Girls' and Boys' Views of Conflicts with Parents

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To Alice and Urban

For bringing life to theory

ABSTRACT

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

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

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

This thesis is based on the following four studies, each of which will be referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

Study I   Sorbring, E., Rödholm-Funnemark, M., & Palmérus, K. (2003). Boys' and girls' perceptions of parental discipline in transgression situations. *Infant and Child Development, 12,* 53-69.

Study II   Sorbring, E., & Palmérus, K. (2004). Children's beliefs about the importance of gender in transgression situations. *Child: Care, Health & Development, 30,* 39-50.

Study III   Sorbring, E., Deater-Deckard, K., & Palmérus, K. (in press). Girls' and boys' perception of mother's intention in using physical punishment and reasoning as discipline methods. *The European Journal of Developmental Psychology.*

Study IV   Sorbring, E. (2005). The child as an active agent in conflict situations. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the thesis, girls' and boys' perceptions, beliefs and agency in transgression and conflict situations, is rooted both in current trends of developmental research as well as the changes that are taking place in society. During the last decade, research into child socialization processes has developed rapidly, from, in the past, simply adopting a unidirectional approach to socialization to a situation today where a bidirectional approach is preferred. The study of parenting has taken a more complex turn and new perspectives have been presented on research in this area (e.g. SRCD, 1998). The parenting situation is seen as a dynamic process between two individuals which is influenced by their perceptions, cognitions, beliefs, emotions, experiences and expectations regarding the current situation and the other person involved (Kuczynski, Marshall & Shell, 1997). Children and parents are active agents in this interaction, modifying their behavior to suit the other person, as well as interpreting the values that are jointly negotiated (Kuczynski, Harach & Bernardini, 1999). Children's constantly developing abilities to make sense of parents' actions, to argue with them and to assert themselves, are shown to influence parents' acquisition of values (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004; Stein & Albro, 2001). Parents' knowledge and understanding of the child's emotional state, ability to interact in the situation and understanding of the parents' behavior, in its turn influences children's acquisition of values (Grusec, Goodnow & Kuczynski, 2000).

Koops (2004) argues that the change in focus and understanding of children in research during the past decade can and should be understood from the historical development of childhood as a part of a lifespan. For many years, children and childhood were an area that did not attract the interest of researchers. Before the Middle Ages, "childhood" was not even viewed as a specific period in the human lifespan. Children had no rights and consequently suffered a great deal. Regardless of social class, the aim was to toughen the child in preparation for adult life (Ariés, 1962). Koops (2004) believes that, from about the 13th

century onwards, representations of children have increasingly accentuated their childishness. Childhood became an increasingly prolonged part of the human lifespan and children were brought up in a separate niche, distant from the adult world. In a sense, a step away is taken (or possibly a step further) in the 21st century by allowing childhood to be a part of the lifespan and not simply a phase to be passed through, in that children's abilities and skills are now noticed in a different way and that children's rights are put on a par with those of adults.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, United Nations, Article 12, 1989) is, with some exceptions, the first international human rights declaration that draws attention to almost every part of a child's life (Verma, Chen & Miller, 2001). Among many other things, the CRC states that children have the right to be listened to, seen, and respected. Children should also be consulted in all matters that affect them; a right that has contributed to a growing awareness of the need for a child-perspective on childhood, on children's own experiences and on social environments (for a review see Hogan, Etz & Tudge, 1999). In Sweden the application of the CRC is overseen by the Children's ombudsman. Her duty is to promote the rights and interests of children. Even though the provisions of the CRC are widely known by government agencies, municipalities and county councils, the implementation progress has however not been as successful as the ombudsman would have liked (Barnombudsmannen, 2004). Some of the difficulties related to the implementation of its provisions concern how it should be done, the definitions contained in the CRC and the lack of children's involvement (Barnombudsmannen, 2001). International researchers (Carlson & Earls, 2001) state that: "In Sweden there is a highly developed view of the child based on democratic values, which gives respect for the child as a person in its own right and a belief in the child's inherent skills and potential" (p.15).

