

Dealing with Intergenerational Disagreements

Parental Authority in Swedish Families

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examined two key aspects of intergenerational disagreements. The first aspect dealt with Swedish parents' preferences for discipline with respect to the national emphasis on child democracy. Parents of preschool children were interviewed so as to examine their responses to hypothetical situations typical of common child misbehavior and their use of three assertive disciplinary strategies (coercion, behavior modification, and verbal control) were examined. In **Study I**, Swedish fathers' preferences for discipline were compared with the preferences of fathers from the United States (U.S.). The results showed that fathers' overall references to assertive discipline were on the same level in the Swedish sample as they were in the U.S. sample. However, compared with the Americans, the Swedes mentioned using more verbal control and less behavior modification. The aim of **Study II** was to investigate how Swedish parents respond across initial and recurring episodes of child misconduct. Parents' overall reports of assertive discipline revealed no significant shifts across first- and second-time child transgressions. In terms of individual strategies, however, fathers did exchange verbal control for coercion and behavior modification, but only when faced with serious situations. Although more research is needed to find out the possible effects of the national family policy in Sweden, a general conclusion is that Swedish parents seem to employ a restrictive, rather than punitive, approach to parent-child conflict. The second aspect of this thesis focused on the links between parental authority and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. The purpose was to address some of the limitations that developmental researchers have noted in widespread typology models of parenting styles. To separate adolescents' voluntary co-operation with parental expectations from parents' deliberate intentions to exert behavior control, in contrast with many previous investigations, **Study III** measured the strategies of firm control and monitoring by asking parents for their responses to hypothetical situations involving potential conflict. The results indicated little support for a direct association between parental use of firm control and monitoring on the one side and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment on the other. Attempting to add to the understanding of the links between parenting and adolescent psychosocial adjustment, **Study IV** examined adolescents' perceptions of how conflicts with their parents are usually resolved (i.e., conflict resolution schemas). The results revealed that adolescents with high and low levels of adjustment differed in their views of how conflicts with their parents were usually resolved. In particular, well-adjusted adolescents were more likely to see themselves as complying with parental expectancies on a voluntary basis. In conclusion, characteristics of the parent-adolescent relationship that promote adolescents' conflict resolution expectancies seem to be more important to adolescents' positive development than parental behavior control in itself.

Key words: Adolescent adjustment, Aka-law, Child rearing, Family policy, Parent-child relationship, Parental control, Parenting practices, Physical punishment ban

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

The present thesis is based on the following four studies, which will be referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I. Jutengren, G., & Palméus, K. (2002). A comparison of Swedish and US fathers' self-reported use of parental discipline. *Children & Society, 16*, 246–259.
- II. Palméus, K., & Jutengren, G. (2004). Swedish parents' self-reported use of discipline in response to continued misconduct by their pre-school children. *Infant and Child Development, 13*, 79–90.
- III. Jutengren, G. (2004). *Parental Control and Adolescent Psychosocial Adjustment*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- IV. Jutengren, G., & Palméus, K. (2004). *The Potential Role of Conflict Resolution Schemas in Adolescent Psychosocial Adjustment*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Parents have different goals for their children and different ideas about how these goals can best be achieved. A somewhat universal long-term parenting goal, however, might be to foster children that function adequately as adults in the society in which they live. In other words, most parents expect their children to acquire habits, skills, values and motives that will help them in the future to avoid abnormal behavior, support themselves and their family financially, initiate and develop friendships with other persons and be able to, in turn, rear their own children (Maccoby, 1992). In order to transmit these skills to their children, parents use various approaches and strategies with their children in everyday family life. They may, for example, support or help the child in daily care tasks, initiate various joint activities with the child, seek the child's viewpoint, or show physical affection (Russel, 1997). However, although parents have certain short- and long-term goals for their children (Kuczynski, 1984), children have goals and intentions of their own. Too great a difference between what children do and what parents expect them to do may result in parent-child conflicts in which parents use their authority to pressure the child into conforming with parental expectations.

Although this thesis focuses on parent-child disagreements, it should be noted that there are several other sources that contribute to children's socialization and psychosocial development. For example, characteristics of intrafamilial processes other than parent-child conflicts, such as emotional and instrumental support among family members, family cohesion, and parent relationship quality, seem to be important for children to develop positive characteristics (see Noller & Callan, 1991; Parke, 2004). Yet sources such as the close social environment outside the family, including peers and teachers as well as the broader social-cultural context in which the child is raised, also seem to be linked to children's successful adaptation to societal demands (Fuligni, 1998; Golombok, 2000; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). However, parents' use of authority within intergenerational disagreements have been of great interest to developmental researchers since the 1950s because parenting

2 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

practices have been considered crucial for children's acquisition of values (e.g., Clifford, 1959; Schaefer & Bell, 1958; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957). Another reason, legitimate as any other, for attending to disagreements between parent and child is the practical interest that numerous parents attach to the issue on a daily basis.

In daily life, parents interrupt their two-year-olds with reference to prohibitions between three and 20 times an hour (Lee & Bates, 1985; Minton, Kagan, & Levine, 1971). In fact, 65% of parent-child interactions involve parental efforts to stop certain behaviors by children at this age (Hoffman, 1975). Several studies show that adolescents' conflicts with their parents appear to peak around age 13 and thereafter decline gradually (Clark-Lempers, Lempers, & Ho, 1991; Collins, 1990; Montemayor, 1983; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Silverberg, Tennenbaum, & Jacob, 1992; Steinberg, 1981, 1990). However, a meta-analysis of existing findings revealed no such pattern (Laursen, Coy, Collins, 1998). Rather, the meta-analysis found evidence of a linear decline in frequency with age, but an increase in affective intensity, thereby suggesting that conflict frequency and conflict intensity should be considered separately. Quarreling over ordinary issues of daily life, such as cleaning one's room, getting along with others, bedtime and curfew, clothing, and school achievement, seems to be the more common pattern, rather than intense and frequent conflicts (Smetana, 1994, 1996; Smetana, Yau, Restrepo, & Braeges, 1991). As pointed out by several psychologists (e.g., Lamb, Hwang, Ketterlinus, & Fracasso, 1999; Ryan & Lynch, 1989; Smetana et al., 1991; Trost, 2002), the once emphasized portrayal of parent-adolescent relationships as turbulent and intensely stressful where adolescents rebel against their parents (e.g., see Blos, 1979; Freud, 1958) has shifted towards a view that recognizes adolescents as gradually becoming more independent while still maintaining their relationships with parents for support and guidance.

Nevertheless, the ways in which conflicts between parent and child are usually resolved seem to have consequences for children's developmental outcomes. At best, parent-child conflicts help children to adjust to the demands of society. By imposing reasonable demands for maturity, parents promote in their children the internalization of important values (Baumrind, 1967). A sound resistance to parental demands may also function as an

expression of autonomy, providing an opportunity for the child to learn social skills such as negotiating, compromising and bargaining (Crockenberg & Litman, 1990; Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990). At worst, conflictual parent–child interaction may cross the line into abuse and thus undermine children’s adjustment by shaping dysfunctional characteristics, such as depression (Toth, Manly, Cicchetti, 1992), aggression (Feldman, 1997), poor affective and cognitive role-taking (Frodi & Smetana, 1984; Straker & Jacobson, 1981) and impaired social awareness (Rogosch, Cicchetti, & Aber, 1995).

This thesis is concerned with two important aspects of parenting. The first aspect focused on parents’ preferences for discipline when they are in conflict with their preschool children. The focus here is on assertive parental discipline strategies, which are used with the aim of subduing the child to conform to parental expectations. In **Study I**, Swedish fathers’ preferences for assertive discipline were compared with the preferences of fathers from the United States. The aim of **Study II** was to investigate how Swedish parents respond across initial and recurring episodes of misconduct committed by their preschoolers. The second aspect of this thesis concerned the links between parental behavior and children’s developmental outcomes. **Study III** scrutinized the relationship between parental use of firm control and monitoring on the one hand and adolescents’ psychosocial adjustment on the other. In **Study IV**, the importance of adolescents’ conflict-resolution schemas for their psychosocial adjustment was examined. Before the studies are described and discussed, they are placed within a wider perspective by four separate sections. The first section presents a brief historical review of past research on parenting in order to provide some background to the current state of the research field. In the second section, the reader is provided with an orientation of the contemporary theoretical basis that applies specifically to the studies presented in this thesis. The third section focuses attention on Sweden as a unique setting for research on parenting. In terms of parent–child conflicts, both the Swedish corporal punishment ban and the parental leave reformation generate specific challenges that will be dealt with in this thesis. The fourth section attends to a number of methodological issues that have bearing on the results of this thesis. An overview of the four studies then follows and, in the final section, the reader will find a discussion of the four studies.

PAST RESEARCH ON PARENTING

Two questions have dominated parenting literature: (a) What are the modal patterns of child rearing? and (b) What are the developmental consequences of these child-rearing patterns? These guiding questions have shaped the research agenda and the particular topics examined (for reviews, see Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby, 1992; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Early Research

Empirical studies of parenting began to emerge in the 1940s (for historical reviews, see Cairns, 1983; Grusec, 1997) and were mainly conducted on U.S. middle-class samples. Most of this research has been interpreted in terms of psychoanalytic theory and behaviorism. Both theories viewed the socialization of children as a unidirectional process and claimed to grasp most of what was significant in the way this process worked through various parenting practices and attitudes.

Psychoanalytic theory focused on the emotional perspective of parent-child relationships and asked how various parental attitudes would affect children's psychosexual, psychosocial and personality development. The rationale behind this approach was that individual differences in emotional relationships between parents and children must result from differences in parental attributes, which were often operationalized in terms of various attitudes. The basic view was that children's development is biologically determined and that their primitive impulses need to be brought under social control. Characteristics acquired in early childhood were considered to be almost irreversible (Baumrind, 1996).

From the behaviorists' perspective, children learned the required forms of behavior through classical and instrumental conditioning. Parents were seen as teachers who set the agenda for what their children should learn and then administered rewards and punishments accordingly. Children were presumed to have no other inherent postulates than some inborn reflexes and need states

(e.g., hunger and thirst) and children's behaviors were therefore not regarded as being any more difficult to unlearn or replace than they were once acquired.

A small number of early studies were designed explicitly to test hypotheses derived from behavior theory. These studies showed that infants could learn and unlearn specific behaviors through the use of instrumental conditioning (for a description, see Gewirtz, 1969, p. 61). However, most research efforts at that time used psychoanalytic theory as the scientific basis, with the actual hypotheses being formulated in terms of testable propositions stated in behavior-theory terms. As a result, these studies focused on outcome variables such as personality-development concepts such as aggression, dependency, sex typing and conscience. Attempts to link these variables to specific parenting practices were not successful (for a review, see Orlansky, 1949). Instead, researchers began to assess clusters of parenting practices, with the intention of identifying various attitudes expressed through acts and words. Parenting practices were organized into categories such as autonomy granting, ignoring, punitiveness, strictness, control by fear and expressions of affection (Schaefer, 1959, 1965). A consensus came about as a result of this research leading to the development of a fourfold typology, not anchored in any particular theoretical framework, based upon two orthogonal variables (see Becker, 1964; Schaefer, 1959). A warm (as opposed to hostile) and permissive (as opposed to restrictive) style of parenting was thought to foster children who would grow into creative, friendly and socially outgoing citizens. However, there were still individual studies that pointed to parenting dimensions for which this typology of parenting was not able to account. Furthermore, although both behaviorists and psychoanalytic theorists agreed that parental socialization goals, beliefs about parenting, and the nature of children were important antecedents of parents' practices, these variables were hardly given any attention in empirical research. In her pioneering research, Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1973) not only incorporated a broader range of emotional and behavioral processes than those that had appeared in earlier models, she also provided the field with a theoretical model of parenting styles that was anchored in parenting beliefs.

