

# Family Decision-Making Autonomy from Middle Childhood to Adolescence: Person-Based Patterns and Media-Related Issues

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## Introduction

- Autonomy development is a central task of adolescence and predicts youth adjustment (Collins & Steinberg, 2006; Qin et al., 2009).
- One common marker of behavioral autonomy is *family decision-making autonomy*: how much control youth vs. parents have over teens' every-day decisions
- The appropriateness of decision-making autonomy depends on the domain of issues considered (Hasebe et al., 2004; Smetana et al., 2004).
  - Shifts from parental to joint control during adolescence are normative for *prudential* (health, safety) issues and *conventional* norms
  - Shifts from joint to adolescent control are normative for *personal* (privacy, preferences) and *multifaceted* (mixed personal & other) issues
- Media-related behaviors are ubiquitous in children's lives (e.g., social media posts, text messages)
- However, normative levels of decision-making autonomy over media issues have not been examined nor compared to other behaviors (e.g., personal, multifaceted).
- Decision-making autonomy has also rarely been examined prior to adolescence (Wray-Lake et al., 2010) or in terms of the heterogeneity of decision-making autonomy across ISSUES (but see Cumsille et al. 2006; Smetana et al., 2015 for patterns of beliefs about legitimate parental authority).

## Purpose

- Identify patterns of family decision-making for 4 types of issues:
  - personal, multifaceted, **media**, and conventional behaviors
- in three age groups:
  - Middle childhood, early adolescence, middle adolescence

## Participants

- 842 parents of U.S. children aged 9-17
  - 76% mothers, 57% white, primarily mid-SES
- Divided into:
  - Elementary school ( $n = 218$ ), Middle school ( $n = 280$ ), High school ( $n = 344$ )

## Decision-Making Items

Who makes the DECISIONS in your family? 1 (Parent decides alone) <--> 5 (Child decides alone)

### Personal

- Choosing hairstyle or clothes (**style**)
- What music my child can listen to (**music**)
- My child's choice of friends (**friends**)
- How my child spends his/her own money (**money**)
- Whether my child can join a school or community-based extracurricular activity (**join activity**)
- Which school or community-based extracurricular activities my child joins (**which activity**)

### Multifaceted

- How clean my child's room is (**clean room**)
- When my child goes to bed (**bedtime**)
- When my child does homework (**homework**)