Children's rights both to be listened to and to be a part of research are emphasized by several researchers. According to Qvortrup (2001), childhood is an integrated part of society, as a specific permanent social construction, qualitatively different from adulthood and in need of a specific research focus. Due to a lack of child-focused studies in the areas of both the family and child development, research has provided little insight into children's everyday lives and the subjective meaning that they attach to their family life (Hogan et al., 1999). It is important not only to study children and childhood, but also to give children a voice. Several researchers argue that children's perspectives are about how children view the world and are therefore difficult for researchers to study. As adults we can never understand the child's perspective

and never obtain a complete knowledge. Research results have always, in one way or another, been subject to adults' pre-understanding and interpretation (Johansson, 2003; Sommer, 2003). However, different methods for producing and analyzing data make it possible to give children a voice and to engage them in research (Qvarsell, 20039). The researcher still has the preferential right of interpretation, although with an ambition to maintain a child-perspective in the study. A child-perspective is then to listen to children and interpret their statements as manifestations of the context, as well as recognitions for their agency (Halldén, 2003).

Focusing on the child and giving children a voice has not only led to an understanding of children's active roles in parenting, but it has also provided some indication of the importance of children's perceptions for their socialization. Children's perceptions of parents' different discipline methods exert an influence on their own self-perception (Crase, Foss & Colbert, 1981), as well as their perception of the surrounding social environment (Herzberger, Potts & Dillon, 1981). For example, children's perceptions of gender-typed parenting contribute to their understanding (or misunderstanding) of gender (see Ruble & Martin, 1998, for a review). Children's perceptions of parents'discipline methods influence the initial development of their own future parenting practice (Wolfe, Katell, & Drabman, 1982). Furthermore, research has shown that, rather than the actual method itself, cognitions and emotions associated with specific discipline methods influence the effect that a particular method can have on the child (Grusec & Rudy, 1999). Children's perceptions moderate the association between experiencing physical punishment and negative child outcomes. For example, children's perceptions of physical punishment as a form of parental rejection are related positively to the young individual's own maladjustment (Rohner & Bourque, 1996; Rohner, Kean & Cournoyer, 1991). Furthermore, children's perceptions of physical punishment as less normative are positively correlated with child aggression and anxiety (Lansford et al., in press).

Research has enlightened us about the importance of putting the child in focus, taking a child-perspective, seeing the child as an active agent, examining children's perceptions and so on. This thesis explores the child's perceptions, beliefs and agency in transgression and conflict situations, with a particular emphasis placed on gender. In the following section, the aims of the thesis will be outlined and addressed. The thesis continues with three theoretical sections, which together constitute a theoretical background to the four studies. The first section focuses on parenting, which is the primary area of interest in this thesis. The second section,

dealing with children's social cognition, presents how the child might make sense of the parent's actions, as well as the child's ability to justify its own position in the conflict situation by the use of arguments. With the ambition to get a deeper understanding of the role of gender in parenting, the third section deals with gender and gender socialization. Following on from the theoretical sections, specific aims and methods for each separate study will be presented, followed by a discussion of methodological issues. The thesis ends with a presentation of results, a discussion and conclusions. The four studies, in their original form, are to be found in the Appendices.

AIMS OF THE THESIS

The child's perception is assigned an important role in our understanding of the child's socialization, as well as other aspects of child development. In the light of these assumptions, the general aim of this thesis is to learn more about the child's perceptions, beliefs and agency in parenting. One overall goal is to examine the role of gender in children's perceptions, beliefs and agency. This was done using four empirical studies. Each study contributes to a greater understanding of the general aim. The studies are delimited to 6- to 9-year-old children and to transgression and conflict situations in parenting.

The aim of the first study was to explore girls' and boys' perception of parents' choices of discipline methods. Several Swedish studies examining parents' self-reported choices of discipline methods found marginal child and parent gender effects (Durrant, Broberg & Rose-Krasnor, 1999; Palmérus, 1999; Palmérus & Jutengren, 2004; Pinkerton, 1996). **Study I** was therefore designed to examine children's perceptions of parental discipline methods, as well as their perceptions of child gender differences in parents' choices of discipline methods. In order to take account of children's experiences of parental discipline vis-à-vis other-sex children in the family, the results for those children who have other-sex siblings are compared with those who do not.

Previous studies have pointed to a relation between harsher versus milder forms of discipline methods and the child's sex in transgression situations (Palacios, González & Moreno, 1992; Pinkerton, 1996). The aim of **Study II** was thus to further examine the relationship between discipline methods and the child's beliefs about the role of gender in transgression situations. In the light of the first study's interesting results about sibling influence and other studies indicating the importance of the sex of the child, familial socioeconomic status, type of siblings, parental values and shared responsibility, these variables were predicted to have an impact on children's beliefs about the role of gender in transgression situations.