Later Models of Parenting

In her model, Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1973, 1996) emphasized socialization as the important aspect of control. With the concept of control, she referred to parents' attempts to adapt the child to the family and the community by communicating various demands related to expected behavior. This definition reflects a more active and expedient type of control than former definitions, which had primarily emphasized the restrictive aspect of control (Baumrind, 1966). Baumrind (1967) argued that different beliefs relating to parental authority were associated with different approaches to control and socialization. Baumrind (1973) identified three qualitatively different styles of parental authority. Authoritative parents were regarded as the more efficient socialization agents and were described as setting clear requirements for prosocial and responsible behavior. Rather than emphasizing maturity and responsibility, authoritarian parents would stress the importance of obedience and respect for authority, whereas permissive parents would de-emphasize the significance of parental authority and point to acceptance and support as the important aspects of child rearing. However, although Baumrind's (1973) model dealt conceptually with categorizations of parental authority, empirical findings indicated that parents' authority beliefs were also connected to parenting practices other than their specific use of authority. For example, whereas authoritative parents were found to express affection and show attentive responsiveness to children's needs, both authoritarian and permissive parents were typically poorer in their communication skills and emotional involvement (Baumrind, 1967, 1973).

With the aim of extending Baumrind's (1967, 1973) interest in well-functioning families to a wider range of families, an influential model was put forward by Maccoby and Martin (1983) that described parenting as varying along two linear constructs, rather than being limited to three distinct categories. Drawing upon Baumrind's understanding of parental control, Maccoby and Martin (1983) defined their model using two orthogonal dimensions: demandingness and responsiveness. By demandingness, they referred to parents' use of maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront children's disobedience. By responsiveness, they referred to parents as being attuned, supportive and acquiescent to the child's

needs, demands and emotional states. The model results in four parenting styles: (a) authoritative parents, high in both demandingness and responsiveness; (b) authoritarian parents, high in demandingness and low in responsiveness; (c) indulgent parents, low in demandingness and high in responsiveness, and (d) neglecting parents, low in both demandingness and responsiveness. Although Maccoby and Martin's (1983) model is very reminiscent of earlier two-dimensional models (e.g., Becker, 1964), the concepts were defined in a different way. First, in contrast to earlier models, which had defined the controlling aspect of parenting as a matter of restricting the child from performing undesired behaviors, Maccoby and Martin (1983) based their view of parenting control on Baumrind's (1966, 1967, 1971, 1973) work in which parents were seen as socialization agents who actively promote the behavior they expect from their children. Second, instead of warmth, which was used in earlier models to represent a general undifferentiated affectionate parenting approach, Maccoby and Martin (1983) used the concept of responsiveness, reflecting a parent's ability to recognize and adapt to various states, signals and behaviors by the child. Several U.S. studies have shown that parenting characterized by an authoritative style is optimal for younger children's social development, self-esteem (for a review, see Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and school performance (for a review, see Hess & Holloway, 1984). Empirical studies of adolescents have shown that authoritative parenting promotes psychosocial competence, psychosocial development (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991) and academic achievement (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989) in older children as well.

Problems Concerning Later Models of Parenting

The parenting models of Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1973) and Maccoby and Martin (1983) were well established during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. However, although the concept of authoritative parenting has been linked to children's skills and adjustment, these models have certain disadvantages. These disadvantages have instigated both conceptual and empirical attempts to advance the research field (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

First, problems have been noted in relation to the generalizability of earlier research findings. As the research area has expanded beyond samples of white American middle-class families, it has become clear that the consequences of one and the same parenting style may vary with sociocultural contexts (Parke, 2004). For instance, whereas authoritative parenting is particularly linked to academic achievement among European-American adolescents, this is not the case among Asian- and African-American adolescents (Chao, 1994; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). Researchers (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993) have raised the question of whether this variability in the effect of authoritative parenting stems from a sociocultural difference in parenting goals or from the process with which parents in each sociocultural group try to achieve their goals. Furthermore, among African-American families, an authoritarian style of parenting, rather than an authoritative style, appears to be the style which best promotes adolescents' social adjustment (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992). It has been suggested that short-term obedience is a beneficial characteristic in children who need to adjust to a collectivist African-American socioculture, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individuals and deference to authority, because the consequences of disobedience in such contexts may be more severe (Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996; Kelley et al., 1992). Accordingly, the emphasis on obedience and respect for authority among African-American parents may be a conscious strategy designed to help their children adjust to the cultural environment in which they live, not necessarily connected to the obstacles of authoritarian parents in samples from individualist western sociocultures.

Second, the significance of parents' direct efforts to exert control over their children's behavior may be overrated in Baumrind's (1971) and Maccoby and Martin's (1983) parenting models. The concepts of firm control and monitoring, both central to the understanding of socialization and demandingness, have not usually been operationalized thoroughly enough to vindicate the still-so-prevalent parenting models that were developed during the 1970s and 1980s. Common measures of firm control, Lewis (1981) suggests, may in fact capture children's willingness to comply rather than parents' tendency to exert behavioral control. The concept of monitoring is also problematic because in most studies it is measured to indicate what

parents know about their children's concerns and whereabouts instead of capturing parents' sole efforts to acquire this knowledge (Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

Third, the various parenting styles in Baumrind's (1971) model are not sufficiently specified to clarify the specific processes that contribute to optimal socialization. As Darling and Steinberg (1993) point out, despite convincing evidence that authoritative parents in certain sociocultural contexts have particularly competent children, we are still unable to explain why this is the case. Despite being defined by two orthogonal dimensions, rather than by qualitative distinctions, Maccoby and Martin's (1983) parenting typology is marred by a related problem. As noted by Maccoby and Martin (1983) themselves, using orthogonal dimensions to define empirical typologies may lead to deceptive conclusions about the outcomes of specific parenting styles. For example, with reference to this model, it is tempting to attribute outcome differences between authoritative and authoritarian parenting to the difference in responsiveness, because each of the two parenting styles is defined as being high in demandingness. However, it may also be the case that variations in children's developmental outcomes are the result of differences in the quality of parental demandingness (Baumrind, 1989).

Former Neglect of Fathers as Caregivers

Ever since parenting and child development became the subject of empirical study, the majority of studies of parenting have focused on the mother-child dyad (e.g., Bornstein, Tal, & Tamis-LeMonda, 1991; Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000; Conroy, Hess, Azuma, & Kashiwagi, 1980; Durrant, Broberg, & Rose-Krasnor, 1999; Kelley et al., 1992). This one-sided focus on mothers, at the expense of fathers, has its roots in the assumption that mothers have a biologically rooted instinct for child care that cannot be exchanged for paternal care and in the fact that mothers have traditionally spent much more time with their children than fathers (Garbarino, 1993; Haas, 1992, pp. 1-8; Hood, 1986). However, the assumption of the maternal nurturing instinct has been strongly called into question by researchers showing that fathers are as capable of nurturing and caring for their children as mothers (e.g., Parke & Sawin, 1980; Russel & Russel, 1987). The maternal instinct assumption has

also been frequently criticized in public debates, both by the feminist movement and by social scientists (Connell, 1995; Haas, 1992, pp. 19–58; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Along with this ongoing public debate, economic and social forces have increased the demands on fathers in the western world to become more involved in their children's everyday life (Pruett, 1993). So, when studying issues related to parent–child conflicts, the role of fathers should not be ignored (Forehand & McKinney, 1993).

In attitude surveys, Swedish fathers tend to take a positive stance on gender equality and they will usually report taking considerable responsibility for the care of their own children (Statens offentliga utredningar, 1997). However, empirical research shows that fathers' involvement in child care still differs from that of mothers. Even in families in which both parents are employed, fathers, in comparison with mothers, have been found to spend considerably less time having actual contact with their children, to be available for fewer hours and to take less responsibility for organizing the care of the child (Lamb, 1987; LaRossa, Gordon, Wilson, Bairan, & Jaret, 1991; Pleck, 1997; Russel & Russel, 1987). The finding that fathers spend less time interacting with their children also applies to countries claiming to have a progressive attitude to gender equality within the family, such as Israel (Sagi, 1982) and Sweden (Bäck-Wiklund & Bergsten, 1997; Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi, 1982).

Few differences have been found regarding the way in which mothers and fathers set behavioral limits for their children. Russel and Russel (1987) observed parents of 6- and 7-year-olds in the home and concluded that mothers and fathers were equally inclined to discipline their children in response to misbehavior. Furthermore, investigations of parents' preferences for specific disciplining techniques have revealed few mother–father differences (Pinkerton & Scarr, 1995). However, when confronted with a misbehaving preschool child, Swedish fathers, compared with mothers, were more inclined to redefine the child's misconduct as non-transgressing behavior (Palméus, 1999). They were also less likely to explain to the child why they disapproved of its behavior.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with a theoretical background that applies specifically to the studies presented in this thesis. First, some general features of importance to the current research area are outlined. The aim here is to portray the conceptual basis that set the scene for the relevant theories and models. This is followed by a presentation of the theoretical framework that addresses the research questions of interest in this thesis.

Characteristics of Contemporary Research on Parenting

Although most contemporary research on parenting refers in one way or another to social cognitions, there is as yet no widely accepted grand theory of parental beliefs that applies to a wider range of parent–child interactions and the connections between these interactions and children’s subsequent psychosocial development. As McGillicuddy-DeLisi and Sigel (1995) point out, parental cognitions are usually defined within the perspective of the questions asked in each particular investigation. However, there are certain characteristics that the research field has adopted as a conceptual basis and the majority of researchers today recognize that (a) cognitions play an important role in the course of parent–child interaction, (b) parents shift their disciplining approach according to the immediate situational context and (c) socialization within parent–child relationships is a bidirectional process where children influence their parents just as much as parents influence their children.

Cognitive approach

Since the 1980s, developmental researchers have increasingly recognized the role of cognition in parent–child interactions (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1995; Murphey, 1992; Sigel, 1985; Sigel,

McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992). From previously focusing on general attitudes, contemporary parenting research has shifted to more commonly asking specific questions about goals, ideas and beliefs, as well as perceptions and interpretations of social behavior (Grusec, Rudy, & Martini, 1997). Compared with former broader formulations of parenting attitudes, more recently formulated conceptions of cognition have the advantage of being more closely related to actual behavior. Rather than studying attitudes, which basically operate at an explicit and relatively conscious level, another advantage of studying cognitions is the opportunity to also include schematic cognitions, which are processed on an automatic, unreflective level (Bugental & Johnston, 2000).

One general understanding of the social-cognitive approach is that people have ideas about themselves and how they relate to other people. By organizing general information about persons, events, roles and situations, these ideas (i.e., schemas) function as cognitive maps that help people to operate in their social environment (Baldwin, 1992; Bargh, Chen, Burrows, 1996; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Flavell & Miller, 1998). In everyday life, these schemas take the form of general expectations, which are learned in part through experiencing interactions with other persons (Andersen & Glassman, 1996; Augostinos & Walker, 1995; Baldwin, 1992).