### Media

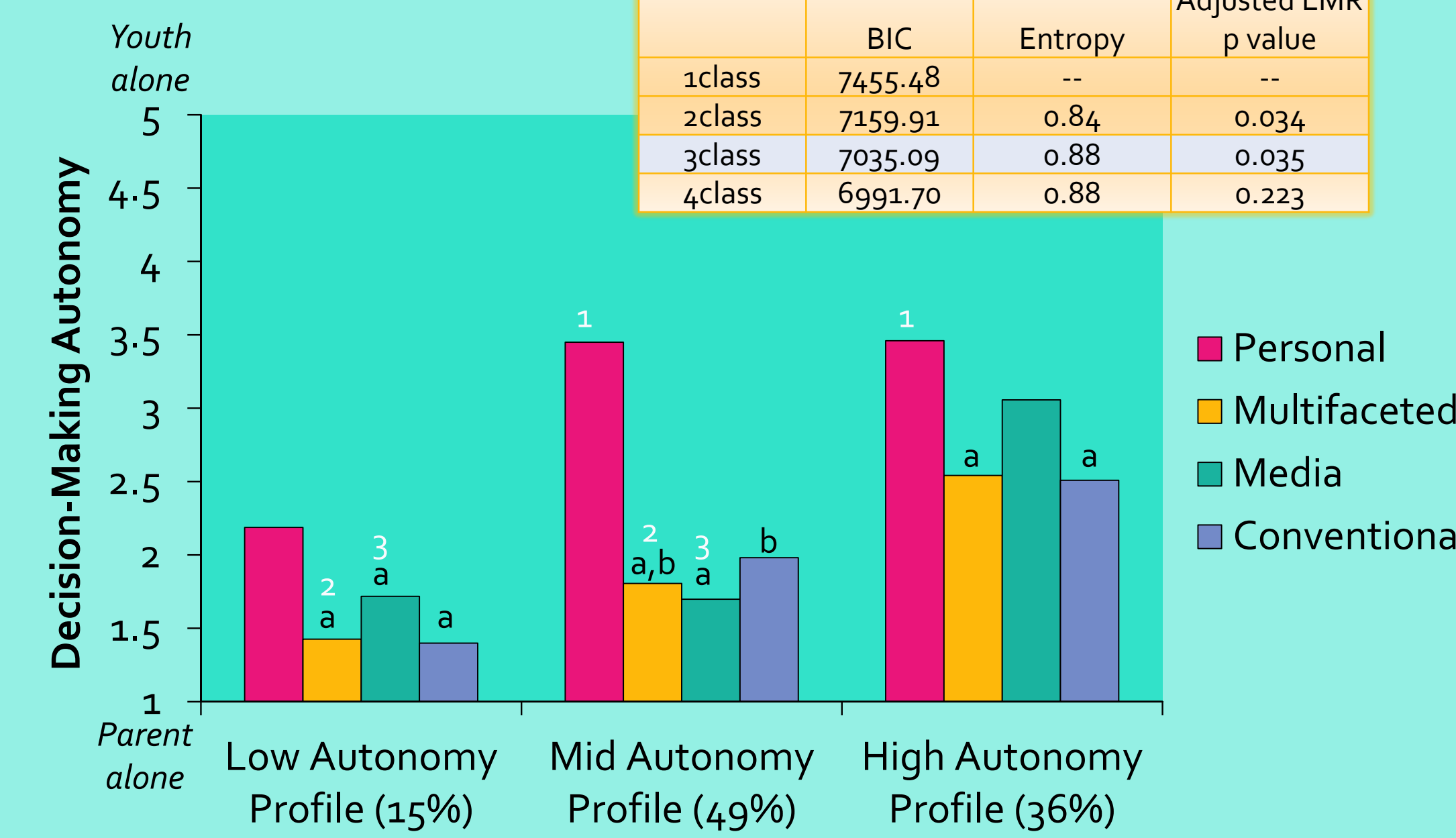
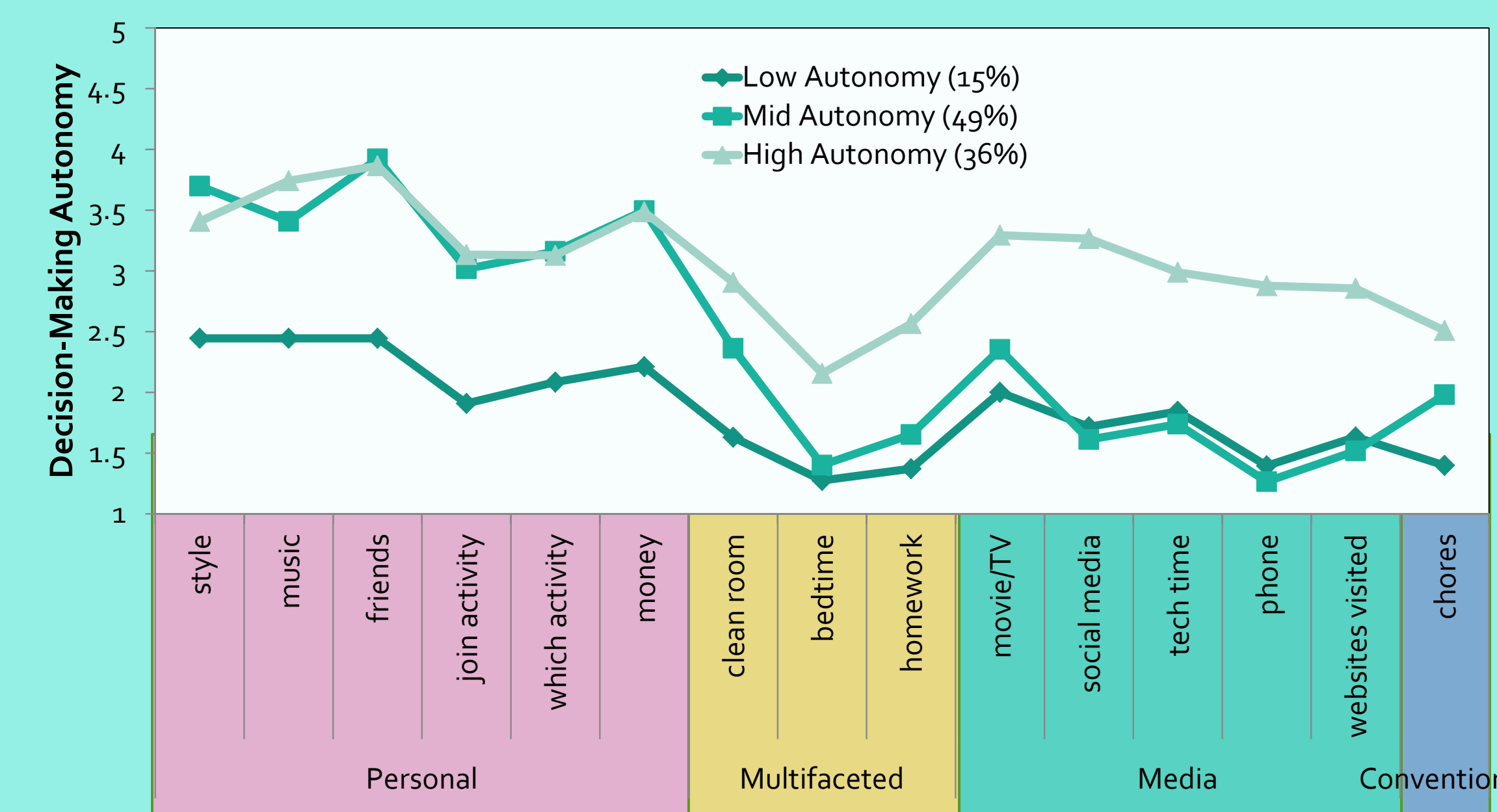
- Which movies or TV shows my child watches (**movie/TV**)
- What my child posts on social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) (**social media**)
- How much time my child spends using technology (e.g. computers, TV, video games) (**tech time**)
- How my child uses his/her cell phone (**phone**)
- What websites my child is allowed to visit (**websites**)

