individual personality system with the collectivity.’ (1991: 238) If individualism was an ideology, the scientist was required to develop other constructs—for example ‘pattern variables’—in order to describe the society which produced it. Parsons (1991) insisted on using quotation marks whenever he used the terms ‘individualistic’ and ‘collectivistic’; however, he conceded that these terms were an effective means of summarising the most important distinctions between the types of society exemplified by on the one hand, modern America and, on the other hand, classical Chinese society. In the terms of his pattern variables, both societies were universalistic (rather than particularistic) but one was characterised by achievement and the other by ascription.

In Chinese societies, where morality was focused on the health of collectivities, the family could not be a safe haven for what Parsons described as “‘spontaneous” expressive orientations’. The well-known “familism” of Chinese society did not refer to families with the functions of the American conjugal unit but to ‘the solidarity of the kinship unit, extending beyond the conjugal family’ (1991:134). Moreover, even though every Chinese boy could aspire to pass the examinations which would lead to an official office, this was a weak universalism because passing exams demonstrated “‘superiority” rather than competence’ and this ‘made it difficult for achievement to become individualistically oriented’ [Parsons (1951) 1991:135]. Indeed:

Instrumental orientations must either be kept under control or strongly inhibited, because their individualistic trends could readily destroy the central collective solidarities. It is this above all which channels achievement in collective directions. (Parsons, 1991:135-6)

Parsons [(1951)1991] thought socialisation crucial to the development of the achievement orientation in American society. He offered a Freudian analysis of the way parents developed an ‘active orientation’ amongst their children, internalising achievement values in the process. The main elements of the parenting required to promote the right values were ‘support, permissiveness, denial of certain reciprocities and manipulation of sanctions through conditional approval and disapproval for performance.’ (1991:339).

Parental influence was the first in a ‘a hierarchy of learning stages’ in which, irrespective of the content of instruction, children experienced ‘a series of apprenticeships for adult occupational roles’ (1991:163). Socialisation in achievement values was the preparatory stage for schooling where, whatever their differences in

personality, every child learned to compete, for example to get the best marks. Parsons was struck, at this point, by the way socialisation made different personalities subject to the same role-expectations. This is not to say, however, that such differences were unimportant for the transition from education to work, since in the occupational order there were many different potential roles.

Parsons [(1951) 1991] thought that the differences in value-orientation between different personalities played an important part in distributing people to these alternative roles. In other words, Parsons thought that the personalities formed in families, for example—subtle differences in the type of achievement values which were transmitted—were critical to individuation. In addition, Parsons was convinced that families in different social classes approached the job of socialisation in different ways. Indeed, it was important for sociologists to study class in America precisely because this permitted a focus on ‘the problem of integrating the individualistic achievement aspects of the occupational system, and the solidarity of the kinship system’ (1991: 287).

There were strains within the families which discharged their functions in a modern individualistic society like America, most of which were disproportionately felt by women who were excluded from the occupational order (Parsons [(1951) 1991]). Moreover, Americans required more socialisation because they had to be prepared for a society with the most extreme levels of affective neutrality and universalism. They also needed more socialisation to wean them off their dependency on their parents. Some of these themes were later taken up by theorists who identified further changes in family structure with the hyper-individuation of ‘postmodern society’ or ‘late modernity’. These were claimed to extend our understanding of the role of families beyond the nuclear American families Parsons had in mind (Giddens, 1991, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2001; Beck-Gernsheim, 1998). Along with these changes in structure—closely related to changes in patterns of marriage and divorce and rising female employment—there had been changes in the kind of norms families nurtured. These were not simply the norms implied by earlier individuation. They may include pro-social values, such as social justice, equality and universalism (Bellah *et al*, 1985), as well as self-expression and self-actualisation (Bell, 1979).

Neither Parsons nor the later theorists who developed his approach had a great deal of use for empirical research, particularly quantitative research; however, social scientists from a variety of disciplines have conducted research on functionalist themes. Bengston, Biblarz and Roberts (2002) reported that American parents socialised their children for both individualism and to be sensitive to collective and social concerns. Pro-social values were even more deeply felt by the generation most affected by the challenges within the family associated with individuation (rising divorce, greater women’s employment). These new norms were better suited to the levels of complexity and differentiation typical of postmodern society or late modernity.

When used by social psychologists outside the US, the kind of survey instrument used by Bengston, Biblarz and Roberts (2002) sometimes produced different results. For example, Prioste *et al* (2017) used a similar instrument to study families in Portugal, which produced evidence of the same pro-social values as Bengston, Biblarz & Roberts. However, the Portuguese study recalled Bengston (1975) in concluding that families did not make an important contribution to the transmission of these values.

As with Bengston (1975), it was parents, and particularly fathers in the Portuguese case, who contributed to the transmission of individualist values to their children.

Parsons' ideas about the influence of family and schools on the formation of the personalities appropriate to an achievement-oriented society reappeared in debates on parenting styles, conducted using empirical research. In social psychology, the debate concerned the style of parenting best suited to complex, differentiated societies. In some cases, but not all, explicit reference was made to individualism. The debate is usually thought to have originated with Baumrind (1967, 1989) and the identification of an 'authoritative' parenting style which was more successful in the US than the alternative 'authoritarian' or 'permissive' styles. It offered children autonomy, but with parental support and control, and was tempered by pro-social values. From a review of social psychological research using this typology, Sorkhabi (2005) concluded that 'authoritative' parenting was more successful in producing happier families and higher achievement. It was not as common in other countries as it was in the West.

It is sometimes assumed that 'authoritarian' parenting was more common in these other countries, but the literature is far from unanimous on this. Social psychologists also noticed a parenting style which was child-centered but quite authoritarian. It gave rise to an addition to Baumrind's typology in the form of 'training', which encompassed 'hard work, self-discipline, achievement, family honour, and obedience' (Sorkhabi, 2005:554). This 'training' was held to be particularly prevalent in China although there was also some evidence for it in the US. It provided support for children's achievement but fell far short of 'the demonstrative expressions of affect and noncontingent praise of US parents' (Sorkhabi, 2005:554). However, in Hong Kong, (Chan, Chan & Chan, 2013:184) found parents with gifted children who 'endorsed highly positive values and beliefs such as interdependence, nonconformity, and creativity'.

Arnett (1995) also revisited the idea that increasing individuation automatically implied increased commitment to individualist values. He offered a distinction between 'broad' and 'narrow' socialisation compatible with Durkheim's understanding of individualism as well as Parson's understanding of individuation. Broad socialisation was thought to capture US parenting practice—ubiquitous but broader for boys than girls—which emphasised individualism and independence, generating a range of possible outcomes. Other countries (Japan or India, for example) favoured narrow socialisation with an emphasis on self-denial and conformity to one preconceived idea about a child's destination. Broad socialisation was a good fit with an individualist society in which parents would not wish to take the same approach to parenting. Indeed, a range of different outcomes to parenting was only likely if they did not.

