

# **Towards a Revised Conception of Social Citizenship: An Autonomy-Focused Model**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

In this paper, I argue for a revised notion of social citizenship that has at its core a relational conception of autonomy. The standard notion of social citizenship, often attributed to T.H. Marshall, does indeed have autonomy at its core; it seeks to correct the economic inequalities that compromise one's ability to act autonomously. However, it fails to consider autonomy as a capacity that is not only hindered by material barriers, but that is also fostered only in the context of well-structured social relationships. This feminist conception of autonomy brings to light an understanding of social citizenship rights as concerned with actively promoting autonomy by establishing and cultivating the relational support necessary to foster this capacity.

Two prominent critiques of the concept of social citizenship serve as an entry point to theorizing the autonomy-focused model I propose. On the one hand, some critics charge that the rhetoric of social citizenship fails to consider the mechanisms of social control that always accompany, and often overshadow, social welfare rights. On the other hand, the language of social citizenship rights is criticized for its so-called "passive" conception of citizenship, focusing only on rights without accounting for the role of duties or obligation. By reconceiving of social citizenship as a status that grants individuals not only the right to freedom from material constraints on autonomy, but also the right to access services and resources necessary to foster and develop the capacity to act autonomously, we can effectively respond to these critiques.

## I. Introduction

Advocates of social citizenship rights—those rights that, as T.H. Marshall wrote, guarantee “the right to a modicum of economic welfare and [...] to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society”(1950) —have seen their notion of the welfare state dissolve in the past decade or so, with a growing number of Western states undertaking radical welfare reforms that impose onerous conditions and limitations on the receipt of welfare subsidies. The most commonly acknowledged critiques of welfare in both the United States and Western Europe come from conservatives who invoke pathologizing notions of “a culture of dependency” or ring the alarm bells of “intergenerational dependence,” with these charges sometimes taking on a racialized and gendered tone. Though public and scholarly attention has recently been focused on conservative critiques of welfare, which have been the basis for dramatic policy changes on both sides of the Atlantic, social citizenship has also come under fire from voices on the opposite end of the political spectrum. In this paper I explore two critiques of social citizenship that do not fall exclusively on either end of the spectrum. First, some critics charge that the rhetoric of social citizenship fails to consider the extent to which mechanisms of social control—overwhelming disciplinary power, bureaucratic lapses in accountability, and degrading tools of surveillance—always accompany the rights associated with the welfare state. Second, the language of social citizenship rights has also been criticized for its so-called “passive” conception of citizenship, focused only on rights without taking into account the role of duties or obligation.

These two important critiques of social citizenship provide an entry point to theorizing a revised (or at least clarified) version of social citizenship. I argue that we need a richer notion of social citizenship, one that has at its core a relational conception of autonomy. While the standard Marshallian version of social citizenship does seem to be at bottom about autonomy—it seeks to correct the economic inequalities that compromise one’s ability to act autonomously—it fails to consider autonomy as a capacity that is not only hindered by material barriers, but that is also fostered only in the context of well-structured social relationships. In this sense, a standard view of social citizenship is often concerned only with removing (material) barriers, and rarely with actively promoting autonomy by establishing and cultivating the relational support necessary to foster autonomy. This revised conception of social citizenship helps us to respond to the critiques mentioned above and therefore to defend a notion of social citizenship rights. First, if we think of social citizenship rights as explicitly concerned with fostering autonomy, the social control critiques no longer point to flaws in social citizenship as a concept, but to *incomplete realizations* of the (revised) ideal of social citizenship. Second, we can also undermine concerns about the passivity of rights-focused accounts of citizenship and the failure of social rights to emphasize duties and obligation when we shift the focus of social citizenship to an autonomy-fostering model. Autonomy, I argue, is a necessary condition for the exercise of one’s capacity to fulfill duties and meet obligations.

In advancing this conception of social citizenship, I am not making an empirical claim about the current state of social rights in the North American context or elsewhere. Rather, I want to articulate a conception of social citizenship that can serve both as an ideal and as a benchmark with which to evaluate social policy and programs. It is

essential that we engage in this conceptual exercise if we are to advance an argument for something we call “social citizenship,” and in order to provide justifications for and a defense of critical social welfare programs that have so often come under attack. My discussion of social citizenship here is also not an attempt to provide a “correct” interpretation of Marshall’s original conception of social citizenship. Rather, I take up the concept of social citizenship as it appears in the context of its defense and criticism by other scholars, in particular in the cases of the critiques I examine here. What I ultimately put forth is an argument for how we *ought* to conceive of social citizenship if we are to hold true to the values that have motivated this concept’s widespread usage in the first place— notions of inclusion, community, and participation—while also responding to the critiques that have these days rendered it a beleaguered concept in the context of actual policy.

