

ABSTRACT

Sorbring, Emma. (2005). Girls' and boys' views of conflicts with parents. Department of Psychology, Göteborg University, Sweden.

The aim of the present thesis was to examine the perceptions, beliefs and agency of children between 6 and 9 years of age in transgression and conflict situations. An overall goal was to examine the importance of gender in their perceptions, beliefs and agency. This was achieved by means of four studies, both quantitative as well as qualitative. Each study contributed to a greater understanding of the general aim. **Study I** was designed to examine children's perceptions of parental discipline methods, as well as their perceptions of child gender differences in parents' choices of discipline methods. Results from those children who have other-sex siblings are compared with those who do not. The aim of **Study II** was to further examine the relation between discipline methods and the child's beliefs about the importance of gender in transgression situations, when accounting for the influences of the child's sex, socioeconomic status, type of siblings in the family, parental values and shared responsibility. In **Study III** boys' and girls' perceptions of mothers' intentions in using physical punishment or reasoning, as well as their evaluation of the mother as a good parent, were examined. Variation due to the child's sex, age, the nature of discipline, presented vignettes and mother's childrearing-attitudes were all estimated. The aim of **Study IV** was to examine girls' and boys' active roles in and around conflict situations, using Kuczynski's three criteria about the child: 1) as actively creating a meaning about what is happening, 2) as acting intentionally in the interaction and 3) as having an idea about the efficacy of its action. Briefly, the results revealed that children had variable perceptions and beliefs about what happens in the conflict situation, as well as about their own agency in the parent-child interaction. Children described how they actively choose whether or not to interact with the parent in the conflict situation and, if they did, which strategies they used to influence the situation and steer it in the direction of their preference. Children's perceptions of discipline methods were influenced by the nature of the situation, the children's age, and the parent's childrearing-attitudes. Children were most accepting of and positive towards reasoning. Girls' and boys' reports about parental discipline methods were in many respects similar to each other. However, children indicated that their parents would choose a different response if they (themselves) were of the other sex. Both boys and girls reported that their parents would treat boys more harshly than they would girls. Children with siblings of the same sex as themselves were significantly more disposed to report child gender differences. Furthermore, the results indicated that lower socioeconomic status, as well as harsher discipline methods, such as behavior modification, physical restraint and physical punishment, related to children's perceptions of gender differences in transgression situations.

Keywords: parenting, discipline methods, child-perspective, agency, parent-child interaction

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Emma Sorbring, Department of Social and Behavioural Studies,
University of Trollhättan-Uddevalla, (From 20060101 – University West)
Box 1236, S-462 28 Vänersborg, Sweden. Telephone +46 521 26 40 31. Fax +46 521 26 40 99
emma.sorbring@htu.se (From 20060101 – emma.sorbring@hv.se)