Situational context dependency

As the situational circumstances vary, parents take different actions when they are dealing with conflicts with their children (Smetana, 1994). However, before Grusec and Kuczynski (1980) showed that parents' choice of disciplining techniques depends on the transgression committed by the child, it was generally assumed that different groups of parents had certain preferences for disciplining strategies and that these preferences were fairly stable across situations. To be able to predict the discipline a transgressing child will receive, researchers have tried to systematize the characteristics of various child transgressions. One such finding that appears to be stable and applicable across most circumstances is related to parents' perception of how urgent it is to correct a misbehaving child. When committing transgressions that parents consider serious, rather than mild, children are more likely to receive assertive discipline (Grusec, Dix, & Mills, 1982). Furthermore,

parental discipline also tends to be more firm and punitive if the child's misdeed is directed towards the parent (Grusec et al., 1982), if the misdeed is accompanied by a defiant approach (Crockenberg & Litman, 1990), or if the parent has short-term goals for his/her demands (Kuczynski, 1984). On the basis of a domain-specific theory of cognitive development (Smetana, 1983; Turiel, 1983; Turiel & Davidson, 1986), child transgressions have also been categorized according to the nature of the rule transgressed by the child when misbehaving. The rule that is broken by the child may relate to social conventions (i.e., conformity to interpersonal social norms or rules), moral issues (i.e., harm to other people), prudential issues (i.e., harm to the child itself), or personal issues (i.e., demands on the child's part for autonomy in terms of privacy, integrity, or certain prerogatives). Empirical research shows that children are most likely to receive power-assertive discipline after breaking a social convention, are most likely to be met with reasoning and explanations in response to a moral transgression, and are most likely to become involved in negotiation when the dispute relates to personal issues (Dunn & Munn, 1987; Nucci & Weber, 1995; Smetana, 1989).

Bidirectional influence

The contemporary view of children's socialization is that parents not only influence their children but that children also influence their parents (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1987; Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997; Parke, 2004). In early socialization research, parental behavior was assumed to be the antecedent of child socialization; children's values, skills and attitudes were accordingly presumed to be the outcome of this process. During the 1970s, researchers pointing to the correlational design of most studies gave voice to the possibility that the causal effect might work in the opposite direction as well (Bell & Harper, 1977; Lewis, 1981; Parke, 1977). This question was followed up by evidence that children influence their parents in the same way that parents influence their children (Ambert, 1992). As developmental researchers gradually came to realize the fact that children perceive and interpret parental actions (Siegel & Barclay, 1985; Siegel & Cohen, 1984) and use various strategies when acting upon these perceptions (Eisenberg, 1992; Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990), children were assigned the status of active agents who influence their parents' values, attitudes and

behaviors. The contemporary view of parent and child as mutually influencing each other implies that parent–child interactions can take place within an enduring relationship in which the behavior of both participants is guided by expectations shaped by a history of former experiences (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). With regard to the socialization of children, the contribution of each interacting participant within a parent–child conflict results in a bidirectionally formed setting that is perceived and interpreted by the child as well as the parent (Kuczynski et al., 1997).

Conceptual Explanations of Variability in Parental Discipline

Parents' preferences for discipline strategies when responding to their children's misconduct may vary across groups of parents, or across situational contexts experienced by individual parents. The behavioral variations of individual parents across situational contexts require parents to perceive the characteristics of the immediate social-interactional environment, as depicted in both attribution theory and information-processing theory. From these perspectives, parental cognitions are seen as mediating the link between the environment and the actions parents take, rather than being the starting point of their actions. Although the two theories portray different aspects of the cognitive process, it is not entirely feasible to separate the mechanisms that are emphasized within either approach. As McGillicuddy-DeLisi and Sigel (1995) point out, attributional approaches usually include some reference to attention and memory, which are mechanisms typically portrayed by information-processing models, and information-processing models usually include causal attributions as one step in the mental process.

Furthermore, both attribution theory and information-processing models include the possibility of automatic cognitions, which, in contrast to explicit parental beliefs, operate at below the level of awareness. In everyday life, parent–child interaction often competes for instant action and response, while the parent is simultaneously involved in other tasks. As a result, parental responses are frequently based on highly accessible cognitions (Bugental, Lyon, Krantz, & Cortez, 1997). In contrast to explicit parental beliefs, such processes have been described in the literature as effortless, uncontrollable and

fast, and as requiring little use of attentional resources (Epstein, 1994; Johnson & Hasher, 1987; Shiffrin & Schneider, 1977). Developmental researchers have suggested that parents' automatic cognitions are derived from relationship schemas (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Grusec et al., 1997), which serve as unreflective guides to the social world (Baldwin, 1992) and which may involve parents' appraisals of themselves as having high or low levels of control relative to their children (Bugental, 1992). In response to children's misconduct, mothers with low levels of perceived control relative to their children use more coercion (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989), more psychological control strategies (Mills, 1999) and display more negative affective reactions (Bugental et al., 1993). As low-control parents are easily preoccupied with their own heightened state of arousal in child transgression situations, few resources are left to actually deal with their children's misbehavior in a constructive way (Bugental et al., 1993).

Variations in parental behavior across groups of parents are likely to reflect differences in relatively stable beliefs stemming from the larger social context — they originate from characteristics such as age, education, or national group — that parents have perceived and experienced throughout life (for an in-depth discussion of sociocultural perspectives, see Bugental & Goodnow, 1998, pp. 427–440). As a result, closely related to concerns about group differences in parental behavior is the question of where parental beliefs originate and how they are linked to the larger social context. Basically, there are two theoretical conceptions of how parental beliefs come about, both taking the perspective that parental cognition is the starting point for parental actions (see McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995). The first conception is made up of the constructivist perspectives: Personal beliefs about the nature of children, how children change, what causes development and the like are viewed as a coherent cognitive system created through interpretations and transformations of beliefs from a wide range of sources, including parents' everyday interactions with their own children. The second conception is represented by the transactional perspectives: Parental beliefs and practices, derived from ideas assumed to predominate among earlier generations within the larger social context, are depicted as being transmitted to the individual with little or no change. Valsiner (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992; Valsiner, 1989; Valsiner & Litvinovic, 1996) has provided a model that embraces elements of

both construction and transaction. This model depicts parents' cultural belief systems as being formed through the construction of messages that emanate from the landscape of collective ideas within the larger social context (e.g., from the mass media). Focusing on both the large-scale cultural environment and the individual's social cognitive processes, this "parental-reasoning model of cultural beliefs" may account for both cultural and individual variance in parental behavior.

Attribution theory

Attribution theory (Weiner, 1980, 1985) suggests that people mentally attempt to make sense of their own as well as other people's behavior. The conclusions parents draw (i.e., the attributions they make) about the causes of the child's behavior are, in turn, argued to influence their own behavior (Miller, 1995). Parental attributions are, therefore, seen as linking the stimuli of the child's behavior to the parent's emotional and behavioral response. In accordance with attribution theory, parents who are physically coercive or abusive with their children are more likely than other parents to attribute defiant intentions to their children (Silvester, Bentovim, Stratton, & Hanks, 1995; Smith & O'Leary, 1995). Attribution theory also applies to changing circumstances; for example, across situations of different types. Empirical research shows that parents are more likely to use power-assertive discipline in situations where they perceive the misbehavior as intentional and under the child's control (Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989; Slep & O'Leary, 1998). In daily life, parents frequently find their children involved in a series of transgression episodes, repeatedly violating the same kind of parental expectation or rule. Although few investigations have addressed parental perceptions across repeated transgressions by the child, there is evidence to suggest that children's repeatedly committed rule violations are associated with parental annoyance and negative perceptions (Ritchie, 1999).

Information-processing models

In information-processing models of parenting cognitions (see McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995) parents are portrayed as active processors of information who filter their experiences during parent-child interactions. Through this filtering mechanism, and dependant on both current and past circumstances, parents address different aspects of the child's

immediate behavior. From the selected information, parents make an evaluation of the child's behavior, which then guides their response and the strategies they use.

Focusing on children's social competence, Rubin and Mills (1992) presented a model in which parents evaluate the child's behavior with regard to (a) the dispositional characteristics of the child, (b) the quality of the parent-child relationship, as well as (c) their beliefs about children's developmental timetables. If the child's behavior is not in line with parental socialization goals, parents will discipline the child, using the strategy they believe to be most effective in achieving the desired change. In their model, Rubin and Mills also considered the impact of parental stress stemming from disadvantaged life conditions (i.e., socioecological factors) and from inter- or intra-individual distress (i.e., personal-social setting factors). A two-year longitudinal study of 45 preschoolers and their mothers revealed that parents' beliefs about disciplining and learning strategies remained relatively stable over time, whereas their self-reported preferences for the same strategies shifted from concrete hands-on strategies to less directive approaches (Rubin & Mills, 1992), indicating that parents foresaw an increase in autonomy with age.

A parental-reasoning model of cultural beliefs

One general assumption of Valsiner's (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992; Valsiner, 1989; Valsiner & Litvinovic, 1996) parental-reasoning model is that parents' personal belief systems have the potential to be transformed, recreated and reorganized as part of an ongoing reciprocal process. The collective cultural belief structure is conceptualized as a landscape of coexisting social suggestions — provided by other parents, teachers, counselors, mass media and other social institutions — that constitute the raw material in parents' construction of their own cultural belief system. Parents respond to these suggestions by reasoning about whether the messages should be accepted, rejected, or modified to fit their belief system (Valsiner & Litvinovic, 1996). As McGillicuddy-DeLisi and Sigel (1995) recognize, Valsiner's parental-reasoning model fits both transactional perspectives, in the sense that the collective cultural belief structure is assumed to constitute the source of raw material for constructing personal cultural beliefs, as well as

constructivistic perspectives, because collective cultural suggestions are viewed as being molded into personal cultural beliefs and not as being passively adopted. By constructing their personal culture, parents also develop their own parenting role, which is in turn linked with certain role-based actions. At any point in time during the course of change, the current state of a parent's cultural belief system is systematically linked with the strategies parents use with their children.

Adolescent Psychosocial Development

Adolescents' psychosocial adjustment may take the form of a positive perception of the self in areas such as relationships with peers and parents, academic performance, physical appearance, and psychological well-being (cf. Bracken, 1996; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Evaluations of the self may be based on feedback from the social environment. This idea is central to symbolic interactionism (Harter, 1983; Mead, 1934/1972), which emphasizes that the self-concept does not function in a vacuum but, rather, is part of one's social environment. According to this view, people's self-perceptions are derived from their inferences about how others perceive them. Whereas Cooley (1902/1968) asserted that the views of certain people (i.e., significant others) are particularly important to one's own self-perception, Mead (1934/1972) claimed that inferences of the combined general attitude of other people (i.e., the generalized other) also contribute significantly to the individual's self-perception.

Another, interrelated source of importance to the formation of the self has to do with the individual's actions to intentionally explore, manipulate, and influence the environment (i.e., personal agency). Like Mead (1934/1972), some of the early self-theorists (e.g., Baldwin, 1897/1973; James, 1890/1950) also made a distinction between two fundamental aspects of the self in terms of an I-self (i.e., the self as recognizing and interpreting perceptions while interacting with the environment) and a Me-self (i.e., the self as evaluated and known to the individual or the social environment). Whereas the symbolic interactionists emphasized the influence of the environment in the development of the self, Baldwin (1897/1973) and James (1890/1950) stressed the importance of the active role of the individual to this process. Baldwin

(1897/1973), in particular, noted that children do not become entirely defined by their environment, but exert influence on their own selves by their past and current experiences. Similarly to this classic view, later psychologists (e.g., Bandura 1982; Gecas & Schawalbe, 1983) have also emphasized the active role of the individual in the process of self-perception formation. In his model of triadic reciprocity, Bandura (1982, 1997) asserts that a person's cognitive, emotional, and physical characteristics are in constant reciprocal interaction with her or his own behavior as well as with the environment. Likewise, people's behavior and their environment mutually influence one another. To successfully navigate in the social world, people monitor and evaluate their own as well as other people's behavior by means of their I-self, so that they may exert directive influence on the behavior while it is still in progress. However, this process is partly dependant on the evaluative Me-self (both conscious and non-conscious cognitions) deciding what information the person should attend to and how the information is to be evaluated. On the other hand, the experiences of the I-self, as well as the conclusions it draws, constantly add to the Me-self. As people evaluate their own behavior, they make social comparisons (with other persons in similar situations, as well as with their own previous performances) and thus draw conclusions concerning their own success or failure (Bandura, 1982). In conclusion, to understand the factors influencing people's self-perceptions it is of interest to attend both to the direct influence of the social environment and to the development of personal agency.