The findings from the second study revealed interesting links between harsher discipline methods and children's beliefs about gender, congruent with classic gender-stereotypes found in society (Armentrout & Burger, 1972; Barnett, Quackenbush & Sinisi, 1996; Zussman, 1978). With this result, together with the unique situation in Sweden, a country which has a long history of legislation against the use of physical punishment (Durrant, 1999) as twin points of departure, the aim of the third study was to explore other beliefs/perceptions that could be connected to the severity of the discipline (i.e. harsh or mild) method chosen by parents. In **Study III,** boys' and girls' perceptions of mothers' intentions when using physical punishment or reasoning, as well as their evaluation of the mother as a good parent were investigated. Variations due to the child's sex, the child's age, discipline method (physical punishment and reasoning), vignette presented (discipline in response to child aggression, or in response to child noncompliance) and their own mother's childrearing-attitudes were estimated.

The results of the third study revealed that the child's perception varied with regard to several of the above-mentioned variables. All three studies supported and identified individual differences in children's active perceptions of parental practices – the active child in the transgression and conflict situations was indeed present. However, it was worth considering *how* children acted as agents in transgression and conflict situations. The aim of **Study IV** was thus to examine girls' and boys' active roles in and around conflict situations using Kuczynski's three child-related criteria : 1) actively creating a meaning about what is happening, 2) intentional acting in the interaction and 3) having an idea about the efficacy of its action, as a conceptual model (Kuczynski et al., 1999). Furthermore, the role of gender in the above processes will be of specific interest in all three objectives.

PARENTING AND DISCIPLINE METHODS

The survey presented below will begin by attempting to provide a definition of parenting and its goals, as well as a presentation of discipline methods. In the second part, a brief summary of the factors that influence the parental choice of discipline method are provided. Thereafter, research concerning children's perception of parenting will be discussed. Finally, the fourth part will pay additional attention to the bi-directional perspective in parenting. Conditions in Sweden, as well as Swedish research, will be presented within those contexts where it is relevant. A particular focus will be placed on the first years of middle childhood (6-9 years old).

Parents in most cultures struggle to attain ***socialization goals*** for their children which include; a) the ability to avoid abnormal behavior, b) the capability, at some point in the future, to support themselves and their own family, c) the capability to create and maintain close relationships with others, and finally d) the capability to, in their turn, successfully rear their own children (Maccoby, 1992; Maccoby, 2000). In addition to long-term socialization goals, parents also have short-term goals. Short-term goals can be associated with specific situations (Dix, McFarland & Thompson, 1999). Long-, as well as short-term goals, can be either child- or parent-oriented (Dix, 1992). Parent-oriented goals focus on what is best for the parent, but not necessarily best for the child. Child-oriented goals aim either to make the child happy or are in the child's best interests. Socialization goals are categorized as child-oriented, when they are in the child's best interests, even if the child does not always view them positively.

By their ***parenting behavior*** parents try to achieve these long-term, short-term, parent-oriented and child-oriented goals (Kuczynski, 1984). Darling and Steinberg (1993) distinguish between parenting styles and parenting practices, as different aspects of parenting. Both parenting style and parenting practices result in part from the goals and values parents hold. Parenting style includes behavior which is not directly associated with the socialization goals

or with the child's behavior, but with the parent's emotions for the child. From these types of parenting behavior children infer the emotional attitudes of their parents and gain knowledge about social behavior. Parenting practices, Darling and Steinberg define as behavior that varies according to those socialization goals parents have in different domains of socialization. These types of parenting behavior are the mechanisms through which parents directly help their child attain their socialization goals. Parenting practices are domain specific, as opposed to parenting style, which is displayed across a range of parent-child interactions. Parenting practices are similar to parental strategies discussed by Bugental and Johnston (see Bugental & Johnston, 2000, for a review). Parental strategies can be categorized in the following way. The first category includes proactive strategies, which could mean being a model for the child, structuring the child's every-day life, doing as the child wishes or, through a warm and positive climate, preventing disobedience. Reactions to the child's disobedience, abnormal behavior and disagreement, as well as the need to control the child's behavior, are included in the second category. This category emphasizes different discipline methods, and the parents' ability to adopt the child's perspective. The last category, monitoring, is, in essence, a mixture of the first and second categories. In this category a focus is placed on the parents' knowledge of their children's activities, and their ability to discover and identify abnormal behavior in the child (Kuczynski & Grusec, 1997).