I begin, then, with two important critiques of social citizenship leveled by other theorists. Section II considers the social control critique, while Section III turns to critiques of the rights-focused orientation of theories of social citizenship. Both critiques, though coming from different vantage points, start from a similar understanding of social citizenship and its relationship to autonomy. On these accounts, social citizenship rights are primarily focused on the provision of material resources in order to provide the basic level of material wealth necessary to exercise individual autonomy. When viewed in light of this notion of the requirements for autonomy, the critiques may indeed be warranted. However, Section IV offers a revised conception of social citizenship, which, I argue, helps to resolve some of the conceptual tensions we find in the former definition. This revised conception also supports arguments for a just and equitable distribution of both material resources *and* optimally structured service delivery. At the core of this conception of social citizenship lies the feminist (“relational”) conception of autonomy, which draws our attention to the structure of relationships that may either foster or hinder autonomy. Furthermore, this feminist conception of social citizenship rejects the aspiration to overcome need and dependence, instead acknowledging their centrality to human life. In the context of this discussion, autonomy can be thought of as both a need in itself and as a mechanism that allows citizens to engage in the ongoing contestation over “needs interpretation” (Fraser, 1990). Section V puts this revised conception of social citizenship into action, arguing that it can help us to respond to the critiques discussed in Sections II and III. Finally, Section VI concludes the argument.

## *II. Social Citizenship as Social Control: The Politics of Empowerment*

Painting a particularly rosy picture of the early days of social citizenship rights, Marshall writes:

Social integration spread from the sphere of sentiment and patriotism into that of material enjoyment. The components of a civilized and culture life, formerly the monopoly of the few, were brought progressively within reach of the many, who were encouraged thereby to stretch out their hands towards those that still eluded their grasp. The diminution of inequality strengthened the demand for its abolition, at least with regard to the essentials of social welfare. (28)

To be sure, Marshall's treatise on citizenship and social class does not proceed only in such laudatory terms. He later notes the effects of stigma and other tensions in the social democratic state. However, like Marshall, contemporary proponents of social citizenship are optimistic that, when fully realized, social rights will alleviate the pressures of material want and free citizens to live their lives according to their own wishes, as full members of the community. But, primarily among those advocates of social justice who are associated with the political left, the promise of social welfare provision as a means to autonomy has been met with skepticism. These critics worry that as it provides the poor with welfare subsidies, the state also exerts power over recipients. Social rights, especially public assistance provision, are a mechanism adopted by the state primarily for the purpose of exerting "social control."

In his essay "Social Citizenship and its Fetters," Eric Gorham (1995) is critical of social citizenship, arguing that the concept does not adequately describe on-the-ground practices associated with the welfare state. Furthermore, Gorham argues that while the discourse of social citizenship highlights the increased participation and economic status of members of a community, it obscures "the increasing failure of those members to act in, and against, the modern state and market" (27). Welfare state policies associated with "social citizenship," Gorham claims, both empower and disempower citizens. The notion of citizenship is therefore inadequate as a descriptive of "the modern political subject." Gorham explains, "citizens must subject themselves to the procedures and institutions necessary to ensure that the state can continue to provide rights" (29). This notion of "subjection," which I further discuss and problematize in Section IV, is fleshed out by Gorham as he describes the means by which the citizen, or "political consumer," must learn the "correct procedure" necessary to be a citizen and access the commodities that are on offer via civic, political, and social provision (29). Though social citizenship rights may meet immediate material needs, Gorham (following Foucault) argues that the disciplinary power of the welfare state establishes "[s]tability [...] often at the prices of individual autonomy and self-determination" (36). Though he ultimately rejects the concept, Gorham's working definition of social citizenship is one of those that take material resources as the barrier to autonomy. However, partly because it fails to offer autonomy even in the face of material relief, Gorham questions the conceptual and practical value of the concept.

Among the most prominent social control theorists are Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1979, 1993). Though Piven and Cloward do not lodge any conceptual complaints against social citizenship per se, their depiction of the (American) social welfare state, its failings, and its oppressive motives suggests that they too are skeptical of social citizenship, as it has materialized over the past 50 years.<sup>1</sup> Though we may think of social welfare services such as public assistance as directed primarily at those who are unemployed, Piven and Cloward argue that "poor relief" functions to exert social control over those in the wage labor economy too. According to Piven and Cloward, work is the primary mechanism for establishing order in modern societies. They write, "So long as people are fixed in their work roles, their activities and outlooks are also fixed; they do

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, I am in a way *stipulating* that Piven and Cloward are offering a critique of social citizenship. While they might actually advocate for social citizenship broadly speaking, what I want to show here is that their analysis of the current (and past) state of social citizenship in the United States highlights what "social control" focused critiques of the *concept* of social citizenship have in mind. That is, Piven and Cloward argue that social citizenship, as it has been instantiated in the U.S., fails because it has at its core an impetus to control the poor, to "regulate" the poor.

what they must and think what they must” (6). When this fixity is disrupted—when unemployment rates rise—disorder may ensue, and the threat of it is ever present. Welfare, then, serves to restore order and is the means by which the state regains social control.