The social environment

In a literature review, Oosterwegel and Oppenheimer (1993, chap. 1) summarize three types of characteristics of the social environment that have bearing on the individual's self-perceptions. First, the degree to which the opinions of another person are integrated into the self depends on who this other person is. The importance of another person is perceived as being higher if she or he is thought to hold favorable opinions about the own person or is seen as highly credible. Appraisals of credibility, in turn, seem to depend on the other person's role and degree of expertise, as well as on the degree to which the other person is liked and the degree of consensus among several others. Considering the credibility connected to the roles that different people

may have, parents take a primary position in the perceptions of younger children, followed by siblings, teachers, friends, and classmates (Rosenberg, 1979).

Second, appraisals of the importance of other people's opinions depend on their individual characteristics, such as age and gender. Whereas parents seem to remain the main source of adolescents' fundamental values in areas such as politics and religion (Hoge, Petrillo, & Smith, 1982; Noller & Bagi, 1985), the significance of the social environment concerning self-evaluations seem to shift from family members to teachers, fellow students, and other non-family members as children progress into adolescence (McGuire & McGuire, 1982). In general, the significance of the social environment for children's self-evaluations decreases with age (McGuire & McGuire, 1982; Pekrun, 1990). Gender differences were revealed in McGuire and McGuire's (1982) study in that girls, more often than boys, mentioned family members as being more credible when it came to their self-evaluations, whereas boys more frequently referred to other people in general. Furthermore, both boys and girls perceived the attitude of the same-gender parent as more important to their self-evaluations than the attitude of the other-gender parent.

Finally, the influence of the environment on a person's self-perception also depends on the characteristics of the particular context. The feedback from significant others (e.g., parents, siblings, teachers, friends, and classmates) is more effective if the situation provides easily interpretable and contingent information (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1984). If the situation that the feedback concerns is complex in nature, it may not be entirely clear to the individual how to attribute the information that is received from significant others. On the other hand, situations enabling a clear, understandable, and differentiated message from significant others increase the impact of environmental feedback.

Personal agency

Personal agency refers to the individual's capacity to initiate and perform planned acts of behavior with the intention of making an impact on the environment (cf. Bandura, 1997; Damon & Hart, 1988; Kernis, 1995; Oosterwegel & Oppenheimer, 1993). According to Bandura's (1982, 1997, 2001) extensive work, in order to regulate their functioning during such

actions people examine and reflect upon their own behavior. Besides providing feed-back on current actions, this reflective process also adds experiences to the individual's self-perception. As they serve as indicators of capability, authentic mastery experiences are one of the main sources of positive self-perceptions. In his model, Bandura (1997) also states that achievement-related self-perceptions together with learned self-regulative skills facilitate effective performance. In other words, by performing well on a task individuals will improve their skills and receive even better feedback that, in turn, adds to their self-perception, and so on.

Psychologists have recently argued that personal agency plays a central role in adolescents' development (e.g., Baumrind, 1991, 1996; Grusec, Goodnow, & Kuczynski, 2000; Larson, 2000). For example, from his review of the literature, Larson (2000) concluded that communication within the context of structured voluntary activities that involve conditional reasoning, hypothetical thinking, prompting for clarification of others' statements, and multiple perspective taking, enhances adolescents' sense of agency, as reflected in increased frequencies of initiative taking, deeper involvement, and in higher degrees of perseverance. Communication has also been emphasized when explaining the internalization of values and other developmental outcomes in adolescents within a family context (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). However, a general conclusion is that interactive patterns of communication directed toward encouragement and support promote personal agency. With respect to parent-adolescent disagreements, one might expect parents' authoritative approach (firm, but responsive control) to promote the adolescent's personal agency by providing a safe environment that offers training in communication and social skills. Similar arguments have been raised by other writers suggesting that parenting practices that promote self-exploration and autonomy enhance identity development because they allow adolescents to discover competencies and to influence their environment (Adams & Jones, 1983; Lewis, 1981). The opposite might be true for a parent's controlling approach to intergenerational disagreements as it leaves the child with a limited number of self-determined choices upon which to act (for a review, see Deci & Ryan, 1995). For example, Lamborn et al. (1991) speculate that authoritarian parenting may have "adverse effects in the realm

of psychosocial development because it restricts the child's sense of competence and independence" (p. 1050).

SWEDEN AS A DISTINCTIVE SETTING

One important characteristic of Swedish family policy relates to the idea that parental authority should be based on mutual respect between parent and child (Durrant & Olsen, 1997; Durrant, Rose-Krasnor, & Broberg, 2003; Haeuser, 1988). This fundamental approach to child rearing has its roots in the 1930s when the Swedish government initiated a progressive social policy program, prompted by concerns about the birth rate, the size of the work force and public health (Liljeström, 1978; Plantin, 2001, pp. 15–32). The more recent guidelines of this policy have addressed democracy and equality among members of society and among family members (Scott, 1982; Welles-Nyström, 1996). Two aspects of this policy are particularly relevant to parenting and parent–child interactions. One is the explicit encouragement of gender equality and the other is the abolition of parental physical punishment.

In addition, it should be noted that during the 1980s and the 1990s Sweden became an increasingly multicultural society. Some of the larger immigrant groups come from cultures in which values relating to parenting and relationships within the family are collectivistic rather than individualistic, such as Asia and the Middle East (for an in-depth discussion of cultural values, see Triandis, 1995). The contrast between Swedish culture, emphasizing autonomy and respect for the individual, on the one hand, and collectivist cultures, emphasizing interdependence within the family and authoritarian child-rearing values, on the other, creates a complex situation for society in general and for the immigrating families in particular (Almqvist & Broberg, 2003). However, this thesis focuses on parenting behavior primarily within intact nuclear families of Swedish origin. As there is no evidence that parents of Swedish origin have adopted the child-rearing practices of their immigrant counterparts, the gender equality policy and the abolition of parental physical punishment are still likely to be two of the most obvious lines of development relevant to the shaping of contemporary Swedish family policy.

The Gender Equality Policy

The gender equality policy in Sweden encourages parents to share equal responsibility when it comes to child care, housework and the economic support of the family (Scott, 1982). One major social reform that supports this policy is the parental leave system. In 1974, Sweden was the first country in the world to grant mothers and fathers equal rights to share six months of leave from employment — extended to seven months in 1975, to nine months in 1986 and to 12 months in 1989 — in order to care for their newborn or adopted children, with job security guaranteed and with 90-percent income compensation (Bekkengen, 1996). In 1995, the income compensation was reduced to 80%, although it remained at 90% for the first 60 days of leave. One fundamental aim of the Swedish parental leave system is to change the customary gender roles where mothers are primarily regarded as breeders and fathers primarily as providers (for in-depth historical reviews of the development and introduction of the Swedish parental leave system, see Haas, 1992; Lamb & Levine, 1983; Scott, 1982). Consequently, fathers are explicitly encouraged by public campaigns and the like to take advantage of the parental leave program (Haas, 1992, pp. 69–75; Lamb & Levine, 1983). The basic idea is that fathers' greater involvement with their babies will promote in them a sense of responsibility for child-care tasks so that they, after a period of parental leave, will regard the child as the equal responsibility of both parents in the future.

In reality, during the last two decades, there has been only a slow and gradual move towards equally shared responsibility between mothers and fathers. The proportion of days of parental leave taken by fathers increased from 5% in 1980 to 12% in 2000 (Statistics Sweden, 2002). However, investigations of the division of child-care chores among Swedish couples have shown that fathers who have taken some parental leave are more involved with the child's care after the leave is over, compared with those who have not taken any leave (Haas, 1992; Lamb et al., 1988). In light of these findings, it is interesting to note that the proportion of fathers taking some parental leave increased from 26% in 1990 to 38% in 2000 (Statistics Sweden, 2002). So, in line with previous findings related to gender equality (e.g., Hwang, 1985), it is possible to argue that the Swedish society is in the position

of gradually loosening the traditional gender roles in relation to parenting and child care.

The Abolition of Physical Punishment

In Sweden, the so-called *aga* law prohibits parents from using any sort of physical punishment on their children (Durrant & Olsen, 1997). This law not only bans the use of physical punishment, it also legislates against any other treatment that may be humiliating or injurious to the child, such as threatening, scaring, ostracizing, ridiculing, or locking the child up (Statens offentliga utredningar, 1978). Since the introduction of the *aga* law in 1979, parental status no longer affords any special legal protection. The legislation against physical punishment and psychologically demeaning parenting practices was the result of a prolonged public debate (for an historical review, see Durrant, 1996). When the *aga* law was finally adopted by the Swedish parliament, it was accompanied by a vast educational program, designed to inform the public that hitting children was not permitted and to stress to parents the importance of taking good care of their children. During the period of time that this issue has attracted public interest, the percentage of Swedish citizens supporting the use of physical punishment decreased from 53% in 1965 to 11% in 1994 (Statistics Sweden, 1996a).

Follow-up studies of the effects of the *aga* law and the surrounding debate indicate that the use of physical punishment among Swedish parents has decreased dramatically. In a longitudinal study of 212 families with children born in the late 1950s, 75% of four-year-old children were struck at least once during a 12-month period by their fathers and 95% were struck by their mothers; more than 25% were struck on a weekly basis by their fathers and 60% by their mothers (Stattin, Janson, Klackenberg-Larsson, & Magnusson, 1995). In a national survey conducted in 1995, only 30% of Swedish intermediate school students stated that they had ever been struck by their fathers before the age of 13 years and 1% stated that they had been hit on a weekly basis (the same rates were assessed for mothers) (Statistics Sweden, 1996a). Studies in Sweden and the USA based on national probability samples with equivalent measurements enable a direct comparison of parents' use of physical punishment between the two countries (Gelles & Edfeldt, 1986;

Straus & Gelles, 1986; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). These studies show that, one year after the introduction of the *aga* law, 28% of Swedish parents had spanked or slapped their 3- to 17-year-olds once or more during a 12-month period, which can be compared with frequencies twice as high among U.S. parents. A review of the literature on attitudes towards physical punishment of children shows that normative support for spanking among Americans varies along demographic variables such as education, ethnicity, religion, and geographic region (Flynn, 1996). In correspondence with these literature-review findings, a Swedish national survey (Statistics Sweden, 1996a) indicates that factors such as higher-level education, non-immigrant background, urban living conditions, and lower age are correlates of attitudes opposed to the use of physical punishment.