There is a spectrum of different **_discipline methods_** used by parents. These methods range from mild to harsh as regards the extent to which the child experiences the threat posed by each situation (for example from using a low use of authority, when the parent changes the circumstances to suit the child or uses mild requests in order to achieve cooperation, to physical punishment where the parent deliberately inflicts physical pain on her/his child). Discipline methods can also be looked upon as either positive or negative. They are positive in the sense that they help children to understand why some behaviors are accepted/not accepted, most often including inductive methods, like reasoning and explanation, when setting up limits. They are negative in the sense that they force the child do what it is told in order to avoid being hurt or punished instead of understanding why. Negative discipline methods most often include power-assertive methods, meaning that the child's noncompliance is followed by negative consequences without the provision of any explanations (Smith, Gollop, Taylor & Marshall, 2004). The definition of different discipline methods, as well as categorization of discipline methods varies in different studies. In some studies, separate discipline methods are grouped together based on empirical grounds, using

factor-analysis. For example, Hastings and Grusec (1998) created groups such as 'punitive control' which included both verbal and physical punishments, and 'surrender/avoid' which included both avoiding the situation but also the parent's failure/child's success in determining the outcome of the situation. Other studies have used a theoretical base to group separate discipline methods into categories. Palmérus (1997) has created categories containing methods similar with regard to concept and principles. For example, 'reasoning/explanation' means that the parent gives an explanation to or reasons with the child from a child-perspective, whereas 'coercive verbal control' includes the parent's use of different forms of firm verbal expressions to control their child's behavior. Indeed, there is a plethora of methods which is growing increasingly with the pace of research. Grusec et al. (2000) point out that studies in non-Western cultures or in different social contexts, may result in the discovery of non-traditional methods, such as rewards and routines that are used as discipline methods. Oburu and Palmérus (2003) found support for this in a Kenyan sample which revealed that supernatural intercession and the denial of food existed as discipline methods.

Parents' choices of discipline methods

There are a number of variables that influence the parent's choice of discipline methods. Moreover, not only do these variables influence the choice of discipline method but, in most cases, they also influence each other. In other words, the connection between variables, on the one hand, and between variables and choice of discipline method, on the other, could be very complex. Parents socialize their children in a context where the child is active and has significant resources and opportunities to influence their parents', and their own development. The parent acts within a wider cultural context in which alternative values and goals that compete with the parent's own frequently arise (Kuczynski et al., 1997). According to Belsky (1984) parents' discipline methods are influenced both by the parent's and the child's age, sex, cognitions, emotions and experiences, as well as the social and cultural environment within which they live.

The ***child's sex and age*** influence the parent's judgments of the child's behavior (Okagaki & Johnson Divehca, 1993; Rubin & Mills, 1992), which in turn influences the way in which the parent acts. Furthermore, children's temperaments, often-in combination with age and sex,

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influence the parental choice of discipline method (Parke & Buriel, 1998; Rubin & Mills, 1992). Parents can have different goals for their boys and girls, which means that they also have different expectations about their behavior (Okagaki & Johnson Divehca, 1993). For example, many parents become upset when their children act in contradiction of traditional gender behavior patterns (Rubin & Mills, 1992). In their every day interaction, parents differentiate between boys and girls (see Maccoby, 1988 for a review), although there is little research showing that there are any significant gender differences regarding parents' choices of discipline methods. Lytton and Romney's (1991) meta-analysis of 172 studies found few significant gender differences in parents' choice of discipline methods towards boys and girls. However, the study does reveal that physical punishment is more frequently used with boys than with girls. Russell et al. (1998), concurring with Lytton and Romney (1991) have shown that physical punishment is used more often with boys than girls, and that reasoning is used more frequently with girls than it is with boys. In a Swedish study Palmérus (1999) has shown that the redefinition of the situation is used more frequently with girls than boys. Fagot and Hagan (1991) argue that the greatest differences in parenting towards boys and girls are to be found in those ages when the child learns new ways of behaving (e.g. at the age of two and as an adolescent) and that in the first years of middle childhood there are relatively few gender differences.

Turning to child age differences in parents' choice of methods Dix, Ruble, Grusec and Nixon (1986) argue that it is most likely that parents expect children of different ages to take different levels of responsibility for their behavior, which means that they evaluate the child's behavior differently depending on the child's age. Parents modify their discipline methods to fit the child's maturity (Dunn, Plomin & Daniels, 1986; Dunn, Plomin & Nettles, 1985). It has been shown in American studies that the child's cognitive maturity and growing social competence encourages parents to make greater use of behavior modification and reasoning strategies as opposed to using physical discipline methods. Parents use fewer physical strategies and more verbal strategies with children above the age of two (see Smetana, 1997 for a review). In Sweden Palmérus (1999) has shown that physical restraint, distraction and redefining the situation were most common among parents of younger children compared to parents with older children.