Arnett included school and work, as well as family, in the institutions that pass on broad or narrow socialisation. He contrasted the Japanese example of children being made to conform to one path of obedience, hard work and academic achievement in both school and family with that of the US. In the latter, education institutions were on a trajectory towards individually tailored teaching which complemented changes in parenting. Self-expression and self-esteem were valued over conformity and self-denial. Arnett thought this trajectory conducive to economic development although

there were some risks to social order. For one thing, broader socialisation increased the risk of reckless behaviour from adolescents.

Methodology

We have discussed important differences between the three paradigms as they theorise change in parental influences, and differences between countries affected by a global expansion of education. Empirical data will help us to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Because this is a key aspect of differences between the paradigms, data on the place of individualism in parental influence are particularly useful. Our data consist of the childhood experiences of samples of graduates aged 25–39 from four countries which featured in the discussion of the three paradigms: Portugal, Singapore, the UK and the US.

Asking graduates about their experiences of being parented necessarily produces a retrospective picture of parenting which may be quite different from the parenting practices prevalent at the time of the interviews, even amongst the interviewees themselves (although, as we will see, very few of the interviewees had children of their own). However, unless we assume that interviews with parents will tell us everything we need to know about the development of individualism amongst their children, this is in fact the only way to research children's experiences other than by observing them directly (Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante, 2015). To find research subjects who can engage with meaningful questions about individualism, we must accept that interviewees must be adults. For this article, interviews undertaken in 2015–16 inform us about parents' practices in relation to individualism, mostly in the 1990s and early 2000s.

These interviews with adults aged 25–39 were part of a wider study on how individualism is experienced in families, schools and universities, and the workplace. Although concerns about the validity of recall data on individuals' life and work histories should be borne in mind (Dex, 1996), few interviewees said they had difficulty recalling how they were parented, although they often said they had difficulties recalling their experience in primary school. Millennial graduates were selected for interview to minimise problems of recall (which would be even greater in an older age group) and to maximise the potential for contact with structural differentiation, neoliberalism or world culture.

Of the four countries selected for this research, only the US has failed to ratify the UNCRC (Human Rights Watch, 2017). The four countries are often said to have very different levels of individualism in psychological research within a functionalist paradigm (Ingelhart and Welzel, 2005; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) which treats the presence or absence of family authority as evidence for the presence or absence of individualism (Brewer and Venaik, 2011). Both the US and UK are usually held to be far more individualist than either Portugal or Singapore (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

Singapore is usually held to be one of the least individualist countries in such research, yet it records very high scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) run by the OECD. Singapore ranks highly in PISA league tables, coming out on top in 2015 (OECD, 2016). The US has PISA scores around the

Table 1. Sample demographics

	Singapore	Portugal	Britain	United States
Female	8	8	10	6
Male	8	8	6	8
Mean age	29.3	31.6	30.9	30.4

OECD average for reading and science, and below it for mathematics. The UK has scores for science and reading above the OECD average (but a mathematics score no different from the average) and slightly better than those of Portugal (OECD, 2016). PISA might serve as a measure of the level of societal modernisation for functionalist, but the programme is also cited by neoinstitutionalists as evidence for the existence of world culture (Meyer and Benavot, 2013). Countries with good PISA results are seen to be successful at promulgating the myth of individualism which motivates their citizens to do well in education (Carney, Rappleye and Silova, 2012).

A total of 64 interviews were conducted in four cities with large graduate populations (Boston, Cardiff, Porto and the city-state of Singapore) between July 2015 and July 2016. In Boston and Cardiff, interviewees were recruited in public places but convenience—including snowball—sampling was used to construct samples in Porto and Singapore. Interviewees received an honorarium. All interviewees were aged 25–39, in employment, with the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree or higher in the US, and had completed all their education in that country. Table 1 shows the distribution of male and female interviewees in each country. Two of the US interviews proved unusable for this analysis because they did not fully satisfy our sampling criteria. The key characteristics of the interviews analysed in the following section are summarised in Table 1. They are also included in the identifier for each interviewee which we use instead of a pseudonym. This identifier includes country, age and gender. Thus the identifier S3[M31] is number three in the Singapore sample, and is a male interviewee aged 31.

The employment profiles of each of these samples roughly matched the sectoral profiles—private/public/not for profit—of that country's labour force. Ethnicity was only used as a recruitment criterion in Singapore where the proportion of Chinese, Malay and Indian interviewees roughly matched the national profile of 75 per cent Chinese, 14 per cent Malay and nine per cent Indian (Teo, 2012). All interviews were transcribed before analysis, and the Portuguese interviews—the only ones not conducted in English—were also translated. Most interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes long.

Graduates who had one or more parents who had also graduated from university were in the minority in all four samples. This is hardly a surprise when so few people of the age of most of the millennials' parents (i.e. 55–64) had degrees. In 2012, about 10 per cent of Singaporeans in this age group were graduates (Teo, 2013). In 2016, the rate of tertiary education (at least two further years of education after high school) amongst 55–64-year-olds in Portugal was 13.1 per cent (OECD, 2017). That the minority of parents of the millennials in the sample in the UK did not have degrees is also what we expect from the proportion of 55–64-year-olds with tertiary education in

that country: 37.6 per cent (OECD, 2017). Even in the US sample, less than half of the interviewees had one or more parents who was a graduate, which is what we would expect from the national data—in 2016, 41.9 per cent of the US parents' age group had experienced tertiary education (OECD, 2017). Other studies confirm that this proportion was no higher amongst millennial graduates. For example, 42 per cent of sophomores from 2002 who had achieved a bachelor's degree by 2012, had one or more parents who had achieved a bachelor's degree or higher (Redford and Hoyer, 2017:5).

The interview schedule explored the role played, both directly and indirectly, by individualism and associated concepts such as personal freedom, autonomy and self-development in graduates' accounts of their families and other institutions. Interviewees were asked to comment on some measures of individualism used in quantitative studies and on a definition of individualism which referred to people having the freedom and opportunity to determine their own fates without interference from others, as well as developing their interests and talents, and fulfilling their potential (as required by the UNCRC). In addition, all interviewees were asked to discuss certain questions: Did your parents or the people who brought you up encourage you to be an individual? Did they want you to be just like them, your siblings, or other people in the neighbourhood? Or did they encourage you to be different and to develop your own talents and interests? Did they listen to you, take you seriously and value your opinions? Was there anything that stopped you being an individual? Did you, for example, have the freedom and opportunities you needed to develop your talents and interests?