Evaluations of the *aga* law, as well as cross-cultural research on parental discipline in general, have typically paid most attention to parents' use of physical punishment (e.g., Durrant et al., 1999; Kelley et al., 1992; Payne, 1989). However, to obtain a better understanding of the links between sociocultural values and parenting practices, it is necessary to expand future cross-cultural comparisons beyond physical punishment. Rather than studying the parental use of a single disciplining strategy, it would be more informative to define the distribution of an array of strategies. Study designs of this kind may reveal whether Swedish parents have replaced their use of physical punishment with other strategies and, if they have, which strategies they use instead and the applied pattern of these strategies. More generally, compared with studies of single strategies, studies of multiple disciplining strategies may reveal more about how parents approach their children's misconduct.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Every research project includes a number of methodological considerations where the researcher has to choose among several possible alternatives. This thesis comprises a number of methodological issues, to which the different solutions will result in a variety of advantages and limitations. A first methodological issue appears when considering how to gauge parents' responses to child misconduct and concerns the choice between direct observations and hypothetical situations (scenarios). A limitation of capturing parental behavior using direct observations is that the researcher has little control over the child's behavior, which constitutes the eliciting stimulus. Comparisons between different samples will therefore not be able to quell any doubts with respect to possibility that the results would have been different had all participants responded to exactly the same child conduct. Comparisons between repeated occurrences within the same sample may be subject to a similar problem. Although children commonly commit a series of misconduct (Ritchie, 1999), there is little chance that each episode in a series of real-life repeated child misconduct is a replication of the initial misconduct. An advantage that observations have over scenarios relates to ecological validity (e.g., the extent to which findings can be generalized to the "real world"). When using interviews, it is difficult to determine the degree of correspondence between the responses and the behavior that the interviews are intended to capture. However, comparisons between parents' self-reported and observed child-rearing practices indicate that self-reports offer substantive information with respect to the parental use of disciplining strategies (Holden, Ritchie, & Coleman, 1992; Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989). Recognizing that parental behavior is probabilistic rather than deterministic (Patterson & Reid, 1984) and that people reconstruct their memories when asked to recall episodes from previous experiences, Holden et al. (1992, p. 117) concluded that "...if the situation is well defined and if mothers are given some flexibility in the number of responses they can give, one can be reasonably confident that they are reporting with some degree of accuracy

about their reported concurrent behavior.” In other words, presenting parents with scenarios that specify the child’s behavior well enough and using groups of particular responses to describe a certain socialization strategy increase the validity of self-reports.

A second issue relates to the choice between interviews and self-administered questionnaire reports of parental behavior and involves the risk of social desirability bias. As most people tend to present themselves so as to be seen as competent and favorable to their social surrounding, parents may adjust their responses to appear in a way they think is desirable in the eyes of the researcher. This threat to validity is particularly sensitive to value laden issues (Sudman & Bradburn, 1973) and the threat to validity might be expected to increase in interview situations, as compared to self-administered questionnaires. For instance, it could be that parents do not admit that they would overlook the child’s repeated misconduct if they believe that such behavior might be seen as irresponsible by the interviewer. One thing a researcher can do to decrease this validity threat is to make the interviewee feel accepted and comfortable in expressing his or her ideas and manners. Choosing the place of the interview so as to increase the likelihood that the participant feels comfortable and acquainted with the surroundings is also crucial. However, choosing interviews in favor of questionnaires also has a number of advantages. The interviewer-participant interaction provides for the possibility of following up on the participants’ responses as well as for a more motivating context. Using open-ended questions in order to increase the ecological validity, both the participant’s motivation and the researcher’s potential to probe for more information are important characteristics of the data collection. An additional benefit of the interview is the possibility of ensuring that the participants really have responded individually to the research questions.

A third methodological issue concerns the grouping of parental disciplining techniques into generalized strategies. Such groupings may be made on empirical grounds. Hastings and Grusec (1998), for example, categorized separate disciplining techniques into broader groupings by using a factor-analysis approach. This is an effective method of ensuring that the techniques that are grouped together are, in fact, interconnected. However, the use of factor analysis may result in different groupings for each new set of

data. To ensure comparability of parenting practices across different samples it is important that the various groupings of disciplines display a reasonable degree of robustness. This can be accomplished by categorizing disciplining techniques on a conceptual basis. Approaches where several specific parenting behaviors have been conceptually grouped into broader disciplining strategies have been used in earlier as well as more recently published studies (e.g., Hoffman, 1970; Oburu & Palmérus, 2003). A third approach combines the conceptually based categorization with an empirical confirmation of the various groupings. This combination offers an appealing compromise between the two basic approaches. Using conceptual arguments for building broader categories limits the possibility that the same strategy will be comprised of a blend of disciplining techniques that will limit the interpretability of the results or reduce the comparability of results with other samples. Using data analyses to verify the uniformity of each grouping, on the other hand, ensures the empirical legitimacy of the strategies within a particular sample.

A fourth methodological issue relates to statistical testing and involves the recognition of the fact that the choice between within- and between-group analyses is not always readily apparent, but rather a matter of reflective judgment. The significance of such judgments becomes particularly evident when participants are matched in pairs so as to limit the influence of confounding background variables. Using a within-group statistical analysis has the advantage of a smaller error variance, thereby increasing the chances of effects reaching statistical significance. Statistical textbooks (e.g., Armitage & Berry, 1994; Hinkle, Wiersma & Jurs, 1994) claim that samples that are matched on measures with relevance to the study variable are likely to be related, and to thus legitimate a within-group statistical analysis. The crucial question then is what measures could possibly be used as matching variables in studies of parental discipline. Research findings point to a number of demographic characteristics of both parent and child as essential in predicting parental behavior. Parental use of harsh discipline has consistently been found to be associated with socioeconomic status (e.g., Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000; Zussman, 1978) and parental beliefs seem to be associated with educational level (McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 1982). Reviews of the literature also show that fathers treat sons and daughters more differently than do mothers (Siegal, 1987) and that harsh discipline is more often used for

boys than for girls (Lytton & Romney, 1991). In conclusion, the judgment of whether or not a within-group statistical analysis is justified depends on the appraisals and evaluations made concerning the strength of the association between parents' use of discipline, on the one hand, and each matching variable, on the other.

As a fifth methodological issue, one should be aware that there is a problem related to accepting a null hypothesis. Even if statistical tests have not established a significant effect, caution should be exercised so as to not draw premature conclusions about the absence of an association. There are two reasons why a null hypothesis cannot logically be proven (Cook & Campbell, 1979, p. 44). First, there is always a possibility that the analyses in a particular study have failed to reveal a true effect (i.e., Type II error). Second, even though no actual association exists between the study's variables of interest, there is always the possibility that an effect would have been obtained had the study been designed differently (e.g., if other operationalizations had been used, or if another sample were drawn from the same population). Therefore, conclusions about zero effects should be based on a series of studies conducted under various circumstances, rather than on the results from separate single studies.

Recognizing the various pros and cons that are associated with different methodological stances, this thesis assesses parental behavior by examining parents' self-reports obtained using interviews. Although parents' self-reports may reflect parental beliefs about what constitute "good," "responsible," or "acceptable" behaviors toward children, they are likely to indicate parents' different tendencies to employ various strategies with reasonable accuracy. In addition, self-report interviews provide for a reasonable compromise between direct observations and self-administered questionnaires. Taking advantage of the possibility of standardizing the event that instigates the parent's behavioral response that follows with using hypothetical situations, interviews may permit more extensive responses and greater involvement on the part of the participants than do questionnaires. Additional benefits of self-reports over direct observations is the practical convenience for both the researcher and the participant, which may have consequences for the overall response rate of the study, and which may possibly lower the risk of obtaining socially desirable responses. Although self-reports are limited to examining parents' perceptions

of their own behavior, or how they choose to present their behavior, it is reasonable to argue that such responses are a legitimate subject for parenting studies in their own right, not least as they frequently have been linked to various child outcomes (for a discussion of this issue, see Ramey, 2002).

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT STUDIES

The studies in this dissertation were organized around two different themes. The first theme concerned the modal patterns of parenting behavior. More specifically, the purpose of **Studies I and II** was to examine Swedish parents' preferences for assertive discipline when they are in conflict with their preschool children. By using a set of assertive disciplining strategies, rather than solely focusing on physical punishment, these studies may reveal important information about the way that Swedish parents approach parent-child conflicts. This concern originates from an interest in the way the corporal punishment ban, as well as the parental leave reform, has influenced parenting practices in Swedish families. It has been speculated that Swedish parents, as a result of the national child-rearing policy (summarized in Bäckström & Edfeldt, 1995), may have adopted a permissive parenting style and may therefore not intervene sufficiently firmly to induce compliance (e.g., Baumrind, 1996; Larzelere & Johnson, 1999). The intention was to include both mothers and fathers in both investigations. Unfortunately, no data for mothers in the U.S. sample were accessible and the comparison of Swedish and U.S. parents had to be restricted to paternal discipline.

The second theme of this dissertation concerned the links between parenting behavior and children's developmental outcomes. A central focus of the last three decades within the parenting literature has been on parenting styles (e.g., Baumrind, 1967, 1973; Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In this literature, a variety of co-occurring coinciding parenting behaviors, attitudes, and strategies for dealing with parent-child disagreements have been grouped in categories; these categories have then been studied in relation to various child outcomes. The purpose of **Studies III and IV** was to address some of the limitations that developmental researchers have noted with the parenting-typology approach. One of these limitations is the possibility that parents' direct efforts to exert control over their children may have been overrated. Critics argue that common measures of certain parenting strategies, such as firm control and monitoring, may in fact capture

children's willingness to cooperate rather than parent's deliberate intentions to attain their parenting goals (Lewis, 1981; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Another limitation of the parenting-style approach is the lack of explanatory power (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993). As a variety of parent behaviors and characteristics are merged into general parenting styles, it is not possible to elucidate the specific processes that contribute to the socialization process.

Aims

In **Study I**, Swedish fathers' preferences for assertive discipline strategies were compared with the preferences of fathers from the United States. The specific aim was to extend this comparison beyond a focus on physical punishment by investigating a wider range of assertive discipline strategies. It was hypothesized that, compared with U.S. fathers, Swedish fathers would (a) report a lower use of assertive discipline in general and (b) compensate for lower reports of behavior modification and coercion by reporting greater use of verbal control.

The concern in **Study II** was the potential tendency among Swedish parents to increase the pressure for compliance when the child does not respond to initial discipline. The specific aim was to investigate Swedish parents' self-reported use of assertive discipline across first- and second-time transgression episodes, in the context of both mild and serious transgressions. For each of these contexts, the following two hypotheses were addressed: (a) Swedish parents do increase their demands for compliance when their children continue or repeat an initial transgression and (b) parents of older preschool children, compared to those of toddlers and younger preschoolers, are more inclined to increase their demands for compliance when their children do not comply with initial discipline.

The aim of **Study III** was to investigate the association between parents' deliberate use of firm control and monitoring, and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. One methodological feature of this study was that all parents were asked to respond to the same set of hypothetical scenarios, thus measuring behavioral control in terms of the parent's intention to intervene with their child's behavior, rather than reflecting whether the parent-child relationship is conflictual or harmonious. The study aimed at establishing (a) whether there is

a positive correlation between parents' tendency to monitor their children's behavior and various aspects of adolescents' psychosocial adjustment, and (b) whether there is a positive correlation between parents' tendency to exert firm control and various aspects of adolescents' psychosocial adjustment.

Study IV examined the significance of adolescents' conflict resolution schemas in the development of their psychosocial adjustment within a parenting context. In response to a set of potential situations involving parent–adolescent conflict, adolescents chose among four alternatives to indicate how the situation was usually resolved; each alternative reflected an authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, or a neglecting parenting style. The summed occurrences of each conflict schema were compared across two groups of adolescents representing high and low levels of psychosocial adjustment. With respect to the four conflict resolution categories, the study tested for distribution differences between the two groups of adolescents. In particular, it was expected that the authoritative conflict resolution schema would be more frequent among adolescents with high-levels of adjustment.