At the same time, welfare also regulates citizens who are not current recipients of welfare. Piven and Cloward contend that in times of relative stability, the market may fail to provide the incentives to work for all people; some have not been socialized fully to the “ethos of the market” (33). The welfare system attempts to correct this failure. Those who remain on the welfare rolls in times of stability “have been universally degraded for lacking economic value and ordinarily relegated to the foul quarters of the workhouse, with its strict penal regimen and its starvation diet” (33). By enforcing such terrible conditions and fostering the stigmatization that renders recipients of relief pariahs, the state in effect “spur[s] people to contrive ways of supporting themselves by their own industry, *to offer themselves to any employer on any terms*” (35). On this account, then, social citizenship in the modern state determines the “shape” of its entitlements in such a way that the ideal of providing material resources as a way of protecting autonomy becomes undesirable, indeed almost intolerable.

The above is just a brief sample of the variations of “social control” focused critiques of social citizenship that exist in the literature. The key point is, however, that these critiques turn on the argument that, though advocates of social citizenship claim that providing the material resources necessary to elevate the individual bearer of “social rights” to a reasonable level of comfort eliminates the constraints that prevent her from acting autonomously, the concept itself cannot stand up to scrutiny. As it provides these resources, theorists of the social control school argue, the welfare state also exercises, sometimes subtly and not necessarily through obviously “state initiated” entry points, an overwhelming disciplinary power over recipients of social rights related entitlements, repressing their autonomy as it claims to protect it.

### *III. Social Citizenship as Passive Entitlement: The Politics of Rights and Duties*

Unlike the previous critique of social citizenship, which tends to emerge from the left, another critique has found its greatest currency on the right, but also holds sway in the center of the political spectrum. In their early nineties review of the growing field of citizenship focused political philosophy, Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (1994) outline the New Right critique of social citizenship that weighed heavily on supporters of the post-war welfare state in both the United States and Britain. Social citizenship, they explain, “is often called ‘passive’ or ‘private’ citizenship, because of its emphasis on passive entitlements and the absence of any obligation to participate in public life” (354-4). Though advocates of the welfare state and its companion notion of citizenship traditionally argue that entitlements help to reconcile the inequalities created by the market and therefore remove barriers to the exercise of political and civil citizenship rights, critics claim that the promise has not been fulfilled. Explaining this charge, Kymlicka and Norman write, “Far from being the solution, the welfare state has itself perpetuated the problem by reducing citizens to passive dependents who are under bureaucratic tutelage” (356). From critiques of this nature have emerged popular buzz words and phrases such as a “culture of dependency” and “intergenerational

dependence,” that have been liberally bandied about in the debates leading up to the welfare reforms in both the U.S. and Britain that arrived in the mid-nineties.

Resisting the critiques of those who view social welfare provision as a threat to civic participation, defenders of social citizenship argue that welfare rights are indeed the basis for a more vibrant participatory democracy insofar as they aim to curb *need*. For example, Desmond S. King and Jeremy Waldron (1988) focus on the account of the relationship between *need* and *the political* that has been prominent in what they refer to as “the tradition” of political theories of citizenship. Citing political theorists from Aristotle to Tocqueville to Arendt, King and Waldron point to the contention that people cannot participate in the *polis* or cannot do so well if a certain attention has not been paid to their material well-being (426). That is, need undermines civic politics and renders questionable the value of an individual’s contributions to the public sphere; “desperate need is conceived to interfere with the processes of reflection and deliberation that civic politics requires” (428). Whilst acknowledging that need is unlikely to be banished from society, King and Waldron nevertheless describe social citizenship rights as aspiring to remove need from society in order to foster adequate political debate.

But this defense of social citizenship as a tool to overcome “need,” and therefore to provide the basis for civic participation, has been challenged by not only conservatives but also those to the left of center. The grounds for these critiques are not only theoretical but also empirical. If needs have been met, participation has not followed, and in many cases, needs have not been sufficiently met. Michael Ignatieff (1989) condemns critiques of conservative rhetoric that fail to acknowledge the genuine shortcomings of social citizenship as it has emerged in practice. The welfare state, he concedes, “did encourage the emergence of new styles of moral self-exculpation” (71). Despite claims to the contrary, “a structure of collective entitlements does not necessarily increase social solidarity,” write Ignatieff (70). While acknowledging that the transfer of care-work to the state has freed those formerly confined to caring roles (women in particular) to participate in the labor market, Ignatieff also notes that such a transfer may lead to a weakened sense of familial and community obligation. As we saw in the previous section, entitlements that purport to empower citizens may be accompanied by the exertion of limiting power over citizens. To this Ignatieff adds that such “empowerment” has rarely brought about participation or any other form of active citizenship: “The entitled were never empowered, because empowerment would have infringed on the prerogatives of the managers of the welfare state” (69). The tensions between the interests of the welfare bureaucracy and those of the so-called empowered citizen-recipient proved too weighty to bring about any genuine empowerment, rendering references to “the enabling and facilitating state” that Ignatieff attributes to post-war social democrats contrary to empirical evidence (69).