The data arising from these questions was analysed in order to compare the internal logic, potential contradictions, and predictive power of the three paradigms for understanding differences in parenting practices as education has expanded around the world. The most obvious lesson of this analysis was that there were more marked differences in the way parents had encouraged individualism in the Singaporean sample, relative to the three Western samples, than there were differences between the US, British and Portuguese samples. In order to give due emphasis to this finding, roughly half of the next section is devoted to Singapore.

The analysis also identified the influence of differentiating variables within, as well as across, societies (Sorkhabi, 2005). These included the ages of parents, divorce, separation or widowhood of parents, parents' level of education, parents' religious beliefs, whether the father or mother took a lead in parenting, relationships to siblings, and interviewees' marital status. There is unfortunately very little space for discussion of these variables in this article. Unless indicated as an interesting exception, all the analyses presented here, including the illustrative quotations, represent recurring themes in the whole dataset or in one or more of the samples, and have been checked for consistency (Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante, 2015).

Findings

Singapore

Almost all Singaporean graduates said that for their parents, even the most liberal, any exploration of their children's potential was secondary to achieving the highest

possible grades and qualifications in order to get a good job. It was only the concrete demonstration of their academic ability that had bought them (quite limited) freedom. Many graduates contrasted the parenting they had received with the more permissive parenting they imagined their Western peers had experienced, precisely because individualism was more developed in those other countries. Although a small minority of Singaporean graduates wondered whether their notion of Western parenting might be an inaccurate ‘stereotype’, most described the culture they had been brought up in as antithetical to individualism. None of the Singaporean sample considered their parents’ emphasis on hard work and good results to be evidence of the inculcation of individualism. For this reason, they thought the society they had grown up in had not been an individualistic society.

Thus, graduate S3[M31] had a ‘pretty traditional Chinese family so a lot of focus is on academic work . . . almost to the other end of the spectrum, talking about individualism.’ Graduate S8[M29] said ‘you need a good job, so you have a good education. It’s not really about individual and trying to see who you are and what you want to be or that kind of experience. I think it’s more about what society dictates in that sense.’ The parents of graduate S2[M30] ‘did not emphasise individualism, they did not emphasise self-expression. They are typical Asian Chinese parents. So, I was brought up on the mantra that hard work brings success. And I was born to it.’

In all but one case, graduates contrasted Western individualism with Chinese or Asian culture. For example, graduate S15[F28] commented on her Chinese-Malaysian parents: ‘growing up I think they valued the usual Asian things like I was talking about—getting good grades, hard work.’ A handful of graduates spoke about some relaxation in the extent of influence of this Asian culture on their younger siblings and other young people in Singapore, and on their own attitudes when, eventually, they had to think about their own parenting style. As stated earlier, most Singaporean millennials were of Chinese ethnicity. Parents who most readily demonstrated belief in the potential of their children, and the desire to support them to explore this potential, happened to be of Indian ethnicity.

Some of these Singaporean graduates said nobody had ever suggested to them that self-development meant anything other than working hard for the next exam, but roughly a third said their parents had promoted self-development *sui generis* and not only for any qualifications it brought. For example, they said their parents encouraged them to think for themselves and to learn about alternatives to ‘the Singaporean typical social norm kind of society mind-set’ S10[F28], for example by travelling outside Singapore. It is important to note, however, that such opportunities were secondary to academic success. Children had to earn the right to be individuals with proof of their hard work and talent, and the opportunities given were largely negative freedoms entailing little parental support.

Although many Singaporean graduates reported parental interventions, including private tuition, designed to improve their academic performance, none of them described parents who saw additional accomplishments they might acquire as cultural capital. Many of the Singaporeans called their parents ‘tigers’—alluding to Amy Chua’s cautionary tale *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*—but they were referring to their parents’ attitudes to formal education rather than their parents’ interest in them acquiring other accomplishments, for example playing the piano. Certainly, some of

them had undertaken several extra-curricular activities but they all reported that their parents were indifferent to whether they acquired these accomplishments or not. Indeed, these were rather a form of child-care for busy parents (or help with the school-run) than a route to self-development. The only thing their parents really cared about was that these activities must not, on any account, get in the way of their schoolwork.

The negative freedoms that became available once parents' priorities had been met were modest, for example graduates reported that they were rewarded with TV time (perhaps with friends) or time on the internet. Although some women graduates also had a second burden of household chores, there were examples of male and female graduates whose parents left them alone as long as they did their homework and did well at school; however, for many of them there simply was not much time left for other activities. So, graduate S8[M29] blamed his family for the fact that he could not ride a bicycle, play a musical instrument or sing, and 'can't really swim'. Others did not regret missing out on 'hobbies' because they had always preferred studying, but all the graduates had taken on board the message that they put their studies at risk if they spent time on anything else. This even included the most rebellious Singaporean graduate S15[F28] who suspected that Western families must also weigh the opportunity costs of time spent away from studies against what they might learn from pursuing a hobby.

Other graduates accepted the 'stereotype' of Western permissiveness and most Singaporean respondents imagined Western children had a lot more freedom growing up, epitomised by less structure and 'a lot of emphasis on playtime, creativity and imagination.' This graduate, S7[F31], said that, when she had her own children, she would give them this freedom. She had been sent to ballet, piano and painting classes, and she thought this was a good example of the structure Asian families imposed in contrast to the Western 'more hands-off approach—they just let their children play and see what they come up with, whereas Asian families tend to be more structured, like my child will do this and my child will do that.' S7[F31] was one of two interviewees who spoke of taking a more Westernised approach to parenting when she had her own children.

The notion that Western parents might lay on a flexible menu of non-academic activities for their children did not feature in this discourse but, then, there had been nothing like this for any of the Singaporean graduates while growing up. That their freedom to do other things was almost always contingent on the demonstration of results was obvious when it came to the co-curricular activities (CCA) that Singapore made available in some primary and all secondary schools (Chua, 1995). Pupils had to sign up for at least one CCA activity in secondary schools and CCA points were now recognised in junior college and tertiary level admissions processes. Nevertheless, graduates' stories showed that parental approval of CCA was dependent on academic results and some parents thought that anything that distracted from schoolwork, including CCA, was to be minimised, even discouraged. Others approved of CCA if it meant joining one of the 'uniform groups' designed to promote collective rather than individualist values, including the virtues of mixing with other ethnic groups. Some busy parents saw CCA as a substitute for child-care, and an

adjunct to shared transport arrangements, but most parents had limited tolerance for time spent on CCA activities.