Participants

In **Study I**, two samples of fathers who were members of Caucasian two-parent families, one from Sweden ($n = 50$) and one from the United States ($n = 50$), were compared in terms of their use of assertive discipline strategies. The two samples of fathers were matched pairwise in terms of (a) the sex of the child, (b) the age of the child (the difference within each pair was a maximum of six months, $|1.32|$ on average) and (c) the fathers' educational level (the maximum difference within each pair was one year, $|0.18|$ on average). With both samples combined, the children (54% boys) ranged in age from 38 to 66 months ($M = 49.92$, $SD = 6.98$) and the fathers ranged in age from 23 to 51 years ($M = 35.72$, $SD = 6.15$) and had completed an average of 14.35 years ($SD = 2.40$) of formal schooling.

The participants in **Study II** were 84 Swedish two-parent families with a preschool child (35 boys, 49 girls), in which both the mother and the father had agreed to participate. The children's mean age was 58.38 months ($SD = 12.95$) and they were divided into four age groups: 3-year-olds (38–47 months, $n = 20$), 4-year-olds (48–59 months, $n = 25$), 5-year-olds (60–71

months, $n = 21$) and 6-year-olds (72–84 months, $n = 18$). The child was the first-born in 37 families and the only child in 14 families. The age of the mothers ranged from 23 through 48 years ($M = 35.38$, $SD = 5.30$) and the age of the fathers ranged from 23 through 51 years ($M = 37.67$, $SD = 6.28$).

The distribution of educational levels for the mothers was such, that 2% had only completed nine years of compulsory schooling, 42% had completed two or three years of upper secondary education (11 or 12 school years) and 56% had successfully completed tertiary-level education (college or university). For fathers, the distribution between the three educational levels was 8%, 45%, and 47%, respectively. This can be compared to the national distribution among 25- to 54-year-olds; as at 1995, it was, 24%, 49% and 27%, for the three levels (Statistics Sweden, 1996b, Table 414).

For both **Studies I** and **II**, the data were drawn from a large cross-cultural research project (Palmérus & Scarr, 1995; Pinkerton, 1996). The participants were recruited through day-care centers during the period 1990 to 1995. In Sweden, the recruiting areas covered Halmstad (about 80,000 inhabitants), Gothenburg (about 500,000 inhabitants) and a nearby rural coastal area. In the United States, the recruiting areas covered Boston, MA; Charlottesville, VA; and Atlanta, GA, including some of the rural areas (all three sites had a population of more than 100,000 inhabitants).

The sample in **Study III** included 64 Swedish adolescents of Caucasian origin (26 boys and 38 girls) aged from 14 years and one month to 15 years and seven months ($M = 14.76$ years, $SD = 0.29$ years) from intact two-parent homes, and their parents. The mothers were, on average, 43.30 years old ($SD = 4.54$, range 37–58) and the fathers were, on average, 45.48 years old ($SD = 4.77$, range 37–60). The distribution of educational levels for all parents was as follows: 19% had completed seven to nine years of compulsory education, 37% had completed two or three years of upper secondary education (11 or 12 school years), and 44% had completed some form of tertiary education (college or university).

The participants in **Study IV** were 120 Swedish adolescents (70 boys, 50 girls), aged from 13 years and 11 months through 15 years and 11 months ($M = 14.76$ years, $SD = 0.38$). Seventy-one percent of the adolescents were from intact families, 21% lived with their mothers, 4% with their fathers, and 4% alternated between their mother's and their father's home. The distribution of

the combined educational levels within each family was such that 16% had completed seven to nine years of compulsory schooling, 42% had completed two or three years upper secondary education (11 or 12 school years), and 42% had completed some form of tertiary education (college or university).

For **Studies III** and **IV** participants were recruited from November 1996 to September 1997 by using listings in the population register for two counties (with populations of about 100,000 and 500,000) in southwest Sweden. By the time of the data collection, the national distribution among the three educational levels for 35- to 64-year-olds was 24% with seven to nine years of compulsory schooling, 49% with two or three years upper secondary education and 27% with tertiary education (Statistics Sweden, 1998, Table 406). Families with a teenager born in 1982 were contacted by telephone and given a presentation on the study. Appointments were made to visit the homes of families where the teenager and both of the parents had agreed to participate, spoke Swedish fluently, and were born in Scandinavia (three of the parents were born in Scandinavian countries other than Sweden). About 30% of the families who met the selection criteria agreed to participate.

Procedure

The procedure for collecting data was the same for all four studies. Prior to each data collection all interviewers were trained to use a number of strategies that aimed to establish a comfortable atmosphere during the interview, such as treating the parent as the expert, thanking the parents often for their cooperation, and explaining that the purpose of the interview was to learn how parents actually handle their children in daily life. With a few exceptions, all participating family members chose to meet the interviewer at their homes. During the first part of the home visit, the parents were asked for background information, such as age and other demographics, of the family members. The parents were then interviewed individually, in a secluded part of their home, to examine how they would respond to various hypothetical situations in which their child behaved in ways that possibly challenged parental expectations. The vignettes describing these scenarios were read aloud by the interviewer and the parents were then asked what they would do if their child or adolescent was involved in a similar situation. The interviews

were audio-taped to achieve satisfying coding accuracy. All participating family members were then given questionnaires to complete individually; these questionnaires dealt with attitudes and practices concerning parental behavior and also contained various ratings concerning both personal characteristics and the scenarios presented to parents. The vast majority of the participants completed the questionnaires during the home visit. In the remaining cases, where this was not possible, the participants were asked to complete their questionnaires individually at home and to mail them to the researchers some days later.

Measures and Coding

Studies I and II

To assess parental discipline, parents were presented with the same set of vignettes in both **Studies I** and **II**. The vignettes were designed for parents of children aged 37 through 84 months (see Scarr, Pinkerton, & Eisenberg, 1991) and covered the following issues (in order of presentation): (1) refusal to be dressed on a busy morning; (2) hitting a peer when arguing about a toy; (3) running into a busy street and hurting oneself when stumbling; (4) demanding a product at a supermarket and (5) refusal to quiet down after being put to bed. There were three questions for each vignette: (a) after being introduced to the initial scenario, parents were asked how they would respond if their own child behaved similarly; (b) to assess parents' responses to second-time episodes, they were then asked what they would do if the child did the same thing again within the next few minutes or continued to misbehave; (c) finally, parents were asked about their responses if a similar episode of the same transgression occurred a third time.

To serve the specific aim of **Study II**, only the first- and second-time responses to vignette (2) through (5) were selected for inclusion in the analyses. The reason for the exclusions of all three scenarios in vignette (1) and the third scenario in each of the remaining four vignettes was that these scenarios depict repeated transgressions as occurring the next day, rather than within the next few minutes. Therefore, as defined in this study, the excluded scenarios did not qualify as repeated transgression episodes. The four vignettes included in the analyses were then grouped in pairs based on

whether they were perceived by parents as being moderately serious (i.e., the shopping situation and the bedtime situation) or very serious (i.e., the hitting situation and the busy street situation).

Parents' responses were classified in line with the Parental Discipline Interview manual (Scarr et al., 1991), into one of 18 categories. Up to three responses could be classified for any of the scenarios (each describing a particular transgression episode) that were presented to parents. Both **Studies I** and **II** focus on assertive parental discipline strategies, which are used with the aim of subduing the child to conform to parental expectations. Parents' demands on their children to comply were considered in terms of the following three assertive disciplining strategies.

Coercion — this strategy was defined as physical or verbal acts that subdue the child from behaving contrary to the parents' wishes. The occurrence of coercion was indicated within each transgressions episode if a parent's response to a particular scenario was originally classified as belonging to any of the following categories: (a) physical restraint (i.e., physical actions to prevent the child from committing undesirable acts by holding it or otherwise physically confining it); (b) physical punishment (i.e., deliberate infliction of pain by behaviors such as slapping, spanking, whipping, hitting, beating, pinching, shaking, yanking, grabbing the child); or (c) threats (i.e., threatening the child with unpleasant consequences without actually carrying out the threat).

Behavior modification — this strategy was defined as the use of tangible reprimands intended to discourage certain types of child behavior in the future. The occurrence of behavior modification was indicated within each transgressions episode if a parent's response to a particular scenario was originally classified as belonging to any of the following categories: (a) privilege withdrawal (i.e., depriving the child of something it desires by restricting a liberty or denying something previously granted); (b) restitution demands (i.e., verbal commands that pressure the child to take the consequences of his/her misdeeds, e.g. apologizing to the victim of the misbehavior); or (c) isolation (i.e., punishing the child by withdrawing him/her from the presence of other people for some period of time).

Verbal control — this strategy was defined as the case when parents confront their child with a certain misbehavior that the child had committed or

make comments so that accusation, blame, or criticism is communicated. The occurrence of verbal control was indicated within each transgressions episode if a parent's response to a particular scenario was originally classified as belonging to any of the following categories: (a) angry interrogation (i.e., confronting the child without any interest in understanding the child's point of view, e.g. asking "Why did you do that?" without following up on the child's answer); (b) disappointment (i.e., telling the child that he/she failed to comply with parental expectations, e.g. "I thought you could behave much better"); or (c) firm commands (i.e., parents' use of ultimatums or criticism without explanation).

Study III

To assess the parenting strategies of monitoring and firm control, parents were presented with six vignettes in which the adolescent challenged a variety of parental expectations pertaining to moral norms, social conventions, and self-destructive behavior by the adolescent (cf. Smetana & Asquith, 1994). The vignettes covered the following issues: (1) bullying peers, (2) neglecting homework, (3) breaking curfew, (4) refusing to clean one's room, (5) watching TV late at night, and (6) using drugs and alcohol. Each vignette included three scenarios covering a variety of contexts on the same issue. For each scenario, parents were asked how they would respond if their own adolescent was involved in a similar real-life situation. Based on parents' responses within each separate question, the two strategies of monitoring and firm control were scored — independently of each other — as being either present or absent. Thus, as there were three scenarios for each of the six vignettes, parents' responses could range from 0 to 18 for each strategy.

Monitoring. This strategy was coded according to whether parents said they would attempt to gain more knowledge about their adolescent's behavior and whereabouts, or whether they would simply increase the attention they devoted to the adolescent's behavior and whereabouts. The definition of monitoring includes demands on the adolescent to give an account of his/her whereabouts in advance as well as using other sources of information, and assumes the prevention of undesired behavior by the adolescent or the placement of the parent in a better position for correcting any undesired behavior by the adolescent. Examples of parents' statements are: "I would

wait to see how well she did on the upcoming test,” “I would keep in touch with his friends’ parents so that we could inform each other better,” “I would check his pockets for cigarettes,” and “I would check up on her to see if she had cleaned her room.”

Firm Control. This strategy was coded according to whether or not the parents used their authority to indicate by word or deed that they did not accept the adolescent’s behavior, sometimes demanding to know the circumstances surrounding the behavior. The definition of firm control includes explicit orders, nagging, scolding, accusations, criticisms and ultimatums, and assumes that the adolescent is placed under a certain amount of pressure. Examples of parents’ statements are: “It is my right as a parent to know whether or not you smoke,” “I would turn off the TV and tell him to get his school books,” “I don’t like you hanging out with those guys,” and “She would have to tell me everything that happened.”