These critiques of the passive nature of social citizenship, then, rely on an understanding of social citizenship as primarily focused on overcoming basic material needs in order to “enable” citizens to participate in community life and politics. The critics, then, charge that first, dependency renders the recipient-citizens passive and therefore unlikely to participate in civil and political life, and second, the very structure of welfare receipt is so fraught with tensions that the bureaucracy itself tends to stifle the impetus and ability of recipients to participate. The latter of these critiques is related to the social control argument; insofar as welfare acts to pacify those who are driven to

protest or unrest by their wants, as Piven and Cloward argue, it also drives them away from their duties to participate in general. Thus, despite the differences in the two critiques I have discussed, they both presuppose a similar notion of social citizenship, which they go on to find fault with.

#### IV. *Relational Autonomy and Social Citizenship: Conceptual Clarity as a Tool*

At the beginning of the paper, I suggested that a revised conception of social citizenship ought to have a particular notion of autonomy at its center. In the previous two sections, I have gone on at some length about two broadly conceived categories of critiques aimed at the concept of social citizenship. Both categories, I claim, are premised upon a similar notion of what exactly the target of the critique—social citizenship—consists of, in theory and in practice. Indeed, the critics may be construed as viewing social citizenship as *a status that grants individuals the rights to freedom from material constraints that may impede their ability to act autonomously, and therefore to exercise the rights associated with civil and political citizenship*. Social citizenship, then, does indeed seem to turn on the concept of autonomy. However, my argument is that inherent in this definition are inadequacies in both (1) the notion of autonomy at the core of this conventional definition of social citizenship and (2) the conception of the conditions under which such autonomy can be exercised. In this section, I describe the “remedies” I propose to these inadequacies, and how the elaboration and discussion of such remedies can be conceived of as part of an ongoing process of contestation over what Nancy Fraser refers to as “the politics of needs-interpretation.”

Feminist political theorists have rightly been concerned with problems of autonomy for some time. The broadly conceived feminist project of overcoming gender oppression is necessarily connected to the notion of individual autonomy; where such oppression has denied women, and those ideas, institutions, and relationships gendered “feminine,” proper respect and recognition, it has often also (or consequently) denied them the opportunity to develop and exercise autonomy. By autonomy, I mean the capacity to live one’s life according to one’s own plans,<sup>2</sup> that is, the capacity for “self-government.” Despite the relevance of autonomy to feminism, feminists have also been concerned about the implications of such notions of “self-government,” which are sometimes criticized for being overly individualistic, for referencing only atomistic, unencumbered, and independent individuals, categories that have conventionally excluded most women, and for ignoring the inherent sociality of human beings. In response to these claims, many theorists, feminist and otherwise, have argued that autonomy is a “relational” concept.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I explore the relevance of the nature of these plans—the extent to which the individual has reflected on them, the question of whether these plans must in themselves be consistent with one’s future abilities to exercise autonomy—elsewhere. For the purposes of this paper, we can, I think, put this issue aside without sacrificing the coherence of the argument.

<sup>3</sup> What follows is a much abbreviated discussion of the relational conception of autonomy, which has a rich and complex body of literature devoted to it. I provide a lengthier account in the introduction. Other theorists that treat this concept include, for example, FRIEDMAN, M. (2003) *Autonomy, gender, politics*, Oxford; New York, Oxford University Press, MACKENZIE, C. & STOLJAR, N. (2000) *Relational autonomy: feminist perspectives on autonomy, agency, and the social self*, New York, Oxford University Press, YOUNG, I. M. (1990) *Justice and the politics of difference*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

Given that humans are socially embedded creatures, autonomy cannot be theorized as though such interdependence does not exist. Rather, as Nedelsky (1989) explains, we must navigate the path between acknowledging the “constitutiveness of social relations” and the “value of self-determination” (9). Autonomy can be understood then, as Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth (2005) write, “as an acquired set of capacities to lead one’s own life”—that is acquired in the context of our various relationships (127). In turn, Anderson and Honneth argue, given the importance liberal societies often place on protecting the vulnerable, “[they] should be especially concerned to address vulnerabilities of individuals regarding the development and maintenance of their autonomy” (127). Furthermore, as John Christman (2005) notes, the capacities associated with autonomy “do not merely emerge naturally, but must be developed through various processes involving educational, social and personal resources” (87).