Typically, Singaporean boys and girls had developed an interest in something like competitive sport, and in due course their parents would ask them to drop the activity because it was getting in the way of 'studying harder' (S3[M31]). This was understood as a way for parents to close down opportunities for individualism. Only one graduate—S16[M30] from a modest Indian background—said his parents had welcomed and celebrated his many CCA achievements. Yet, even for his parents, the fact that these activities took so much time away from his studies was 'a major concern'. This respondent was the only Singaporean interviewee who did not conceive of individualism wholly as the product of negative freedom. He thought that individualism in the West required the stimulus to be different, to find your uniqueness, in addition to the opportunities to find it. That Singaporean graduates did not experience this 'incitement' did not mean they lacked individualism, however. Instead, he described an 'Asian individualism' in which children did 'not get a lot of extrinsic encouragement to be different; but it's mostly an intrinsic thing that you tell yourself—you know I just want to be me, I want to be unique'.

Portugal

Portuguese graduates described a society which was rapidly becoming more individualist; for example, they thought that family authority was being relaxed in favour of children's autonomy and self-development. Some Portuguese graduates had known friends who were not allowed to talk at mealtimes when they were children and, in their own families, they had observed the increased freedoms granted to younger siblings. The oldest male graduate in the Portuguese sample, P11[M39], said 'we're still working on that, there's still a long way to go. I'm not saying this out of envy or frustration. I am even glad about it, because it means that in fifteen years society evolved and matured. But there's still something missing.' Most other Portuguese graduates said their parents gave them similar liberties to those reported in the British and US samples, for example the right to express their opinion on age-appropriate matters. The boundaries for their behaviour were set much wider than in the Singaporean families and they had the opportunity to make their own mistakes, which the Singaporeans were denied (although one, S7[F31], said that her parents, in protecting her from making mistakes, may 'have inadvertently stifled some individualism').

Portuguese graduates often related greater individualism to increased education, particularly tertiary education. However, their parents were less involved in supervising children's encounters with formal education than the Singaporean parents, and some had had very low expectations. Like some British families (where many parents were even less engaged), the absence of disciplinary problems or attendance issues were sometimes sufficient to satisfy them. Although some parents (for example those of the oldest male graduate P11[M39]) had never thought their children might go to university, all of the parents of the graduates in the Portuguese sample were said to have great respect for education, even revering it for its own sake rather than the jobs to which it might give access. Even those with limited education had encouraged their children to do their best, and obtain degrees, but there was little evidence of the

Singaporean parents' focus on education as human capital with easily identifiable labour-market pay-offs. Even where Portuguese parents had tried to influence their children to choose pathways they thought would lead to better-paid or more secure jobs, they found they had empowered their children with the ability to resist their influence.

A further contrast with Singapore was evident in respect of extra-curricular activities which were not seen as contingent on educational success by the Portuguese graduates or their parents. Indeed, such activities often had as much parental approval as academic activities and much greater parental involvement and support, at least as far as family finances would allow. Portuguese graduate P1[F29] explained that her family could not afford the music lessons she asked for because 'it wasn't a thing relevant for my future, it was just for self-improvement. . . and it just wasn't possible.' However, where they could afford it, the parents of Portuguese graduates went out of their way to lay out a menu of activities for them to choose from and to give them the extrinsic encouragement which Singapore graduate S16[M30] said was lacking in 'Asian individualism'.

Some Portuguese graduates and their parents made a connection between extra-curricular activities and the labour-market benefits sometimes assumed to flow from this kind of cultural capital, but only one graduate said his parent's encouragement of such activities had shaped his career. The parents and grandparents of graduate P15 [M34] encouraged his artistic side and he later became an architect and painter. At least one other parent intervened to discourage a child who was thinking of making labour-market choices based on their success in extra-curricular sport. For other graduates and parents, the connection between such activities and later careers was extremely vague and seemed to be one item of faith in a set of beliefs about the good that would come of self-development. Thus, Portuguese graduate P14[F25] said her parents gave her the extra-curricular opportunities which 'encourage imagination' and which gave her and her siblings 'a considerable advantage that will pave our way in the future'. She counted sport along with music and theatre amongst the activities that had 'improved' her.

The parents who provided these opportunities for their children were not granting the extreme freedom from parental interference which Singaporeans associated with Western individualism. For example, the parents of P14[F25] supported whatever their children showed interest in 'as long as it was something they considered reasonable, something important to us, that would do us no harm.' Nevertheless, most of the Portuguese sample—and particularly the male graduates—said they were given considerable freedom to spend time on age-appropriate activities. They tried whatever they wanted and none of them said their parents worried about them spending too much time on practicing music and (especially for boys) sport. The sports that sons and daughters were encouraged to do were often gendered but daughters were also more involved in sport than their counterparts in Singapore, and so were their parents; for example, when accompanying their children to training and competitions.

The childhood experience of the Portuguese graduates shows that, for many parents, their children's acquisition of a good public record of achievement was not a condition for encouraging individualism. Nor was this only a matter of negative

freedom, as the Singaporean graduates imagined it to be in the case of Western families. Many of the Portuguese parents had demonstrated limitless belief in the potential of their children and the desire to give them every opportunity and support to explore this potential. They had, perhaps, been rather less involved in promoting academic achievement, often preferring to leave this to the schools. A similar pattern, perhaps even more marked, appears in the British sample.

The UK

Historical sociologies have often remarked on British parents' indifference to, and sometimes outright suspicion of, the value of education, particularly tertiary education (Fevre, Rees and Gorard, 1999). Some of the British millennial graduates said their parents had simply been content as long as they did not get into trouble at school. For others, their parents had only hoped for success in the A-level examinations taken in the last two years of school. They had suspected a college degree may be a waste of time and money and that their children would be better off going straight into work.

The relaxed stance which the parents of this small and largely unrepresentative sample of British millennials took towards their children's academic achievements meant that they had rarely been in close touch with what was going on in school. Whereas some Portuguese parents were said to have been quite involved in their children's education, the British parents generally left their children to their own devices, even when things went wrong. Indeed, the divorced mother of GB3[F29] 'didn't want me to be a Goody Two-Shoes who was in school all the time'; however, her mother was sometimes 'controlling' and had denied her time and privacy which were 'an important part of the individualism thing'. The result was that doing well at school was the only way she found to rebel against her mother who, although she was a teacher herself, told her daughter that doing her homework came secondary (as a 'luxury') to helping her mother with housework and her job. Despite her hostility to her schoolwork, her mother maintained romantic notions of her daughter's career: 'I think she thought maybe I'd be a politician, or I don't know . . . I think she saw me as being quite special in some ways.'

British parents were more likely to have unrealistic aspirations for their children. Some told their children that their hidden potential was so great that they could achieve anything they set their minds to, while others undervalued the labour-market benefit of their children's qualifications to a significant extent. However, almost all the British graduates thought one or both of their parents had been committed to giving them every opportunity and support to explore their potential in areas other than academic excellence. As GB12[F34] explained, 'in terms of becoming an individual, I do think your parents play probably maybe the most important part, definitely.'