In addition to the child's sex and age having an influence on the parent's choice of discipline methods, so too do the ***parents' own sex and age***. Research has shown that fathers

differentiate between boys and girls more frequently than mothers do (Gervai, Turner & Hinde, 1995; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Starrels, 1994). Furthermore, mothers are shown to be more authoritative than fathers, and that they use strategies of reasoning, engagement and democracy more frequently than fathers do (Russell et al., 1998; Smetana, 1995). These results are confirmed by the Palmérus study (1999), which revealed that Swedish mothers report a greater use of reasoning and ignoring, and a less frequent use of redefining the situation than was the case for fathers. Furthermore, younger parents use harsher discipline methods, compared to older parents. However, it is important to remember that there are a number of variables (e.g. education, SES, maturity, experiences and living standards) which differ between younger and older parents, and it could be that it is these variables which have an effect on the harsher discipline methods that younger parents tend to use (Luster & Mittelstaedt, 1993).

In recent years research has indicated that parents' and children's *cognitions and emotions* are important in determining the parent's choices of discipline methods. Goodnow and Collins (1990) have presented a number of studies which show that a complex connection exists between cognitions, emotions and parents' behavior, which, in different ways, influence and are influenced by each other. When a discrepancy exists between the parent's ideals about their own behavior and the behavior which they actually exhibit, a number of complex emotions arise. For example, a parent may have negative attitudes about the use and out-comes of physical punishment and, although occasionally it might use physical punishment, the parent's emotions and further actions will be different from those of a parent whose attitudes from the beginning were more positive. Furthermore, parents' and children's emotions are influenced by the attributes that they attach to each other's behavior. Parents' as well as children's attributions and emotions affect, in a conflict situation, how they choose, consciously or unconsciously, to act. Parents' angry emotions are linked to the assertion of power and not to reasoning or responsiveness (Dix et al., 1986). Furthermore, in those cases where the parent assumes that it is the child itself who bears the greatest responsibility for whatever event has occurred, rather than factors in the surrounding environment, the parents' reaction will be stronger (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). On the other hand, the parents' reaction may change due to the fact that they shift from one socialization goal to another. This shift can be based in parents' perceptions of what is possible in any given situation and how the child may succeed in achieving the goals that parents have set (Grusec, Goodnow & Kuczynski, 2000).

Both personal and common experiences are important for the child and the parent's interaction in the parenting situation. Experiences from earlier relations and from the parent's own upbringing influence the parent's choice of discipline method (Belsky, 1984). Research indicates that there is a positive correlation between the discipline methods adults favor and those their own parents used with them (Graziano, Lindquist, Kunce & Munjal, 1992; Kelder, McNamara, Carson & Lynn, 1991). Furthermore, Goodnow and Collins (1990) noted that several studies have shown that parents' modify their choice of discipline method according to the effects that the particular method has had in previous situations.

Parent's attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about children and child development also influence how they choose to bring up their children (see Goodnow & Collins, 1990, for a review). For example, parents with gender stereotypical attitudes choose gender-traditional discipline methods (Palacios et al., 1992; Pinkerton, 1996). Parents with traditional parental attitudes make more use of firm command and physical punishment than other parents (Palacios et al., 1992). For example, Durrant et al. (2003) have shown that mothers' positive attitudes towards the use and out-come of physical punishment are associated with their greater use of physical punishment. Finally, there is a connection between the knowledge parents have about children and parenting and those discipline methods they choose to make use of (see Goodnow for review, 1995). Parents' ideas and attitudes about parenting influence their choice of disciple methods and are, in turn, influenced by the information and knowledge they are presented with. Information and knowledge about children's rights and skills can, for instance, increase parents' use of reasoning and argumentation. On the other hand, ambiguous information and knowledge about parenting may result in ambivalent parental attitudes and actions (ibid).

The attitudes, beliefs, values, laws and thoughts that exist in any given context, influence both the type of discipline methods that parents use, and how these methods affect the child's development. Parent – child interaction is influenced both by the surrounding cultural context, and the specific situation in which it occurs (Kuczynski et al., 1997). Several studies have shown that both parent and child make a value judgment about the specific situation and that parents, using their evaluation of the situation as a platform, choose the most suitable discipline method for the situation (Grusec & Kuczynski, 1980; Palmérus & Jutengren, 2004; Smetana & Asquith, 1994). In those situations where the child has made a moral transgression, for example causing harm to themselves or to any other person, or that they have not taken sufficient consideration of other people's rights, reasoning is often used. For

conventional transgressions, for example where the child is disruptive, lies or does not adhere to social norms, methods other than reasoning or reasoning in combination with power assertion are used (Chilamkurti & Milner, 1993; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Smetana, 1994).