The insights of theorists of relational autonomy, which, as Marilyn Friedman (2003) notes, are now relatively widely accepted by mainstream theorists, have considerable significance for our conception of social citizenship. There are two points that emerge here. First, if the capacity for autonomy is developed in the context of relationships, and if this capacity can also be disrupted, curbed, or threatened in the same context, we must consider not only the lack of material resources that may act as a constraint to the exercise of autonomy. We must also explicitly turn our attention to the *provision* of these resources and to the provision of other services, both of which will serve to constitute a set of especially pivotal relationships in the lives of recipients of the entitlements associated with social citizenship rights. Whether or not these relationships are appropriately structured—whether, for example, they entail relations of domination—will be crucial in determining their likelihood of fulfilling the goal of promoting autonomy. The second point follows from Christman’s argument: autonomy is developed in the context of a complex mixture of resources, extending well beyond material resources only (though they are certainly important). Christman, writing in defense of the closely related concept of positive freedom, explains:

Seeing freedom as more than a set of opportunities created by removing constraints from the path of thought and action [...] is to set out a view of human agency as a set of powers and abilities, ones regarding the development and expression of authentic and effective self-government. Certain political institutions and policies may well remove or minimize constraints faced by an agent but do nothing to establish or protect those powers. (87)

Specifying a relational conception of autonomy as central to this conception of social citizenship, then, is critical in defining the contours of what social citizenship rights will look like. If social citizenship is concerned with ensuring the ability of individuals to act autonomously, the rights associated with it will look significantly different depending on what we mean by autonomy.

The second point discussed above—the implications of a relational notion of autonomy for our understanding of what resources are required in order to facilitate the development of that autonomy—is closely linked to the second of the two “inadequacies” I described above. The conventional notion of social citizenship, I argue, inadequately theorizes the conditions under which autonomy is developed. Political scientists and



policy analysts have devoted considerable attention to the question of service delivery; ranging from considerations of the plausibility of a just welfare system given the vast bureaucracy of many welfare states, to more specific, empirical questions about the levels of accountability and discretion required of a successful (however it may be defined) system, these analyses place service delivery high on the list of relevant concerns for questions of social rights (See, for example, Lipsky, 1980, Soss, 2000). But political theorists examining *normative theoretical accounts* of social citizenship rarely develop a clear account of what service delivery ought to look like if it is to be consistent with the goal of fostering autonomy. This concern, I argue, must be accounted for in a theory of social citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

This discussion of the role of autonomy in the conception (and practice) of social citizenship is, I want to argue, congruent in some ways with Nancy Fraser's (1990) discussion of the politics of needs interpretation. Fraser wants to shift the focus of political discourse from discussion of needs to discussion of the "discourses of needs, from the distribution of need satisfactions to 'the politics of need interpretation'" (200). The particular salience of "need" to this discussion in general is an important point that I will return to in greater detail in the next section when I respond to critics in the "duties and obligations" category, as discussed above. I do, in fact, want to think of autonomy as a unique type of need, but also as a key instrument in the very politics of "needs interpretation." But for now, I turn to Fraser's argument as a generating a helpful framework for further distinguishing the conventional conception of social citizenship from the one I am proposing.

Fraser divides the politics of needs interpretation into "three analytically distinct but practically interrelated moments" (202). Keeping in mind the interrelation of these moments, we can identify the contours of a discussion of social citizenship within the framework of Fraser's "moments." The first moment is a struggle for validation of a need; it is the pursuit of "political" status (or some other status) for the need. In a sense, Marshall's conception of social citizenship does this with regard to autonomy; Marshall's notion of social citizenship highlights the importance of autonomy to both inclusion in the political community and to the exercise of rights, both explicitly social (i.e. welfare), and those related to the other types of citizenship he discusses, political and civil citizenship.

The second moment Fraser describes revolves around "the struggle over the interpretation of the need, the struggle for the power to define it and, so to determine what would satisfy it" (202). It is within this moment that I want to situate both the critics of social citizenship I refer to above and my own discussion here. While I argue that there is general agreement about the centrality of autonomy to questions of social citizenship, there is not only disagreement over, but also a lack of clarity regarding the meaning and place of "autonomy" in the context of social citizenship. Moreover, the contested nature of needs interpretation that Fraser brings to our attention points to the fact that when we consider the concept of social citizenship, we must be very clear about the meaning of autonomy, who constructs this meaning, and what interests such meanings serve. Fraser argues that analyses of needs that appeal unquestioningly to "socially authorized forms of public discourse" often "neglect the questions whether these forms of public discourse are skewed in favor of self-interpretations and interests of

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dominant social groups and, so, work to the disadvantage of subordinate or oppositional groups” (202). Indeed, conceptions of autonomy that *do not* take into account its relational character often presuppose an image of the autonomous individual that is exclusionary along various axes. Such a conception of autonomy, where it shapes the ideal of social citizenship, may arbitrarily (or even pointedly) limit the potential for policies associated with social citizenship to genuinely do the work of fostering autonomy. This “work,” as it were, helps to expand the category of individuals who will be both recognized as autonomous, and genuinely enabled to develop autonomy.