Study IV

Conflict Schemas. Adolescents filled in a questionnaire to indicate how their parents usually approach six potential situations involving parent–adolescent conflict. These situations involved the following issues: (1) bullying peers, (2) neglecting homework, (3) breaking curfew, (4) refusing to clean one’s room, (5) watching TV late at night, and (6) using drugs/alcohol. For each situation, the adolescents chose from among four alternatives to indicate how the situation was usually resolved, with each alternative reflecting a certain parenting style. The four categories were as follows: (a) *Authoritative*, “my parents have a lot of life experience, so I usually do as they wish”; (b) *Authoritarian*, “parents have power and therefore things usually turn out the way my parents wish”; (c) *Indulgent*, “my parents think I should decide for myself what is best”; and (d), *Neglecting* “my parents do not care, therefore it is up to me to decide what to do.” The scores were summed across the six situations, and could thus range from 0 to 6 for each separate category.

Studies III and IV

Psychosocial Adjustment. Adolescent psychosocial adjustment was assessed by the “I think I am” questionnaire (Ouvinen-Birgerstam, 1985), which comprises 72 items in total. For each item in this self-assessment

questionnaire, the adolescents rated whether they considered themselves to be similar (very similar = 2, fairly similar = 1) or different from the item description (rather different = -1, very different = -2). The full range of items in this questionnaire may be divided in five predefined subscales, which cover the following issues: (a) psychological well-being (e.g., “There is nothing that worries me”), (b) physical appearance (e.g., “I like my looks”), (c) academic achievement (e.g., “I am doing well at school”), and relationships with (d) parents (e.g., “I can talk with my parents about anything”) as well as with (e) others (e.g., “I have a lot of friends”). Whereas the five subscales were analyzed individually in **Study III**, only the total scores of the “I think I am” questionnaire were used in **Study IV** so as to perform a median split thereby categorizing adolescents as having either high or low levels of adjustment.

Results

In **Study I**, the hypothesis that Swedish fathers would report a lower use, in general, of assertive discipline was not confirmed. In fact, the overall use of assertive discipline was at the same level in the Swedish sample as it was in the U.S. sample. However, the distribution among strategies differed between the two countries. In accordance with the second hypothesis, Swedish fathers reported that they would use more verbal control and less behavior modification. For the strategy of coercion, the sample difference, indicating lower levels of use among Swedish fathers than among American fathers, only attained trend level ($p = .07$).

To obtain a more detailed analysis of paternal responses to child transgressions, the strategy of coercion was separated into its basic components: physical punishment, physical restraint and threat. Swedish fathers reported less physical punishment and more physical restraint than American fathers, whereas the use of threat occurred to the same degree in both samples. Neither Swedish nor American fathers responded differently as a result of the sex of their child.

In **Study II**, the first hypothesis, that Swedish parents would increase their demands for compliance when their children continue or repeat an initial transgression, was partly supported by the analyses. Going against this hypothesis was the result that parents did not state that they would increase

their overall use of assertive discipline in response to second-time episodes of either mild or serious child transgressions. Although they did not mention that they would increase their overall use of assertion, parents did not reduce their frequency of assertive responses either, thus displaying a pattern of consistency in their responses across repeated transgression episodes. However, when the results were analyzed in terms of separate strategies support was found for the first hypothesis; when faced with serious transgressions, fathers in particular shifted from using the strategy of verbal control to using higher-order disciplining strategies, such as coercion and behavior modification. In the context of mild transgressions, parents showed no indication of exchanging particular strategies for others.

No support was found for the hypothesis that the older the children, the more inclined the parents are to increase their demands for compliance if the child does not comply with the initial disciplining episode. Neither mothers' nor fathers' reports revealed any age effects.

In **Study III**, the results failed to confirm the expected positive association between parents' tendency to use monitoring and firm control, on the one hand, and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment, on the other. Monitoring by mothers was not associated with any of the five aspects of adolescent adjustment that were examined in the study. However, monitoring by fathers correlated significantly with adolescents' positive relationship to people other than family members, whereas the correlation coefficient for the relationship to psychological well-being reached trend level ($p = .07$). No positive association was found with any of the five aspects of adolescent adjustment for the strategy of firm control for either mothers or fathers.

In addition, monitoring by mothers seemed to have different effects on boys and girls. For boys, greater monitoring by mothers was positively associated with higher academic achievement and better relationships with people outside the family, whereas for girls it appeared to be negatively related to the same aspects of adjustment.

The results of **Study IV** confirmed that the overall pattern of conflict resolution schemas differ between adolescent groups with high and low levels of psychosocial adjustment. As expected, the authoritative conflict schema (cf. voluntary compliance) was particularly frequent among well-adjusted adolescents. Furthermore, high levels of psychosocial adjustment were

associated with lower reports of authoritarian conflict schemas (cf. forced compliance), whereas the indulgent conflict schema (cf. non-confirmed or approved autonomy) did not differ in frequency across high and low levels of adjustment. The neglecting conflict schema was dropped from the analyses due to a skewed distribution as well as its infrequent occurrence.

As adolescent attributions of parental behavior may be influenced by the quality of their relationships with parents, a second set of analyses was conducted. This time, however, the relationship-to-parents subscale was excluded from the “I think I am” questionnaire when using it to perform a median-split. Although group differences in the authoritarian conflict schema did not reach statistical significance, the general findings proved to be robust in these analyses.

DISCUSSION

This thesis addresses two aspects of intergenerational disagreements. The first aspect deals with parents' preferences for discipline when they are in conflict with their preschool children. The second aspect focuses on the potential association between parental use of authority and adolescents' developmental outcomes. Parenting research, like most other non-experimental research areas conducted in real-life contexts, is a challenging field where separate investigations add only small pieces of information to the larger picture. Restricted by methodological pitfalls due to practical and ethical circumstances, interpretations of results are commonly limited in depth and scope. With these rudiments in mind the following discussion comments and sheds light on the main findings pertaining to the twofold purpose of this thesis.

The first part of this thesis directs attention to family policy in Sweden (see Liljeström, 1978; Welles-Nyström, 1996) by examining parents' limit-setting behavior in terms of three assertive strategies: coercion, behavior modification, and verbal control. The central concern is whether the emphasis on child democracy has discouraged Swedish parents in their role as socialization agents, as suggested by Baumrind (1996). In **Study I**, Swedish fathers' preferences for assertive discipline strategies were compared with the preferences of fathers from the United States. Despite reporting a different strategy profile, the Swedes' overall use of assertive strategies was on the same level as the American fathers. A similar result was found in a cross-cultural study of 4-year-old children and their mothers, where the endorsement of restrictive child-rearing practices was greatest among Indonesian mothers, while no differences were found among American, German and Swedish mothers (Farver, Welles-Nyström, Frosch, Wimbari, & Hoppe-Graff, 1997). In terms of the distribution between strategies, the results of the present study showed that, compared with their U.S. counterparts, Swedish fathers stated that they would use less behavior modification but more verbal control. Although there were slightly fewer reports of coercion among fathers in the

Swedish sample than in the American sample, the difference did not reach statistical significance.

The essence of behavior modification is a parent's intention to administer a punishment so that the child will learn not to engage in similar transgressions in the future, whereas the essence of verbal control is mainly to stop the child from misbehaving within a particular transgression episode. On the basis of the findings in the present study, one might therefore conclude that Swedish fathers, possibly as an effect of the *aga* law, have exchanged punitive discipline for restrictive control. The contention that Swedish fathers, compared with American fathers, focused more on restrictive discipline, at the expense of punitive approaches, was also supported when the contents of coercion were analyzed in greater detail. In comparison with the American fathers, the Swedes mentioned using physical restraint more often and physical punishment less often. Hence, a plausible interpretation of the emerging pattern of results is that Swedish fathers do not define parent-child conflicts as learning situations to the same degree as American fathers but instead focus on preventing the potential harm resulting from the child's misbehavior.

Another parental characteristic that may account for cultural biases in relation to the way parents approach their children's misconduct has to do with social-cognitive attributions. Parents who tend to interpret their children's misbehavior as intentional and as being caused by internal dispositions, rather than by external circumstances, are more punitive and controlling with their children (Dix et al., 1989). These parents are also likely to experience more negative affect in response to their children's misconduct (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, & Nixon, 1986). Sociocultural values that relate to the inherent nature of children, the character traits that are important for children to develop and the age at which these traits should appear, influence parenting cognitions so that certain groups of parents are more inclined than others to attribute children's misbehavior to willfulness and defiant intentions (Bornstein, 1989; Goodnow & Collins, 1990). Therefore, differences in how Swedish and U.S. fathers approach parent-child conflict may be explained by differences in the fathers' tendencies to hold their children responsible for their misbehavior. This interpretation is in line with the suggestion of Durrant and colleagues (Durrant et al., 1999) that Swedish mothers justify their lower

use of physical punishment, compared with Canadian mothers, by giving lower ratings of seriousness to the transgressions committed by their children.

To achieve an ideal methodological situation for conducting cross-cultural studies, the compared samples should not differ in any aspects other than cultural setting. In reality, it is of course impossible to meet this criterion. However, the more variables with potential confounding effects that can be ruled out, the better the likelihood of drawing plausible conclusions. For example, unless a study of cultural behavioral differences across various countries includes samples that are comparable with respect to socioeconomic class, it is impossible to conclude whether findings are due to socioeconomic group differences or differences in cultural values. The present comparison between Swedish and U.S. fathers utilized two homogeneous samples in which all the participants were from intact two-parent families and of Caucasian ethnic origin. To further ensure comparability between the samples, Swedish and U.S. fathers were matched pairwise in terms of crucial demographic variables such as fathers' level of education, as well as the sex and age of children. These variables have previously been linked to a wide range of parenting practices, including choices of disciplining strategies (Kelley et al., 1992; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Palméus, 1999; Pinkerton & Scarr, 1995; Sorbring, Rödhholm-Funnemark, & Palméus, 2003).

Study II examined the tendency among Swedish mothers and fathers to increase the pressure for compliance across initial and repeated child transgressions. Parents' overall responses for assertive discipline indicated that their general efforts to elicit compliance did not decrease with repeated transgressions; their overall preference for assertive discipline was stable across initial and repeated episodes of both mild and serious child transgressions. This result may be compared with that of Zahn-Waxler and Chapman's (1982) study, in which American mothers said that they used more discipline when their children disobeyed initial discipline. Although the comparability with Zahn-Waxler and Chapman's investigation is limited due to differences in design and methodology, one cannot disregard the possibility that Swedish parents may be less willing than U.S. parents to increase their assertive demands for compliance when their children ignore initial discipline.

However, while Swedish parents did not increase their overall demands for compliance with repeated transgressions, neither did they decrease their

demands. Developmental researchers have claimed that ineffective parenting is typically characterized by non-contingent discipline, in which parents' responses do not logically follow from their children's misconduct (e.g., Snyder & Patterson, 1995). The rationale behind this contention is that parents' failure to follow through on initial discipline promotes defiant child behaviors through the process of negative reinforcement (Reid & Patterson, 1989). Others (e.g., Wahler & Dumas, 1986) argue that inconsistent discipline produces defiant children because, rather than being faced with unpredictable parental responses, children prefer to seek their parent's attention by repeatedly involving themselves in serious misconduct.

In light of these arguments, one might claim that the consistency that Swedish parents display across initial and repeated child transgressions is indicative of parenting competence. However, the interpretation of such results may be subject to ambiguity due to social desirability bias. On the one hand, as parents responded to the child-transgression scenarios in a face-to-face interview situation, they might have been anxious to present themselves as "good parents." With reference to the research question, this problem is particularly relevant if parents hold the idea that inconsistent use of discipline is a sign of incompetent parenting. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that parents were reluctant to admit that they would not follow up on initial attempts to discipline their children. On the other hand, exaggerating the problem of social desirability may also lead to faulty conclusions being drawn. In conjunction with the parental discipline interview, parents were explicitly asked whether they had ever used physical punishment with their child; 81% of mothers and 63% of fathers in the project as a whole admitted that they had violated the Swedish physical punishment ban (Palmérus, 1997). Considering this information, one can conclude that parents' reports of their use of discipline in both initial and repeated child transgressions are indicative of their genuine responses.