Parents' attitudes, beliefs, values and interpretations also vary within cultures, depending on the parent's social environment. These differences mean that even parents from the same cultural background will bring up their children differently. Parents from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds tend to use more physical discipline methods, whereas parents with a higher socioeconomic status tend to use more child-oriented, democratic and verbal discipline methods. This could be explained first by the fact that parents with different socioeconomic status have different experiences and, secondly, that they live in different circumstances (see Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995, for a review). For example, harsher discipline methods are more frequently used by parents living in deprived housing areas. Garbarino, Kostelny and Barry (1997) argue that the choice of harsher discipline methods can be grounded in parents' fears that the child could be influenced by criminality in the surrounding environment. Furthermore, parents' choices of discipline methods are influenced by their own working environment. Parents, especially fathers, transfer those behavioral patterns that they use at work to the parenting situation. This means that parents who use democratic methods in problem-solving at work, will also use democratic methods in parenting (Crouter & McHale, 1993). Belsky (1984) argues that the support that a parent is given from her/his husband/wife/partner and from other people in the wider environment, can function as a buffer against adverse social conditions and consequently influences the parent's choice of discipline method. This could be put in relation to the research showing that, after a divorce, parents will, over an extended period of time, use less positive discipline methods, than those used before the divorce. Mothers use harsher discipline methods whereas fathers more permissive methods (see Parke & Buriel, 1998, for a review).

Most parents believe that it is in the child's best interests, both during childhood and as an adult, to bring up their own children in accordance with pertaining cultural norms (Garcia Coll, Meyer & Brillon, 1995). Sweden is a cultural example of how legislation can influence parents' attitudes and their use of different methods of discipline. In 1979 Sweden passed legislation prohibiting the use of physical punishment (which is known as *aga* in Swedish) and other forms of insulting treatment towards children (Barnombudsmannen, 2005). Since 1990 this legislation has been supported be the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,

which states that the child should by protected from all forms of physical and mental violence by legislation (CRC, United Nations, Article 19, 1989). Both Palmérus (1999) and Durrant (Durrant, Rose-Krasnor & Broberg, 2003) have shown in their studies that physical punishment was the discipline method least frequently reported by Swedish parents. Compared to other Western countries, physical punishment in Sweden is used less frequently and in milder forms. Among Swedish mothers 45%, compared to 71% of Canadian mothers, reported the use of physical punishment on at least one occasion in their lifetime. Two percent of the Swedish mothers and 33 % of the Canadian mothers reported using physical punishment more than once a week (Durrant, Rose-Krasnor & Broberg, 2003). Furthermore, 40% of undergraduates in Sweden reported experience of physical punishment as children, compared with 87% of the American students. American students reported experience of occasional as well as frequent physical punishment, while the Swedish students only reported occasional experiences (Deley, 1988). There are also studies of the occurrence of physical punishment in Sweden that report both higher numbers, 57% (Palmérus, 1997) and lower numbers, 14% (Socialdepartementet, 2000), as well as numbers in-between, 35% (Fäldt, 2000).

The aims of the 1979 legislation were, first, to change attitudes regarding the use of physical force against children and to reduce the use of physical punishment towards children. Secondly, the aim was to offer parents and professionals a clear set of guidelines, and finally that a general prohibition would lead to an earlier identification of child abuse, which in turn would lead to earlier intervention (Durrant, 1999). The dominant opinion is that the 1979 legislation had been preceded by a long process of adjustment which, over time, created a negative attitude towards physical punishment in Sweden thus enabling the *"aga*-law" to be passed and implemented (Durrant, 1999; Durrant et al., 1999; Deley, 1988). At the time when the legislation was enacted, an intensive public awareness campaign was undertaken to inform both adults and children, as well as Swedish-speaking and non-Swedish speaking parents, about the aims and contents of the *"aga*-law". According to Durrant (1999) this legislation has achieved all of its original aims. The percentages of the Swedish population that believed it necessary to use physical punishment in parenting were 53% in 1965 , 35% in 1971 , and 26% in both 1979 and 1981(Ziegert, 1983). Finally, in 1996, only 11% of the population believed in milder forms of physical punishment (SCB, 1996). This is in line with the reduction of actual use of physical punishment. Almost every child born in the mid-1950s (Stattin, Janson, Klackenberg-Larsson & Magnusson, 1998) experienced physical