#### V. *Responding to the Critics: The Normative (and Practical) Implications of the Model*

The account of social citizenship developed in Part IV provides a *normative* basis for responding to the critiques of social citizenship outlined above. That is, this account in and of itself clearly cannot remedy the practical problems of contemporary welfare states; a theoretical conception cannot serve as the antidote to the shortcomings and antipathies that exist in service delivery, political culture, and resource allocation. However, as a benchmark—a way to measure whether in fact the welfare state is providing the services and resources necessary to genuinely afford all members of the community the status of social citizenship—this revised conception, I argue, can help us to evaluate and therefore work towards remedying the problems of contemporary welfare states. In this sense, both critiques leveled against the welfare state that I have discussed above can be challenged when the target of the critique is the *ideal* of social citizenship, in its reconstituted form. The critiques, then, no longer point to flaws in social citizenship as a concept, but to *incomplete realizations* of the ideal of social citizenship.

##### i. Social Control

The critique of social citizenship that expresses concern over the potential (or, some argue, necessary) coincidence of social rights and social control is on one level relatively easily displaced by our revised notion of autonomy. First, let’s rehearse the critique, where the conventional conception of social citizenship remains in place. Gorham argues that in order to attain the entitlements associated with social citizenship, recipients are subject to the disciplinary forces of the welfare state bureaucracy that coercively motivate them to conform to whatever qualities it has deemed appropriate for the subjects of social welfare benefits to embody. That is, social citizenship rights, which provide the material resources necessary to alleviate constraints on the exercise of autonomy, are accessible only to the “good” recipient—the individual who conforms and acquiesces to the demands of the disciplinary state. Thus, Gorham argues that social citizenship has an inherent contradiction in it: in order to attain autonomy via social citizenship rights, one must also *sacrifice* her autonomy. He writes, “the stability that permits the exercise of liberty for the citizen,” that is the material resources provided by the state, “also holds the subject in a network of tutelary power constituted by school, psychiatry, social work, etc.” (36).

However, when we revisit this critique wielding the revised conception of social citizenship, the contradiction is no longer sustainable. Social citizenship rights now refer

to something well beyond material resources provision; these rights refer explicitly to the provision of services and resources that actively foster (relational) autonomy. Therefore, if social citizenship rights are realized only in conjunction with social control, the notion itself is incoherent. We cannot refer to a system as engaged in advancing social citizenship status if it provides a monthly check to a single mother, but also dictates, for example, how she will conduct her intimate relationships and what counts as “work” for her. Such a system clearly violates the single mother’s ability to live according to her own ‘law’—to act autonomously.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, suppose the services—the check or whatever else—are delivered in a way that reproduces relations of domination, simply with regard to the professional-client relationship established in welfare offices, or extending to other relations of power, including those organized along lines of gender, race and sexuality. In this case, our revised model highlights the extent to which these so-called social rights fail to develop the relationships out of which the *capacity* for autonomy is always partially constituted. Instead, the relationships extant in the service delivery context are particularly *constraining* with regard to the development of autonomy. Indeed, in our society, characterized as it is by ongoing inequalities and discrimination, many individuals and families who are compelled to rely on entitlement based programs are already subject to relations of domination in various aspects of their lives and may therefore be particularly in need of the (relational) resources needed to assist them in developing the capacity to act autonomously.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the contradiction that Gorham, and to an extent Piven and Cloward, point to in their critique of social citizenship, is no longer a contradiction in the concept, but a failure to realize the requirements of the concept itself.

While the more overt forms of social control that Gorham and Piven and Cloward point to are relatively easily excluded from the revised conception of social citizenship, some theorists point to more subtle forms of coercion that may in fact operate by “enabling” citizens, rather than overtly constraining them. Barbara Cruikshank (1999) cites Foucault’s notion of bio-power in explaining the ways in which welfare “is a form of government that is both voluntary and coercive” (38). That is, the simplistic view that welfare necessarily dominates and controls recipients in an entirely coercive fashion is put to the side, in favor of a model that points to a much more subtle and, in some sense, insidious form of power. Cruikshank explains, “welfare recipients are not excluded or controlled by power so much as constituted and put into action by power” (41). Foucault’s bio-power helps her to elucidate this mode of working through rather than against citizens “agency”; “Instead of excluding participation or repressing subjectivity, bio-power operates to invest the citizen with a set of goals and self-understandings, and

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that all attributes of conditionality that may be found in a given welfare system are disqualified. Only perhaps a system of guaranteed annual income would achieve this, but it would fail on other fronts I cannot discuss here. The point is simply that any social rights must be evaluated not only on whether they provide material resources but on whether (in this case) the conditions accompanying these resources foster or hinder autonomy competency.