Further, although responding with consistency across initial and repeated episodes of mild child transgressions, fathers exchanged the strategy of verbal control for higher-order disciplining strategies (i.e., coercion and behavior modification) when faced with serious second-time transgressions. Mothers also distinguished between mild and serious child transgressions, but not to the same degrees as fathers. Although mothers' responses indicated that the

frequency of verbal control dropped significantly across initial and repeated serious child transgressions, indications of them shifting to higher-order strategies were evident only for coercion and, even then, only reached trend level. Such results may be contrasted with the contention that permissive parents do not view themselves as active agents and do not insist on compliance when dealing with their children's disobedience (Baumrind, 1996). A typical permissive parenting behavior would be to not follow through on an initial disciplining attempt even if the child obviously ignores the parent's disapproval. Therefore, the approach employed by fathers, and to some degree mothers, when dealing with their children's misconduct does not pass as being incompetent or permissive.

To sum up, Swedish parents appear to approach their children's misconduct with restrictions rather than punishments. Parents, particularly fathers, also distinguish between mild and serious situations in their responses to children's disobedience to initial discipline. These patterns of discipline may be interpreted in terms of Swedish parents seeming to approach parent-child disagreements with a certain degree of consciousness and responsiveness. One might therefore argue that Swedish parents have adjusted well to the democratic parenting style that is advocated by modern Swedish family policy. However, before establishing firm conclusions on this issue there is one limitation in particular that needs consideration. As the samples that were studied contained an over-representation of well-educated parents, the results may not be able to be generalized to families from lower socioeconomic groups (see von der Lippe, 1999; Raikkonen & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1992). It may also be the case that parents similar to those included in **Studies I** and **II** would display an authoritative style of parenting regardless of whether or not the restriction on the use of punitive discipline existed. In the same vein, one could also argue that formerly authoritarian parents, as a consequence of the restriction on using physical punishment, have experienced problems in finding alternatives to the range of disciplining strategies they were previously accustomed to using.

As a final remark, to further examine Swedish parents' use of disciplining behavior, future studies should also take the effectiveness of discipline into account. Although effective when making sample comparisons regarding parents' tendency to confront their children, hypothetical scenarios

of parent–child conflict have limitations when studying discipline across initial and repeated transgressions. Using scenarios of child transgressions, parents are presented with a second-time child transgression irrespective of the likelihood of a second disciplining encounter being necessary in a real-life situation. Therefore, even though Swedish and U.S. parents may follow up on initial child disobedience to the same degree, it is uncertain whether Swedish parents are less effective in achieving compliance than U.S. parents (i.e., there may be a smaller likelihood of a second disciplining encounter being required for U.S. parents, compared to Swedish parents).

The second part of this thesis focuses on the links between parental authority and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Widely used parenting models intended to predict various child characteristics from different parenting styles (e.g., Baumrind, 1967, 1973; Lamborn et al., 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) have been criticized for potentially overrating the significance of parental control and for having low explanatory power due to their lack of conceptual refinement (see Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Lewis, 1981; Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

Having separated adolescents' willingness to cooperate from parents' actual attempts to exert control, in contrast with several past investigations (e.g., Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987; Fletcher, Darling, & Steinberg, 1995; Lamborn et al., 1991; Steinberg et al., 1989; Weintraub & Gold, 1991), the results of **Study III** revealed only vague support for a direct association between the strategy of monitoring and adolescent adjustment. Of the five aspects of adolescent adjustment that were studied, monitoring by fathers was significantly linked only to adolescents' relationships with people outside the family, with the association to psychological well-being attaining only trend level. Monitoring by mothers revealed no associations with adolescent adjustment. Stattin and Kerr (2000) have demonstrated that the way monitoring is usually operationalized may lead to flawed conclusions about its effects on adolescents' developmental outcomes. Their study sought to identify which of three potential sources of information contributed most to parents' knowledge about their adolescent's concerns and whereabouts. Adolescents' spontaneous disclosure was a more important source than either parental solicitation or parental control. Stattin and Kerr's results were valid

for both parents' and adolescents' reports, even when the effect of closeness of parent-child relationship was controlled for.

Furthermore, there were no indications of an association between the strategy of firm control and adolescent psychosocial adjustment for either mothers or fathers. To our knowledge, the number of past studies that have explicitly addressed the connection between parental use of the strategy of firm control and adolescent psychosocial adjustment is limited. In a recent study, Barber, Bolitho, and Bertrand (2001), found no association between adolescents' perceptions of their parents' limit-setting behavior and their own conduct disorder. However, when Steinberg et al. (1989) asked 10- to 16-year-olds whether their parents' behavioral demands were negligible or not, they found that parental behavioral control was associated with adolescent self-rated psychosocial maturity measured with a one-year delay.

The results of **Study III** should be interpreted in the light of the study's methodological strengths and limitations. Using both adolescents and parents as sources of information limits the risk that a third variable — such as warmth or quality of attachment — might influence the covariation between adolescents' perceptions of parental behavioral control and their self-rated psychosocial maturity (for a related discussion, see Grusec et al., 2000). Although covariation of study variables due to the influence of a third variable cannot be avoided in a non-experimental design, the use of more than one data source decreases the methodological hazard considerably. One limitation of this study is, however, the cross-sectional design. This is important because the impacts of parental control on psychosocial adjustment rely on conceptual ideas that imply a certain time delay. Therefore, one should be cautious about drawing premature conclusions about the presence or absence of an association between parental control and adolescent adjustment as well as about the directions of any possible impacts that one variable may have on the other.

Attempting to add to the understanding of the specific processes that contribute to optimal socialization (cf. Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Grusec et al., 2000), **Study IV** examined adolescents' perceptions of how conflicts with their parents are usually resolved (i.e., conflict resolution schemas). The results revealed that adolescents with high- and low-levels of adjustment held different views concerning how conflicts

with their parents were usually resolved. In line with our expectations, we found that adolescents' mental representations (i.e., schemas) of parents as employing an authoritative conflict style were more frequent in the well-adjusted group, whereas the authoritarian conflict schema was more frequent among adolescents who were less well-adjusted. However, it should be noted that the group effect for the authoritarian conflict schema did not reach statistical significance when the influence of adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with parents was excluded.

Both the authoritative and the authoritarian conflict schemas represent a certain degree of parental demands for compliance. Yet adolescents see themselves as complying with their parents' wishes for very different reasons. On the one hand, within the authoritative schema, adolescents' view their conformity as an act of free choice, thus representing a form of conflict resolution that includes parents' deliberate use of authority as well as a genuine mutual emotional involvement between adolescent and parent. On the other hand, within the authoritarian conflict schema adolescents' attribute their conformity to external force.

These findings are in line with parenting-style research (i.e., Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn et al., 1991), which links coercive control to detrimental child outcomes. Parents who employ an authoritarian approach towards their adolescents have been described as status-oriented, constraining, and non-negotiating (Baumrind, 1991), and in comparison with authoritative parents, their adolescents are worse off within a wide range of psychosocial competencies (Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn et al., 1991). Some researchers (e.g., Bretherton, Golby, & Cho, 1997; Lewis, 1981; Stattin & Kerr, 2000) argue that authoritative parents exercise behavior control not by means of strict demands for compliance, but rather by some other means that cause their children to voluntarily conform to parental expectations. Such arguments fit well with the results concerning the authoritative conflict schema in this study. Further empirical support for such a contention is provided by research showing that adolescent adjustment is associated with family harmony and parent-child synchrony (Barber et al., 2001).

In contrast with the results for the control-related conflict schemas, no group difference was revealed for adolescents' perceptions of parents as being indulgent when dealing with disagreements. Typical for the indulgent conflict

schema is that it represents a certain degree of scarcity in the parental use of authority. Adolescents with predominantly indulgent conflict schemas concerning their parents are likely to be involved in relatively few conflicts with their parents. However, rather than perceiving a sense of family harmony, these adolescents are likely to experience a lack of guidance and instrumental support. For instance, studies on parenting styles show that adolescents who describe their parents as indulgent typically display externalizing problems and deficits in achievement-related activities (Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn et al., 1991). Furthermore, although adolescents assert more freedom for issues they consider as belonging to their own personal sphere as they grow older, they do not claim full autonomy for moral, prudential, or social-conventional issues (Smetana & Asquith, 1994).

In line with recent arguments that personal agency play a central role in adolescents' development (see Baumrind, 1991, 1996; Grusec et al., 2000; Larson, 2000), the concept of conflict schemas opens the possibility of explaining how parenting styles are linked to children's psychosocial development. Recognizing the bidirectional nature of parent-child interactions (Kuczynski et al., 1997), conflict schemas may be depicted as both a predecessor and consequence of children's psychosocial development. The authoritative conflict schema, for instance, may develop partly as a result of adolescents' past experiences of parent-child disagreements, but also through the influence of a warm parent-child relationship in general. Conversely, through cognitive processes working in the opposite direction, the authoritative conflict schema may also enhance adolescent adjustment through positive parent-child interactions during episodes of disagreement. Facing authoritative parental demands from the position of an authoritative conflict schema may increase the likelihood that adolescents become involved in constructive communication in which they are allowed to assert their position. Such communication may enhance personal agency as well as the development of social and cognitive skills (see Larson, 2000).

In contrast, none of the other parenting approaches offers the adolescent the possibility of being involved in interactions that develop psychosocial competencies. For example, the authoritarian parenting style leaves the child with a limited number of self-determined choices upon which to act, and restricts children's sense of autonomy and self-efficacy (for a review, see Deci

& Ryan, 1995). As a power-assertive parenting approach is likely to add to the adolescent's authoritarian conflict schema, a coercive process of interaction may develop and even escalate in the future (cf. Dishion & Bullock, 2002). In the same vein, adolescents from permissive homes (whether indulgent or neglecting) seldom receive the opportunity to develop their communicative and social skills within the context of parent-child disagreements. In line with observations of coercive family processes (Dishion & Bullock, 2002; Gardner, 1989), one aspect of parenting competence may be the ability to create and maintain a positive pattern of interaction during episodes of parent-child disagreement. Although such speculation concerning the conceptual mechanisms underlying various parenting styles have not been explicitly confirmed empirically, the above reasoning points to the importance of future examinations of adolescents', as well as parents', perceptions and cognitions with respect to interpersonal interaction. Continuing to treat family members' perceptions as static factors, as in traditional research on parenting styles, may add little to our understanding of parenting and its consequences.

In summary, the second part of this thesis raises important questions about the commonly assumed link between parental control and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. What is the point of parents exerting behavioral control if adolescents' voluntary cooperation contributes more to their own psychosocial adjustment? Is it really a good idea to pressure a deviant adolescent to conform to parental expectations? However, the results also indicate that, rather than dismissing parental control as an important aspect of parenting, further attention should be directed to the ways in which parents use their authority. Although adolescents' perceptions of parental authority appear to be essential to their psychosocial adjustment, it seems that the content of these perceptions is even more important. In accordance with recent arguments that positive parenting is not something adults do to children, but rather a quality of the parent-child relationship (Barber et al., 2001), one might suggest that parents' manners, goals, and intentions during episodes of parent-child disagreements are more important than are the actual strategies they employ.

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