punishment. This number declined to 49% in 1980 (Edfeldt, 1985) and went down to around 40% in 2000 (Durrant et al., 2003; Fäldt, 2000). Those children who were subject to physical punishment, experience this kind of treatment much less often than prior to the legislation. Furthermore, compared to the situation prior to the enactment of the legislation, only a minority of children (4% of 11-13 years old) had at one or more occasions in their lives, been exposed to severe punishment, i.e. where parents used some sort of instrument (Janson, 2001). However, during the last ten years, the number of reports to the Swedish police concerning child abuse has increased. The number of reports has increased by 40% for younger children (0-6 years old) and by 80% for older children (7-14 years old). These numbers include not only parents, but also other adults, as well as older teenagers, who have abused children. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention argues that the increasing numbers of reports to the police probably is an effect of an increasing disposition among people to make official complaints (Nilsson, 2004). This concurs well with the third aim of the legislation against physical punishment and other forms of insulting treatment towards children.

CHILDREN'S REPORTS ABOUT PARENTING

Research about children's **perceptions and evaluations** of parenting show that children prefer parents who intervene when the child misbehaves, rather than parents who simply ignore the situation (Dadds, Adlington & Christensen, 1987; Paikoff, Collins & Laursen, 1988; Siegal & Barclay, 1985; Siegal & Rablin, 1982). Laissez faire methods (low levels of parents' communication and engagement in their children) are rated most negatively of all methods. Reasoning, time-out, quiet time and physical punishment are all rated more positively, and only withdrawal of love is rated on a par with laissez faire methods (Barnett et al., 1996; Dadds et al., 1987; Paikoff et al., 1988; Siegal & Barclay, 1985). Of all discipline methods, children themselves prefer reasoning but, despite this, they are also relatively positive towards physical punishment (Barnett et al., 1996; Carlson, 1986; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Nix, Harnish & Pinderhughes, 1998a; Deater-Deckard, Oyelese & Vance, 1998b; Herzberger et al., 1981; Siegal & Cowen, 1984). Harsher physical punishment is evaluated as more negative than milder forms of physical punishment (Deater-Deckard et al., 1998a; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998b; Herzberger et al., 1981). In contrast to these British, American and Australian studies, only two percent of Swedish children between 10-12 years old found it acceptable for parents to use physical punishment (Socialdepartementet, 2000). Barnett et al. (1996) have

identified the presence of a positive correlation between older children's (upper secondary school students and university undergraduates) evaluations of a particular discipline method and the extent to which the individual believes that they are going to make use of that specific method when they become parents, as well as, the extent to which their own parents have used the same method. Even younger school-aged children tend to favor the method that they report as being used by their own parents (Barnett et al., 1996).

Children's evaluations of discipline methods vary according to the ***child's age, sex, the parent's sex, and the situation***. Overall, older children at the age of 10-12 years old are more positive towards their parents' discipline methods, than is the case among younger children at the age of 5-6 years old (Deater-Deckard, Dodge & Sorbring, 2005; Eimer, 1983). Eimer (1983) explains this being due to the fact that older children are more capable of understanding their parents' intentions, whereas younger children focus on the element of unpleasantness associated with particular parenting situations. Deater-Deckard et al. (2005) and Eimer's (1983) studies suggest that older children (10-12 years old) are more positive to both physical punishment and to reasoning, than are younger children (5-6 years old). However, these results conflict in part with the results of other studies (Barnett et al., 1996; Paikoff et al., 1988; Siegel & Barclay, 1985; Siegal & Cowen, 1984) that have shown that the favorable ratings of physical punishment decline with age, when comparing children at the age of 6-7 years of age with different ages up to older teenagers.

Reports from children about gender differences in parenting vary from being non-significant in British studies (Deater-Deckard et al., 2005) to being a reflection of traditional gender beliefs concerning gender roles in parenting (Barnett et al., 1996; Crase et al., 1981; Herzberger et al., 1981; Siegal & Barclay, 1985). Reasoning is favored more by girls and is believed to be more effective with girls than with boys. Boys, however, rated physical punishment more positively than girls did. Children generally believed that physical punishment is more effective with boys, than with girls (Barnett et al., 1996; Siegal & Barclay, 1985).

Children believe that fathers use more physical punishment than mothers, and that mothers make more use of reasoning than fathers (Barnett et al., 1996; Herzberger et al., 1981). Herzberger et al. (1981) have shown that children are more acceptant of fathers using physical punishment than they are when mothers make use of this method. Both Barnett et al.