### Conventional

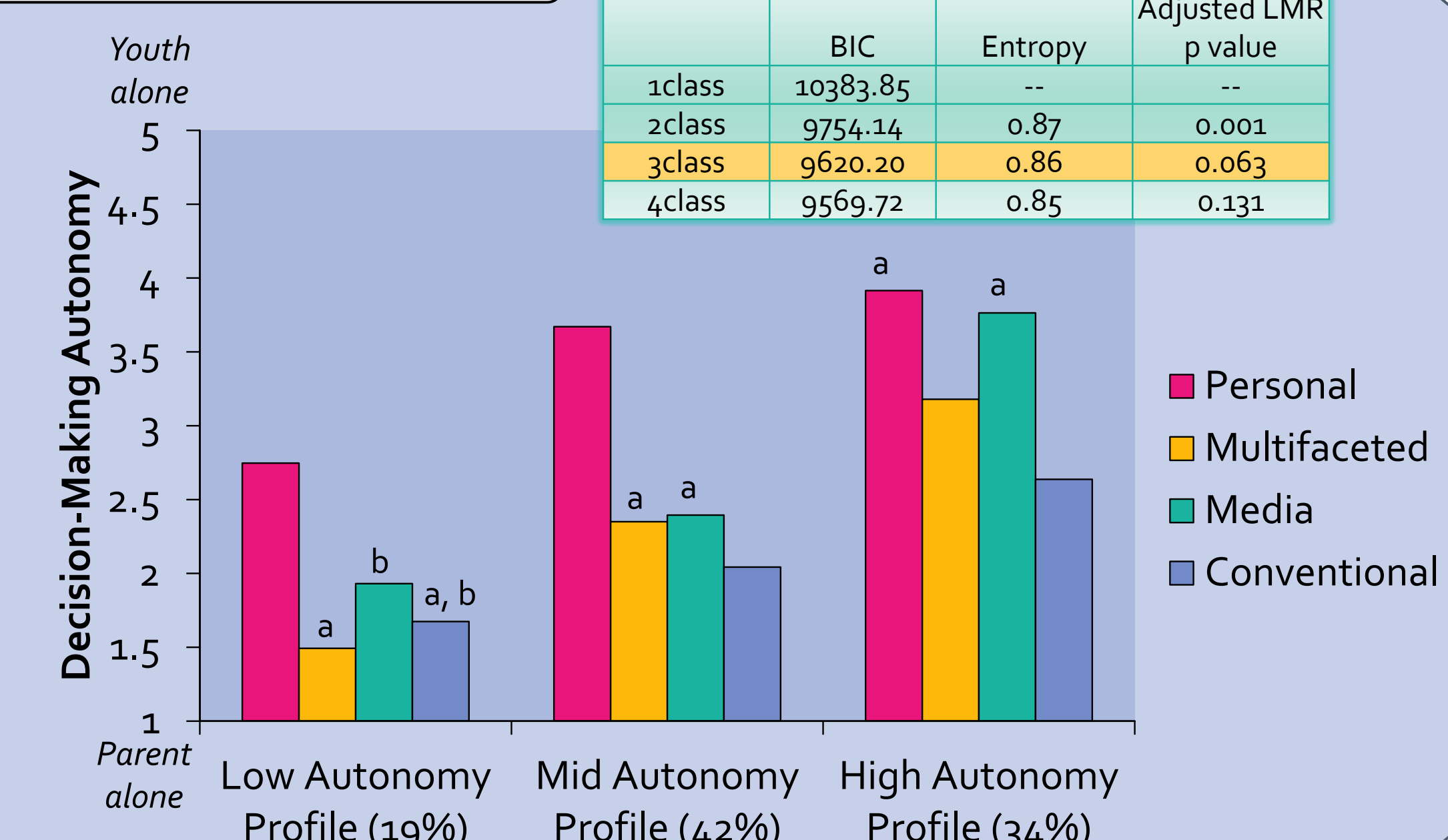
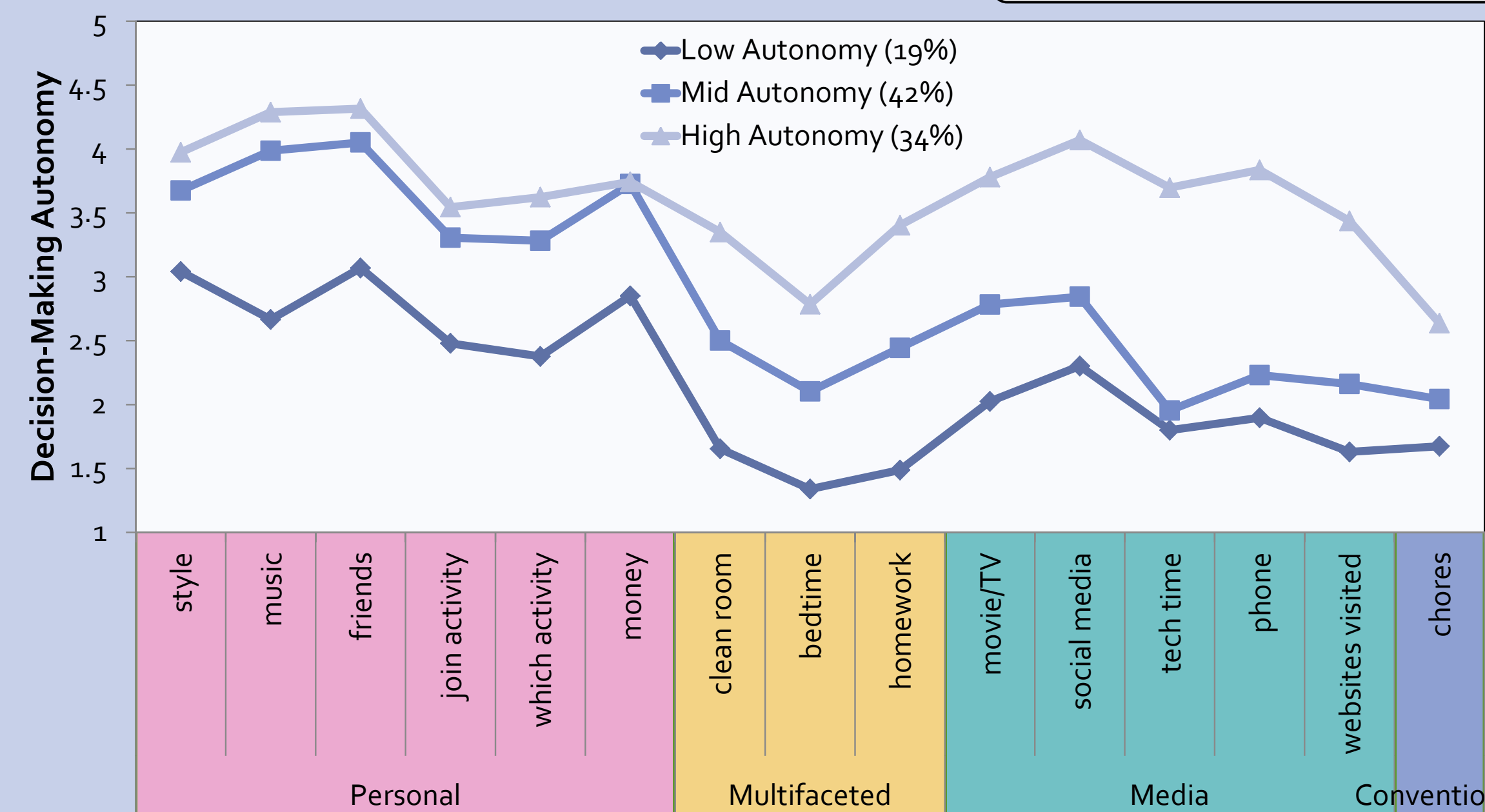
- Whether my teen should do chores around the house (**chores**)