British graduates often used the development of their musical tastes to illustrate the way their parents would 'encourage individualism' (GB1[M28]), and music was often in the array of activities which their parents encouraged them to take up. Graduate GB16[F34] was 'out every night of the week' doing 'a lot of drama and arts, and stuff' and 'I did my Duke of Edinburgh' (youth award). As well as being divorced when she was quite young, her parents had impairments which made communication

problematic. These were special reasons why they had ‘pushed’ her to take part in other activities outside the family, but other graduates talked about their parents actively encouraging, not simply permitting, self-development and self-expression. Graduate GB8[F31] described her parents facilitating her every whim, so much so that she wondered whether this had been wise: ‘For example, I used to think it was really cool to dress up in fancy-dress clothes and wear them to school, and I always looked ridiculous, but they never stopped me, which is probably not a good thing.’

Just as British parents often had relaxed attitudes towards academic achievement, so their encouragement of self-development and self-expression was not contingent on getting results (winning competitions, progressing through music grades, getting picked for the best teams). What mattered was their children’s wishes. Fathers might be keen on taking sons to play rugby or football on a Sunday morning but, as they got older, their sons might develop other interests—perhaps playing in a brass band, like male graduate GB1[M28]—and the fathers adapted accordingly. More often it was the musical training which was abandoned and substituted with sport, which the graduates said they had enjoyed more.

There were examples of British parents laying out a menu of activities for their children to choose from in an even more concerted way than the Portuguese parents, perhaps because fathers were more involved in facilitating sport activities (this happened in the US too). For example, graduate GB5[M30] ‘was 110 per cent pushed towards it all’ by his father. The sport that the British graduates had been encouraged to play, and facilitated with lots of parental time and money, were usually gendered. However, in all of these families, children’s wishes were paramount: ‘I was very encouraged to just be myself and whatever I wanted to do, or wanted to try, my parents were very, “Yeah, you can go and do it, go try it. If you don’t like it, you don’t have to do it again”.’ (GB6[F27]). Graduate GB5[M30] disappointed his father because he did not think he was big enough to play rugby like his dad, but ‘anything that I wanted to do they were really supportive and really helpful’.

United States

In the US sample there were no echoes of British indifference towards the value of a degree. American parents also had a more hands-on approach to schoolwork and were alert to problems at school, particularly any risk that their son or daughter might drop out. For some parents, a bachelor’s degree had intrinsic value, but American parents showed more interest than British parents in making sure their children benefited from their investment in human capital. They were much more likely to influence their choice of degree for this instrumental reason and seem to have been much more successful in this than their Portuguese counterparts (who were often unable to contend with the powerful autonomy they had helped to embed in their offspring).

Although not as frequently as the British graduates, the US sample mentioned their development of musical tastes as proof that their parents allowed them to be individuals. For example, US16[M28] said ‘I could express myself as long as it wasn’t too vulgar or anything like that. But they weren’t kind of trying to stifle my music or interests, so, in that sense, I was able to be an individual.’ Graduate US7[M30] described his parents encouraging his self-development: ‘generally they let me

discover things for my own, and supported me and guided me, and imparted wisdom where they could, but they definitely weren't overbearing and this is what you're going to do, this is what you need to do, this is how you should do it sort of thing'.

American parents were keen to foster creativity, but this did not mean the US graduates had been allowed to neglect their schoolwork. Graduate US2[F25] said,

it was clear that school was important, so there was still some sort of boundaries and it wasn't like go off and go be an artist, necessarily. But still within that I think there was just like, oh, you're interested in liberal art . . . or language, arts and history as opposed to math and science, that's fine, or whatever.

The parents of American graduates did not always prioritise schoolwork, but some parents were strongly motivated by results. Thus, graduate US4[F38] said she 'went to a school, it was one of the top schools, high schools in the state and, I mean, my parents moved to that area for that specific reason.' It was however only graduate US3[F28], who had Chinese immigrant parents, who described them as fixated on her results in similar terms to the Singaporeans, even using the same tiger-parent trope.

In general, the parents of US graduates had similar attitudes towards the encouragement of extra-curricular activities as their British counterparts and encouraged their children to try any activity and drop it if they did not like it, even if it was something a parent had been particularly keen on, such as the eagle-scouting enjoyed by the father of US14[M28]. American fathers seemed to put in quite as much time and effort into making opportunities for their children as the British fathers. Thus, the parents of US8[M25] 'were always my biggest supporters' and gave him 'the gear' no matter what he decided he wanted to do. When he really got involved in baseball his father would

coach all my baseball teams, he'd take me down for batting practice and stuff and he'd throw me, I mean, he'd throw . . . there was an occasion when there wasn't a machine, and he'd have to throw the balls. He'd throw like a hundred and fifty balls to get me better, and he really enjoyed that too, baseball was a big thing for him so [unclear 10:47]. I mean, really anything I ever wanted to do, my parents would support me 100 per cent.

Discussion

What do these findings reveal about the strengths and weaknesses of our three paradigms for understanding the role of parents as education expands globally?

Neoinstitutionalism

All our interviewees were graduates who had embarked on careers. On the face of things, it is by talking to just such respondents in different countries that we should be able to document the spread of world culture. Yet, where functionalism has a potential problem in the way it copes with the *variety* of parenting practices that goes with modern education systems around the world, neoinstitutionalism has a similar headache when confronted with evidence that parenting continues to play any role at

all. The influence of the family is meant to fade away with institutional isomorphism and the relentless rise of individualism. Yet even in the US, where many aspects of world culture are usually held to originate, we found that this was far from the case. We are not claiming that our samples are in any way representative but, of course, much of what we found out about family influences resonates with a well-populated literature in the sociology of education.

If all millennials were like those Portuguese and British graduates who told us that their parents had not understood the education system or the labour market, we would be more comfortable with the neoinstitutionalist view. Neither is the involvement of parents in extra-curricular activities in the West necessarily a problem for the neoinstitutionalist paradigm. From our data, in contrast to Mori and Baker (2010), this appeared to have little to do with building a publicly-available record of achievements. The obvious difficulties for the neoinstitutionalist approach arise in the accounts from Singapore and the US of how important family influence was in orienting children towards the formal education system. A less obvious, but equally problematic, area concerns family influence on individualism.

In neoinstitutional theory, the propagation of the 'myth' of individualism is held to be fundamental to the spread of world culture and, especially, of isomorphism in education systems. Our interviews suggest two ways in which data on parental influences may be at odds with this theory. Singaporean parents appeared to have played a part in dissuading their children from believing they lived in an individualist society. On the other hand, Western parents appeared to have played a key role in developing their children's individualism. It is here that parental facilitation of extra-curricular activities like sport and music appears to have been significant. That this facilitation apparently had so little to do with career-building is, therefore, not a guarantee that neoinstitutionalists can safely ignore it.