<sup>6</sup> I do not mean to claim that certain classes or categories of people are “less autonomous” than others by nature, or even by virtue of their social location. However, on my account of autonomy, there is reason to believe that those who have been subject to recurring and sustained experiences of domination may be more likely to have been limited in their abilities to develop and exercise the capacity for autonomy. See further FRIEDMAN, M. (2005) *Autonomy and Male Dominance*. IN CHRISTMAN, J. P. & ANDERSON, J. (Eds.) *Autonomy and the challenges of liberalism: new essays*. Cambridge, UK; New York, Cambridge University Press.

gives the citizen-subject an investment in participation voluntarily in programs, projects and institutions set up to ‘help’ them” (Cruikshank, 41).

Cruikshank’s model of what she refers to as “relations of empowerment” may sound a lot like the ideal of social citizenship as explicitly seeking to foster autonomy that I have laid out. However, as the scare quotes around the word “help” in the previous quotation might tip us off to, she is wary, even cynical, about the prospects of this empowerment. While Cruikshank claims, first, that her conception of the will to empower is “*neither* clearly liberatory *nor* clearly repressive,” and second, that “empowerment is a power relationship, a relationship of government; it can be used well or badly,” she focuses most on the destructive possibilities empowerment affords (72, 86). Claims to empowerment, she seems to suggest, may create a self-understanding of autonomy and self-sufficiency within recipients, but empowerment is necessarily a power relationship and these “self-understandings” emerge from what she calls “technologies of citizenship.” Technologies of citizenship that operate on the basis of the knowledge culled by “experts” that seek to “know” the target of empowerment and construct a particular kind of subjectivity among them that, Cruikshank believes, still fits a model determined by the state to be worthy of the status of citizenship. The question is, then, whether such a mode of empowerment, still so fraught with power relations and prescriptive forms of agency, can truly be thought of as fostering autonomy.

While Cruikshank’s argument here is convincing in some respects—it serves us well to recognize the always-already present power relations that must surround even projects of “empowerment”—it also seems to foreclose the possibility of actually fostering autonomy, without showing us a way out. Furthermore, it in some ways reverts back to an individualist model of autonomy, rather than a relational one. For Cruikshank, the project of empowerment is always suspect because embedded within it are relations of power that can never simply stand by neutrally. Empowerment also means exercise of power *over* some individual(s). Yet, this also seems to indicate that no one can truly be empowered from without—that relationships that claim to assist us to develop our capacities for autonomy are always somehow suspect. Is it the case, then, that for autonomy to be “truly” autonomous, it must be developed in a vacuum? The alternative is that there can never be autonomy at all; it cannot be developed in isolation and where it is developed in the context of social relations, it is not really autonomous. But the latter option is also unsatisfying. Whether or not “perfect” autonomy can exist is not the purpose of this inquiry. But seeking to provide services that enable individuals to better or more easily choose their own life paths, even in the context of dependency, remains, I believe, a realistic and necessary pursuit, especially with regard to feminist concerns. Thus, the revised conception of social citizenship that I have suggested here responds to Cruikshank’s concerns insofar as it highlights *relations* of power endemic to the delivery of welfare services, but it does so without foreclosing the possibility for autonomous agency. Rather, it helps us to distinguish configurations of relationships that hinder autonomy from those that enable autonomy.

## ii. Duties and Obligations

There are two grounds on which to address the concerns of critics of social citizenship who express worries about the effects of welfare receipt on individuals’

fulfillment of obligations to the state, or more broadly, their engagement in the polity as duty-bearing members of a community. The first point of departure takes us back to the question of needs. While Ignatieff claims that need-satisfaction is no guarantee of civic engagement, and in fact often renders citizens passive, King and Waldron counter that it is by virtue of the *removal* of needs that citizens become more likely and better contributors to the polity. The second point of departure more broadly addresses the relationship between autonomy and community engagement and obligations. Autonomy, I argue, is a necessary condition for the capacity to fulfill obligations and duties.

King and Waldron, following Arendt's concerns about need, argue that social citizenship, insofar as it is able to eliminate the most desperate of need through the provision of material resources, protects autonomy and therefore renders individuals more able to participate in politics. The Arendtian line, they note, is that not only does an individual's own desperate need make it difficult to call upon the public spiritedness necessary for effective political participation, but it also hinders other, non-needy, individual's abilities by invoking in them the apolitical sentiment of compassion (King and Waldron, 428). However, I do not think the aim of eliminating need from the public sphere is a desirable or plausible one. To seek out an end to "need" as a way of overcoming the particularity and potential irrationality of participation in civic politics obscures our constant and inevitable state of human interdependence, which must always imply some sense of need. Furthermore, this argument has the effect of marginalizing from civic politics those who have particularly obvious or pressing needs, those who are "dependent" in ways that come to be highlighted in the context of our society, and those who care for "needy" individuals. This points back to the politic of needs-interpretation I discussed above. Politics is very much about needs; not only welfare politics, but much of our political discourse hinges in some way or another on questions of needs and needs interpretation (Fraser, 1990). Therefore, to try to vanquish need from the politic sphere is to claim that we can initiate interpretations, make arguments, and take decisions with regard to needs, all without acknowledging that such need is ever present in all of our lives, including in politics. Allowing those who are "needy" into the public debate—and such need does not have to be "desperate" and therefore impairing of our decision making abilities—is essential to rendering the politics of needs-interpretation inclusively "political," rather than dominated by the voices of those who claim to transcend need. Thus, need itself is a valid point from which we might fulfill our obligation to participate in politics and from which we may better be able to identify with other members of the community.