4-factor CFA:  
 $\chi^2(84) = 332.59, p < .001, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .95, SRMR = .05$

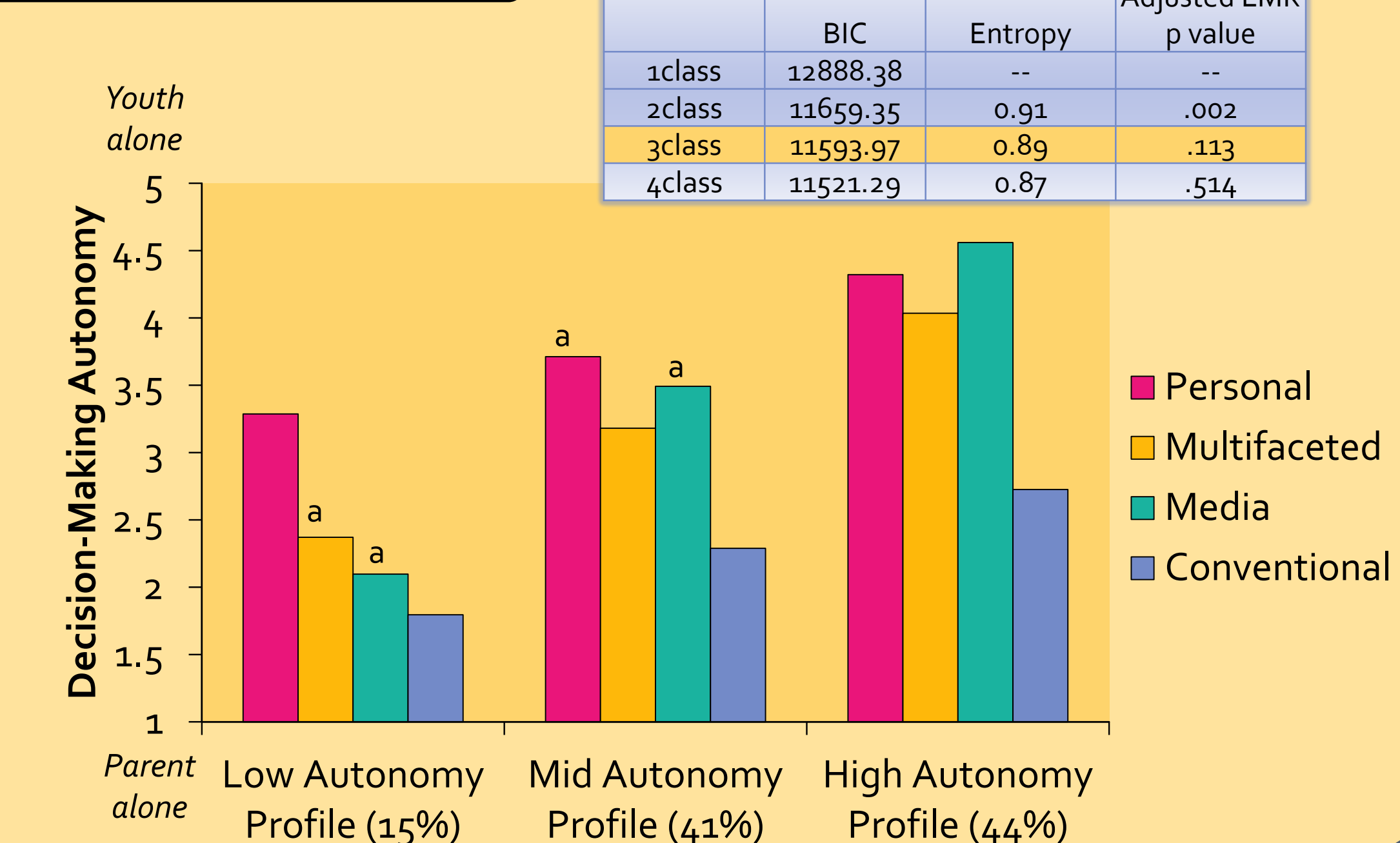
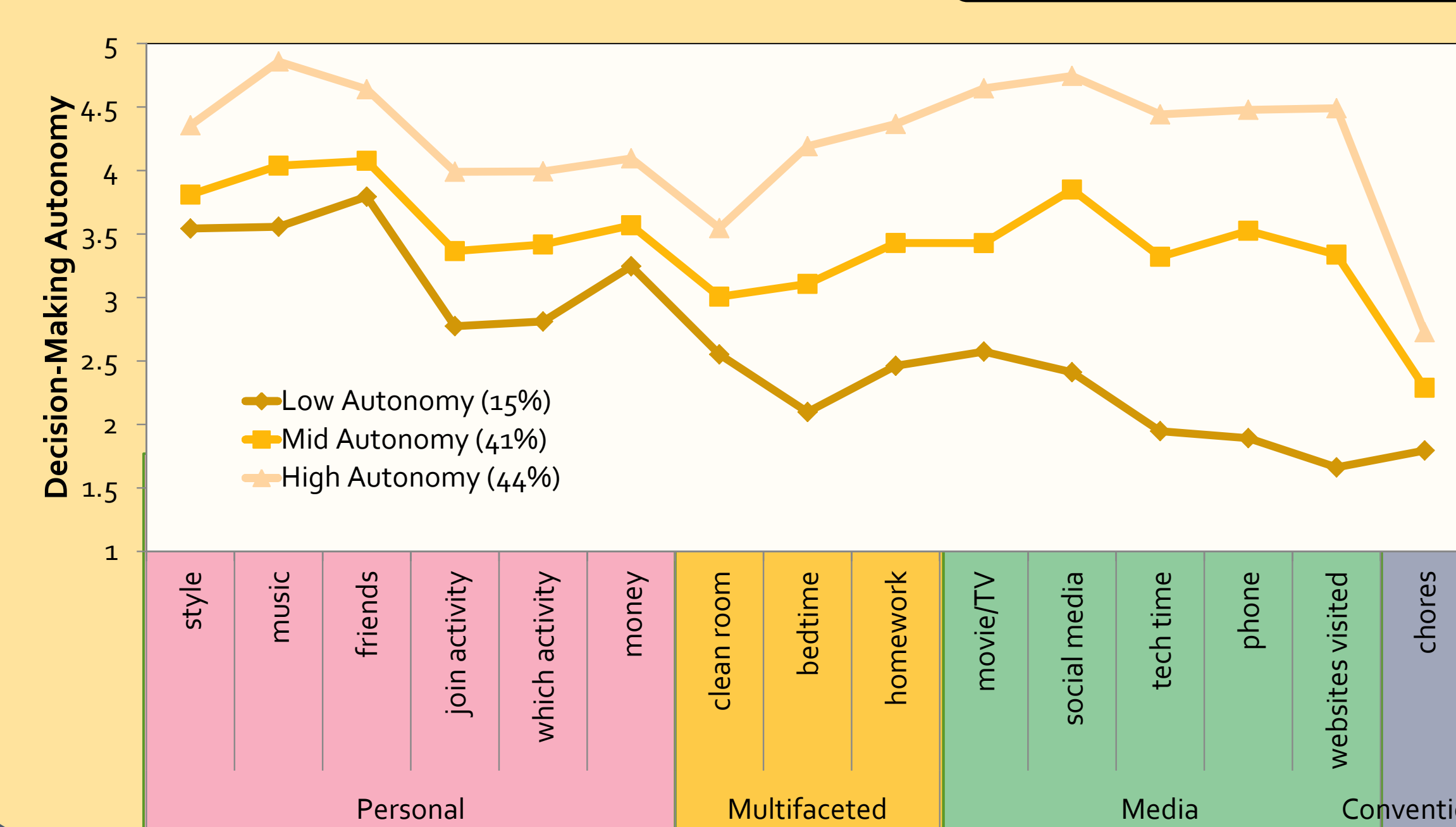
## Elementary School Latent Profile Analysis