A deeper, and more fundamental, problem for the neoinstitutional paradigm is revealed here. The individualism which the Singaporean parents encouraged, but denied, is precisely the kind of individualism which John Meyer had in mind when he theorised about our participation in 'the public institutionalisation of the individual life course' (Meyer, 1987:243). However, the type of individualism which the Western families were involved in developing is, in Meyer's terms, its second 'subjective' dimension. In the neoinstitutionalist paradigm such involvement should be completely unnecessary because any responsibility for the maintenance of this dimension has long since been assumed by rationalised institutions, for example in the fields of human rights law and educational psychology. The difficulty for the neoinstitutionalist paradigm is not so much that family still matters but that the second dimension of individualism may not be quite what John Meyer imagined it to be. We will return to this question with the discussion of Fevre (2016) in the next section.

For the moment, we conclude that the elaborated conception of individualism produced by neoinstitutionalist theory is unhelpful when explaining variations in international experience. The isolation of a subjective dimension underpins the conviction that families are casualties of the rise of world culture. It means the subjective dimension is necessarily excluded from any neoinstitutional account of the global rise of education, so cannot be used as a resource to explain the millennials' experiences

outside Singapore. These are reasons to doubt that the global rise of education is best understood with the concept of world culture.

Political economy

Although some accounts of globalisation and neoliberalism might seem to belie this, the political economy paradigm need not be hampered by the tendency to ignore differences between superficially similar countries, which is a weakness common to functionalism and neoinstitutionalism. Some of the most promising approaches discussed in the literature review analysed the actions of classes, governments and social movements within their different jurisdictions. One such approach was focused on Singapore.

The average Singaporean graduate in our study was born in 1987 and began their schooling in the period studied by Chua (1995), at the time that the PAP was intent on promoting Asian values as an antidote to the problems of excessive Western individualism. The actions of the PAP government may well explain why Asian, or Chinese, values featured so strongly in our Singaporean interviews. On the other hand, there was little evidence in our data that the PAP achieved its aim of discouraging excessive competition at school and work through propagating Asian values. The fact that graduates were so focused on educational achievement confirms the later research of Teo (2011, 2012, 2017), along with one significant qualification.

According to Teo (2011), the PAP had produced a Singaporean hybrid in which neoliberalism was, sometimes uneasily, *cohabiting* with the idea of Asian values within families. Our data refer to a slightly earlier period, but the graduates we interviewed regarded working hard at school in order to get a good job as an *expression* of Asian values. Several of them referred to the familiar tiger-parent trope of Asian values driving achievement, particularly in education, within families. They also made it clear to us that they did not think Asian values were the exact opposite of working hard to get good qualifications and a good job when contrasted with Western values. Far from associating them with neoliberal competitiveness, they told us Western values underpinned the relaxed and permissive attitudes typical of Western parenting.

In the discussion of functionalism below we will touch on the notion that Asian values and competition are somehow contradictory. We will take note of what Singaporean graduates said about not competing, but merely trying to excel, in order to overcome the apparent contradiction between achievement values and collectivist ideology. Here we should consider whether, in the period before Teo published her research, the cohabitation of achievement and Asian values was not as uneasy as she suggested because collectivism, rather than neoliberalism, was the dominant ideology. Of course, this may no longer have been the case when subsequent generations were entering the Singaporean education system.

Before we explore this point, we should observe that, in one important respect, our graduates' behaviour fitted with Teo's (2011) predictions for Singaporeans of their age. She noted that, as in the 1980s, the PAP was not happy with all the results of its policies—partly because they seemed to have depressed the birth rate. Although of course not representative, our Singaporean sample happened to include only one

graduate who was married—compared to five of the Portuguese graduates—and none had children.

According to Teo (2011), families suffered because Singaporeans were torn between subscribing to collectivist Asian values and desperately searching for help from tutors and enrichment programmes which would help their children to get a competitive edge. This contrasts sharply with parents' conditional toleration of after-school activities as described by the Singaporean graduates. In the years since our sample left school, the collectivist ideology which had been sustained within Singaporean families may have given way to neoliberalism. Teo (2017) described a recent explosion of commercial enterprises offering enrichment, to which there was extensive parental commitment as a key indicator of a Singaporean variation on neoliberalism.

This is a further challenge to the Mori and Baker (2010) view of 'shadow education' within the neoinstitutional paradigm. However, what should we think of their contention that 'shadow education' is becoming an unavoidable support for mainstream institutional arrangements to extend mass education around the world? In our study, the extra-curricular activities invested in by British, Portuguese and even American parents offered more autonomy and were less structured and results-oriented than those in Singapore. Graduates recalled less emphasis on accomplishments acquired or competitions won, and more on pursuing self-development and self-expression.

Within the paradigm of political economy, these extra-curricular activities could be considered a part of a process by which people are prepared for employment in neoliberal settings, which promise self-actualisation at work (Dardot and Laval, 2014; Brown, 2015). In this view, parental encouragement of self-exploration, self-development and self-expression is as much a part of preparation for neoliberal individualism as the acquisition of qualifications. However, this is quite an awkward fit for the types of self-development and self-expression the British and Portuguese millennials were introduced to by their parents. British parents certainly tried to multiply the positive freedoms their children enjoyed, but evidence of a cavalier attitude towards qualifications and an apparent lack of concern for preparing their children to succeed in the labour market seems at odds with neoliberalism.

Along with their British counterparts, some Portuguese millennials recognised, and expressed hostility towards, the increased influence of competitive neoliberal individualism, particularly in education. The Portuguese sample included millennials who thought their parents had been extremely important in early self-development, and that this had helped them in their subsequent careers. However, others said their parents had little idea of the labour-market consequences of their educational choices and experiences. Some said that opportunities for self-exploration, self-development and self-expression encouraged them to rebel against any attempt to direct them to educational or career choices.

We should recognise that the labour market for young Portuguese was particularly depressed at the time of the interviews (Capucha, Calado and Estevão, 2014; OECD, 2017). There is also the possibility that, as with Singapore, the British and Portuguese graduates may have been telling us about a world that no longer existed. The relative indifference to degrees and lack of realism about the labour market recorded amongst UK families may, by now, be a thing of the past. Young British and Portuguese parents may be much more like American ones (Devine, 2004; Tavares, 2013) but, even

if things have changed for subsequent cohorts, the fact that parental influences in Britain and Portugal may once have been different from Singapore and the US might be explicable within the political economy framework.

We noted in the earlier discussion of neoinstitutionalism that the founding myth of individuals with their 'own' wishes and feelings was not meant, within that paradigm, to require constant renewal within families. We suggested that John Meyer's conception of this dimension of individualism may need revision. In Fevre (2016), Meyer's two dimensions of individualism are replaced by (i) moral individualism which has sentimental (secular) or religious roots and which should be contrasted with (ii) cognitive individualism which has latterly become associated with neoliberalism. These distinctions are potentially of value in explaining the differences between the parental influences recalled in our four samples.

