CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Attributions, Attitudes and Agency

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Avhandlingen grundar sig på följande fyra artiklar:

I   Sorbring, E. & Gurdal, S. (2011). Attributions and Attitudes of Mothers and Fathers in Sweden. *Parenting: Science and Practice, 11*, 1-13.

II Putnick, D. L., Bornstein, M. H., Lansford, J. E., Chang, L., Deater-Deckard, K., Di Guenta, L., Gurdal, S., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P. O., Pastorelli, C., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Tapanya, S., Uribe T., Liliana M., Al-Hassan, S. M., Bacchini, D. and Bombi, A. S. (2011). Agreement in Mother and Father Acceptance-Rejection; Warmth, and Hostility/Rejection/Neglect of Children Across Nine Countries. *Cross-Cultural Research. 46* (3) 191-223.

III Gurdal, S., Lansford, J. & Sorbring, E. (submitted). *Parental perceptions of children's agency: Parental warmth, school achievement and adjustment.*

IV Gurdal, S. & Sorbring, E. (submitted). *Swedish children's beliefs about agency in family, school and peer situations.*

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ABSTRACT

Gurdal, Sevtap (2015). *Children and parents- attributions, attitudes, and agency.* Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Children and parents are both part of children's development and research on children and on parenting are both areas that, in some way, have changed in recent decades. These changes are related to the new way of seeing children and that children are no longer seen as 'becomings' or adults in the making; rather, children are instead regarded – and seen – as more active in their development and as social agents. With a new way of viewing children and childhood there is also a new way of explaining or understanding parenthood. The general aim of this thesis is to learn more about how parents think about their parenting and how this can be related to children's agency. In addition, children's own beliefs about their agency are studied. The aim of **Study I** was to investigate mothers' and fathers' (77 participants from each group) attributions and attitudes in Sweden. The results revealed that Swedish parents are more polarized in their attitudes than in their attributions. Regarding attitudes, mothers and fathers reported more progressive than authoritarian attitudes. Fathers reported higher adult-controlled failure and child-controlled failure attributions than mothers. In **Study II** the aim was to assess whether mothers' and fathers' self-reports of acceptance-rejection, warmth, and hostility/rejection/neglect of their children differ in the nine countries. A total of 1996 parents (998 mothers and 998 fathers) participated in the study. Mothers and fathers reported high acceptance and warmth and low rejection and hostility/rejection/neglect (HRN) of their children in all nine countries. Despite the high levels of acceptance and low levels of rejection across all countries, some systematic differences between countries emerged. In **Study III** Swedish mothers' and fathers' warmth towards their children was examined in relation to their children's agency. It also studied the longitudinal relation between agency and children's externalizing, internalizing, and school achievement. Swedish children's parents ($N = 93$) were interviewed at three time points (when children were 8, 9, and 10 years old) about their warmth towards their children, children's agency, children's externalizing and internalizing behaviors and school achievement. Results from this study indicate that Swedish parents' warmth is directly related to children's subsequent perceptions of their agency, which in turn are related to subsequently lower child externalizing and internalizing problems and higher academic achievement. Personal agency is studied in **Study IV** and the aim of this study was to examine how 10-year-old children perceive their agency in three different contexts, family, school and peer-situations. Interviews were conducted with 103 ten-year-old Swedish children. Vignettes concerning three different situations were presented to the children and their answers were written down for subsequent thematic analysis. The results showed that children perceive their agency differently depending upon which context they find themselves in. The difference is not in how they think adults or peers would react to their agency, but in how they themselves would act if their agency was suppressed. It is mainly with other children that they would show assertiveness and try to find a solution together, while they would be more emotional and powerless with adults.

   In summary, parents in the studies report higher similarity about parenting in some cases, for example concerning acceptance and warmth and hostility/rejection/neglect, but lower in others, such as the Swedish parents' reports about attributions. It is also revealed that parents' warmth is related to children's agency, and that children's perceptions of their agency depend on whether they interact with adults or other children. A possible contribution of this thesis is to generate additional knowledge about parental cognitions and the implications that parenting can have on child agency, but also the shedding of light on the ways in which, depending on the context, children's beliefs of their agency differ.