The politics of need and its relationship to duties and obligations also returns us once again to the centrality of relational autonomy to our conception of social citizenship. The wariness we may have in the face of need is very much related to the dominant sense in our society that *dependence* is undesirable and threatening to the "impartiality" that is demanded of "good" political participants. As Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (2002) describe in their genealogy of the term dependence, "[i]n the age of democratic revolutions, the developing new concept of citizenship rested on independence; dependency was deemed antithetical to citizenship" (19). This sense of dependence as incompatible with citizenship remains in place today. Furthermore, note Fraser and Gordon, dependence has been pathologized and reduced to an individualized affliction, rather than a product of social relations and a "condition" that affects virtually all of us.

Need is seen as putting us in a perpetual state of dependence, and therefore banishing us from civic participation. But the relational conception of autonomy is especially important in highlighting the extent to which autonomy and dependence are *not* antithetical; since autonomy develops in the context of relationships, interdependence is not only compatible with autonomy, it is a necessary condition for the development of autonomy. Since the autonomy that we now seek to cultivate via social citizenship is “relational,” the notion that both need and dependence compromise one’s ability to act as an autonomy citizen is rendered incoherent.

Finally, the aim of social citizenship both under the revised formula and the conventional one is related to autonomy; autonomy is seen as a precondition for exercising the rights associated with citizenship. But some theorists argue that a focus on rights is in itself atomizing, leading to a diminished sense of community and, indeed, a sense that other community members are primarily entities that threaten to infringe on our rights. Thus, “fellow” citizens are seen not in a solidaristic sense, but in as jeopardizing our autonomy. Now, clearly the relational conception of autonomy rejects the claim that social relationships threaten our autonomy in and of themselves. But what of rights? Isn’t the language of rights counter to the language of duties and obligations? Although I cannot launch a defense of rights here, I do want to point to an alternative way of thinking about rights as a potentially fruitful way of resisting this opposition between rights and duties. Martha Minow (1990) argues that we should think of rights as embedded in and constitutive of relationships. Thus, to briefly highlight an implication of this way of thinking, Minow writes, “[b]y invoking rights, an individual or group claims the attention of the larger community and its authorities” (293). But, Minow explains, the rights claimant not only claims attention in an abstract sense, she reaffirms her connection to the community. “At the same time,” Minow notes, “this claim acknowledges the claimant’s membership in the larger group, participation in its traditions, and observation of its forms” (293). This is especially true if we think of claims to social citizenship rights as claims to the opportunity or possibility to develop the capacity to act autonomously, a capacity through which one is able to become—and to become *recognized* as—a full member of the community. It is *only* in making this claim that the possibility for fulfilling ones duties to the community can emerge.

## VI. Conclusion

Social citizenship rights, though under attack for several decades now, are worth standing up for. In order to pursue an inclusive and just society, we should seek to provide all members of the community with the social welfare services necessary to ensure that they may access and exercise full citizenship rights. But, if we are to defend this notion of social citizenship rights, we must be clear what such rights entail and what form they will take on the ground in order to fulfill their promises. The conventional conception of social citizenship as a status that grants individuals the rights to freedom from material constraints that may impede their ability to act autonomously, and therefore to exercise the rights associated with civil and political citizenship, leaves open the possibility of charges of incoherence and contradiction. Because this conventional conception of social citizenship presupposes a notion of autonomy that does not take into account the social relationships from which this capacity emerges, it cannot adequately

conceive of what must be present in order to not only protect autonomy but foster its development. The revised conception of social citizenship that I propose in this paper suggests that social citizenship rights should explicitly seek to provide the services that are necessary to foster the capacity for autonomy. Because this capacity is a product of well-structured relationships, social citizenship rights must be particularly focused on enacting social service *provision* that is conducive to this development; where relations of domination or other constraining relations are prevalent in service delivery situations, autonomy cannot flourish.

Given this revised conception of social citizenship, claims that social citizenship must always masquerade as social control or that social rights claims hinder citizens' sense of obligation and duty are no longer salient. Though on the ground instances of social control and limitations on obligation may well continue to exist and even thrive at this moment in welfare state development, a revised conception of social citizenship allows us to identify these problems as failures to live up to social citizenship rather than failures within the concept of social citizenship itself. Furthermore, as a benchmark or ideal, this conception of social citizenship helps point the way to the strategies and solutions necessary to remedy the practical problems extant in today's welfare states

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