If the individualisms which have shaped parental influence in different parts of the world have consisted of varying balances of sentimental and cognitive individualism, this could explain why the accounts of British and Portuguese millennials were not an easy fit for the theory that their families were preparing them for employment in neoliberal enterprises. Put simply, the legacy of earlier political and economic circumstances and, particularly, of earlier social movements, left families in Britain and Portugal with resources of sentimental individualism not available to families in Singapore or even, to the same degree, amongst American families.

Moreover, the minimal element of sentimental individualism in the parenting recalled by Singaporean millennials can help us to understand why they and others think their society is collectivistic. If they understand individualism to mean only sentimental individualism and not cognitive individualism, this may be why they see it as an entirely Western phenomena. The relative absence of sentimental individualism in Singapore also accords with Teo's view that Singapore's hybrid version of neoliberal individualism lacks the emphasis which we might expect on individuals' rights, authority and responsibilities. Neoliberalism usually insists on a rights-based framework for its market solutions which justifies inequality (Fevre, 2016). However, Teo (2012) confirms that Singapore has seen very little of the social movements which, in the account offered by Fevre (2016), bequeathed sentimental individualism to Western societies and led, ultimately, to the UNCRC. Without such history there would be very little sentimental individualism, no legacy for neoliberalism to adapt to, and none of the expected emphasis on individual rights.

In sum, while the application of a naïve critique of hegemonic neoliberalism would be of little help in understanding the data presented here, the political economy paradigm is potentially more useful. An approach which identifies only a neoliberal version of individualism will have limited purchase on international differences in parental influences on education and the way these influences are changing. However, the elaboration of two types of individualism, and of the importance of social movements to one of these types, may well help us to explain these international variations.

Functionalism

Millennials in each country gave accounts of conjugal families socialising children for places in the occupational order, but there were remarkable differences between the

samples in what this entailed. The functionalist paradigm struggles to accommodate these differences. Singaporean graduates recalled the strong parental influence on achievement values which Parsons associated with socialisation for an individualistic society, but their parenting did not include the permissiveness which Parsons included in his characterisation. Their parents had not allowed them to explore, experiment and make their own mistakes. The Singaporean millennials associated such permissiveness with Western parenting and, above all, with individualism. They saw their society at the collectivist end of a continuum with individualism and identified the cause as the commitment which their parents and others shared with Chinese, or Asian, culture.

The relative absence of 'spontaneous' expressive orientations in the Singaporean accounts is much closer to Parsons' characterisation of Chinese familism than it is to the American conjugal family. The Singaporean parents prepared their children to succeed in education, but not to find out what they were good at and what they enjoyed. This was most evident in the accounts of parental attitudes to extra-curricular activities. Singaporean parents apparently did not consider such activities important to self-development. They usually only allowed their children to participate if this caused them no inconvenience and they always insisted these activities should never get in the way of their children's studies.

According to the part of Parsons' theory which draws on Freud, the Singaporean families were creating slimmed-down versions of the personalities authored by families in the West. The families of the Singaporean graduates might be passing on achievement values, but they were not fulfilling the specialised function which could only be performed by families in such a strongly differentiated society. Yet the very emphasis on achievement in Singaporean families means, in the functionalist paradigm, that these accounts are a poor fit with Chinese traditional culture. Parsons characterised collectivistic, traditional Chinese society as having weak universalism and ascription rather than achievement, yet there was nothing in the graduates' accounts (or comparisons of PISA results) to suggest that universalism was weaker in the Singapore sample than elsewhere.

The Singaporean accounts did not fit the 'authoritarian' parenting Baumrind identified with traditional cultures, but did have several elements of the 'training' parenting style described by Sorkhabi (2005). Amongst the elements of training listed by Sorkhabi (2005: 554)—'hard work, self-discipline, achievement, family honour, and obedience'—only 'family honour' was not mentioned by the Singaporean graduates. Family honour is one measure of the priority of collective solidarity over individual achievement. Even though the Singaporean millennials professed to live in a collectivistic society, any collective solidarities which may exist had not been allowed to dilute a marked emphasis in parenting styles on individual achievement.

We are left with a combination of parental influences which seem to be illegitimate within the functionalist paradigm. Parsons was convinced that a society with socialisation without affectivity and expressive orientations could not allow an emphasis on individual achievement because this would threaten collective solidarities. It was the collectivities which achieved in such societies, rather than individuals. The Singaporean graduates seemed, in general, to agree. They sometimes tried to escape the apparent contradiction with their parents' emphasis on individual achievement by

claiming that they were not actually competing with others, just trying to be the best they could. However, Parsons [(1951)1991] did not think that giving children a desire to out-do their peers was a necessary part of socialisation in achievement values.

To remain within the functionalist paradigm, we might argue that collective solidarity only functioned at an ideological level in the Singaporean accounts. Alternatively, we might speculate that the Chinese families in our sample, as in the Singaporean population at large, included immigrant families with necessarily attenuated ties with wider kinship networks. If this were to help account for the anomalous nature of the Singaporean accounts, we could further speculate that the same might also be true in the case of the attenuation of kinship networks in China caused by the largest internal migrations the world has ever seen ('The impact of Chinese migration: We like to move it move it', *The Economist*, February 25th, 2012). How does the functionalist paradigm fare when we draw on it to analyse our other samples?

The descriptions of parenting in the Western countries seem to be a better fit with the socialisation practices Parsons [(1951) 1991] associated with American families. Most reported a degree of permissiveness with parents engineering a bounded space for individualism to flourish. There was also much more evidence of affectivity and expressive orientation in parenting outside Singapore, particularly in graduates' accounts of parental involvement in extra-curricular activities like sport and creative arts. The parents of the Western millennials apparently went out of their way to multiply the positive freedoms their children could enjoy, doing their very best, within whatever means they had, to offer their children opportunities for self-discovery and development. This was coupled with socialisation in achievement values but few, if any, graduates said their self-development and self-expression were secondary to the emphasis placed on achievement by their parents, as was so often the case in Singapore.

The Western accounts also seem to accord well with what Parsons [(1951) 1991] had to say about the personality differences produced in socialisation and their importance in distributing people to all the alternative roles available. For example, Parsons did not believe that socialisation left every child of an American family with the same achievement values. Moreover, the functionalist framework accommodates the adolescent rebellions of some of the Portuguese and British millennials as proof of the strains produced in some families trying to combine affectivity and permissiveness with socialisation in achievement values. If they did not always choose the labour-market route which made the most of their educational investment, this would once more accord with Parsons' insistence on the variety of personalities produced by socialisation and the place of this variety in any explanation of the distribution of occupational roles and rewards. However, it may be that the very commodious nature of the functionalist framework represents a weakness, since it glosses over important differences in parental influence.