## Middle School Latent Profile Analysis



## High School Latent Profile Analysis



## References

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## LPA Details

### Analyses

- LPA's conducted in *Mplus 7.3* (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012)
  - FIML estimation of missing data and MLR estimator
- 3-step prediction of profile membership from age, sex, ethnicity, SES
  - Low autonomy profile more likely for Black youth (elementary & HS)
  - High autonomy profile more likely for older youth (all age groups)
  - Female HS students more likely to be in the High than Low autonomy profile

### Bar Charts

- Equal letters signify equivalent values *across topics, within profiles*
- Equal numbers signify equivalent values *within topics, across profiles*
- All other values significantly different

## Main Findings

### Age Group Comparisons

- 3-profile solution in all age groups
  - Low, moderate, high autonomy
- Similar profile patterns & proportions
  - Moderate autonomy profile most different between ages
- Mean decision-making autonomy higher for older age groups and for older youth within age group

### Treatment of Media Items

- High autonomy profile: media items treated like personal issues (more freedom than traditional multifaceted issues)
- Low autonomy profile: media items treated like conventional issues (and multifaceted ones) until high school.
- Moderate autonomy profile: Media items treated like multifaceted issues and increase in freedom at fastest rate
  - Little control (like conventional issues) in elementary school but high control (like personal issues) by high school

## Discussion

- Similar profiles and age-related increases in autonomy as observed for teens' beliefs about legitimate parental authority (Cumsille et al., 2006)
  - Demonstrates conceptual overlap in parents' & teens' perspectives
- But more youth in moderate & high autonomy classes here
  - Highlights distinction between beliefs about the *acceptability* of control and actual daily occurrences in who makes decisions
    - Ability for shared decision-making key?
- Ethnic differences consistent with greater parent unilateral decision-making observed in black families (Lamborn et al., 1996)
- Treatment of media items differs by profile and age
  - By high school, it's normative for families to treat media use as a personal decision and grant youth more control over these behaviors than traditional multifaceted issues
  - But high autonomy families begin this trend early; they differentiate media from classic multifaceted issues in elementary school, and treat media use as a personal decision by middle school.
  - Media-related decision making autonomy appears particularly tied to development for youth in moderate autonomy families