While several graduates from Portugal and Britain said their parents had put little emphasis on achievement and had just been happy as long as they did not get into trouble, there were differences between the samples in terms of parental attitudes towards education. The Portuguese millennials thought their parents valued education highly, although usually in an abstract way. Parents wanted their children to have

every chance to succeed but were rather vague about what this entailed beyond wanting them to make their own choices. While some got heavily involved in their children's education, others had few expectations of their children beyond attending school. The British parents had not been as involved in their children's education as the Portuguese parents. British graduates had largely not had parents who had been in awe of education and some parents had doubted the value of graduate qualifications in the labour market.

The British parents told their children they could accomplish anything they wanted to achieve but, importantly, they did not think this necessarily required success in the education system. Some British parents thought education might even be an obstacle to individualism, whereas the reverse was true of the extra-curricular activities into which they put so much time and effort. British graduates recalled more parental involvement, and perhaps explicit encouragement, for these activities than for academic work. None of this provision was dependent on the demonstration of results. It was rather about encouraging, sometimes explicitly and consciously, self-development and (much more so than in Portugal) self-expression.

The US millennials recalled similar encouragement of individualism, for example devoting time and energy to menus of extra-curricular activities. There may have been, by contrast with the British sample, more limited encouragement of self-discovery and self-expression and perhaps more emphasis on competition. However, the major difference was the complete absence of the indifference, or even hostility, to educational success recalled in Britain. Like the British graduates, the Americans had been allowed to have a say in what education they had, but their parents were much more likely to have been involved with their schoolwork and were very sure that education was going to pay off.

The psychological parenting literature illustrates the problem faced by the functionalist paradigm since its typologies are of limited use here. Baumrind's (1967, 1989) 'permissive' and 'authoritative' parenting styles capture some elements of the parenting described in the interviewing but do not help us to analyse the differences between countries. Arnett's (1995) theory of cultures characterised by broad and narrow socialisation makes the point even more clearly. Narrow socialisation entails the demands for conformity and obedience experienced by the Singaporean graduates. Broad socialisation emphasises the individualism, self-expression and independence which featured in the parenting practices in all three Western countries. It also predicts the adolescent rebellions, especially amongst boys, recalled by some graduates. However, the licence given to individuals by sentimental individualism in the political economy framework also explains these rebellions as does, perhaps, the dialectical relation between the two dimensions of individualism in neoinstitutionalism. Moreover, broad socialisation glosses over potentially important differences in parental attitudes towards education between Western countries.

Later work in the functionalist paradigm suggested the family could also help adjustment by nurturing alternatives to achievement values, while others suggested that limitations on affectivity in families were not just a feature of societies with limited structural differentiation (as in classical Chinese familism). In some modern societies, families might be eschewing both affectivity and alternative values in favour of the strong emphasis on instrumental orientations seen in the Singaporean families in

this study. However, if variations in parental influence are not to be traced, ultimately, to the degree of complexity of the division of labour, we might well wonder whether the functionalist paradigm remains intact in such accounts.

Next steps within the political economy paradigm

We already have Fevre's (2016) account of the 19th century social movements which led to the growth of sentimental individualism in British society. Neither do we need to reprise his account of the 20th century changes—including the rise of comprehensive education—which boosted cognitive individualism there. However, in the present study some British and American graduates mentioned the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s as an influence on parents and other adults. Further research on this topic would shed light on an earlier American literature which described the way American families tempered individualist values (Bengston, 1975; Bellah *et al.*, 1985). There is also a need for a corresponding account of recent Portuguese society.

Some Portuguese graduates could remember a time in which parents did not encourage individualism of either kind (Wall *et al.*, 2001). Yet there was evidence of strong sentimental individualism in their childhoods by the 1990s, so perhaps the social movements which have shaped parenting in Portugal are more recent phenomena. More research is needed on the effects of the Carnation revolution and, latterly, resistance to neoliberalism, especially after the elections of 2011 (Fishman, 2011; Capucha, Calado and Estevão, 2014). Stoer and Dale (1999) showed how the effect of the Carnation Revolution within the educational system led teachers to focus on developing students' creativity and autonomy. More recent empirical work confirms that the effects of the Revolution, and the social movements which appeared in its aftermath, shaped the educational system and individual civic practice (Fishman and Lizardo, 2013; Fishman and Cabral, 2016). We need to determine whether there were effects within families leading to the emphasis on sentimental individualism which was evident in the parenting recalled by Portuguese graduates.

While the absence of a history of social movements might help to explain why parents in Singapore were not much concerned with sentimental individualism, the same theory might usefully be applied to China. While the PAP was concerned that parents should become less focused on cognitive individualism to help stimulate a falling birth rate, China—which has also ratified the UNCRC—has fretted about the effect of such a focus on creativity and innovation. Kuan (2011) described the Chinese government's concerns about parenting being focused on educational competition as the cause of the population's lack of creativity and inventiveness. Parents were encouraged to adopt something more akin to the *laissez-faire* individualism imagined by the Singaporean millennials. Institutional experts and government campaigns exhorted parents, with little effect, to have the patience to allow their children the freedom to be curious and creative and make their own mistakes. China has also recently seen the same explosion of commercial enrichment facilities in its malls that Teo (2017) noted in Singapore.

The absence of the social movements which encourage sentimental individualism in China may have something to do with parents' reluctance to give their children the space and encouragement they need to develop their interests and capacities. This

may not be the case in Hong Kong where (Chan, Chan & Chan, 2013:184) found that parents with gifted children thought that lack of creativity could be a problem and ‘endorsed highly positive values and beliefs, such as interdependence, nonconformity and creativity’. In Singapore, and perhaps China, we may be witnessing a natural experiment in the substitution of state action, and particularly market action, to make up for the effects of absent social movements.

In 2019, the malls of Beijing, like thousands of others around the cities of China, played host to different commercial enterprises selling middle-class parents opportunities for their children to play with building blocks or in hygienic sand pits, to build robots, bake cakes, go roller-skating, learn to dance, paint and draw, or speak English. Children were sometimes left in the care of young attendants, but quite often a parent stayed by their side, even joining in with their play. The substitution of the market for the family and social movements is a move taken from the neoliberal playbook, written at a time when American employers learned to tell their employees that it was in the workplace, above all, that they would find self-expression and fulfilment (Fevre, 2016). We predict that this extension of the market solution to the early years of life has a role to play in further increments in inequality. However, we will need research to establish whether this synthetic way of stimulating sentimental individualism will develop ‘the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential’ as the UNCRC requires.

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