(1996) and Siegal & Barclay's (1985) studies point to a same-sex effect. Boys are more positive to their fathers' discipline methods than girls are. However, the opposite effect (girls being more positive towards their mothers discipline methods) cannot be verified. Furthermore, studies have shown that girls are more positive towards their fathers' use of reasoning than boys, and also that boys are more acceptant of their fathers' use of physical punishment than girls are (ibid).

Finally, children modify their evaluations of different discipline methods depending on the specific situation (Carlson, 1986; Dadds et al., 1987; Siegal & Cowen, 1984; Tisak, 1986; Wolfe et al., 1982). In those situations where the child believes that the parent's behavior is an appropriate response to their own behavior, the method is evaluated positively (Tisak, 1986). Children believe that in those situations where the child has been particularly disobedient, the parents' use of physical punishment is an appropriate response (Wolfe et al., 1982).

BIDIRECTIONALITY IN PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Children do not only have an opinion about their upbringing but also play an active role in the socialization process. Socialization is not something done *to* or *for* children, but together *with* children. A child's socialization is influenced not only by the methods of care used by her/his parents and other adults but also, significantly, by the characteristics of the child (Kuczynski et al., 1997). Thus there has been a shift from agent–object to agent–agent within the body of theory on the parent -child socialization process. Kuczynski et al. (1999) have presented a bilateral model of parent-child relations, including assumptions about context, causality, agency and power (see Figure 1 for an overview).

Child ↔ Parent

Assumptions:

Context:	Interaction within relationships
Model of causality:	Bidirectional
Model of agency:	Equal agency
Model of power:	Interdependent asymmetry

Figure 1:   Bilateral model of parent-child relations (Kuczynski et al.,1999)

When considering the bidirectional perspective, it is very important to clarify assumptions about context. The parent-child relationship is best seen as a series of ***interactions within a relationship.*** Instead of looking at the parent-child relationship from a macro-environment, this assumption highlights the importance of several aspects connected with bidirectionality in parent-child relationships (Kuczynski et al., 1999). Lollis and Kuczynski (1997) state that looking at the parent-child relationship (as well as causality, agency and power in that relationship) must necessarily involve the examination of parent-child interactions that are embedded in a relationship which includes a past and a future and which takes place within a multitude of different kinds of contexts. Lollis and Kuczynski (1997) base their statement on Hinde's criteria for relationships – a relationship is created by two persons interacting over time. This interaction requires contributions from both parties and is connected with both the parent's and child's expectancies based on their own experiences. More than any other relationship, this does not only have a long-term past, but also a long-term future (Hinde cited in Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997). Hastings and Grusec (1998) suggest that parents' ambitions for maintaining a positive parent-child relationship, as well as fostering autonomy and independence in their children, will make them willing to accept or change their mind about child compliance. Lollis and Kuczynski (1997) state that, in order to study bidirectionality in parent-child relationships, it is necessary to examine the processes by which parents and children construct a relationship through constant, ongoing interaction with each other. Although specific contexts need to be studied, these contexts are linked to each other by the history and future of the parent-child relationship. Thus children and parents do not only react

to stimuli in the specific situation, but also take into account other aspects of the relationship (Kuczynski & Hildebrandt, 1997). The contexts that should be studied could include everyday activities, play or, as in this thesis, transgression and conflict situations.

Traditionally, *causality* refers to a top-down influence from parent to children with the aim of shaping the child. A bidirectional perspective stresses that the values, beliefs, attitudes and motives (working models) of both parents and children are constituted in their interaction with each other (see Figure 2 for an overview). Put simply, the parent socializes the child and the child socializes the parent (Pinquart & Silbereisen, 2004; Ta, Kuczynski, Bernardini & Harach, 1999), as opposed to a traditional perspective that places a great deal of emphasis on the parental influences on the child. This interaction is a continuing process throughout the human lifespan and is constantly open to change. Both the child and the parent continuously modify their values, beliefs, attitudes and motives, both as a result of their interaction and as a result of changes in their environment and culture. The bidirectional process includes externalization and internalization of values for both the child and its parents. Externalization means that the individual evaluates and reworks her/his own working models before applying them in the parent–child interaction. Internalization represents different forms of mental activity communicated in the parent–child interaction, such as the interpretation, selection, forgetting, denial or assimilation of a particular value. Internalization as a result of upbringing, is a two-step process. (1) The child has either a correct or an incorrect perception of the parent's value. (2) The child either accepts or rejects that value (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). The latter is affected by the child's evaluation of the value, the parent–child climate and the child's feeling that the value has been self-generated. Both these processes indicate that the child influences how and what is internalized in different ways. Grolnick, Deci and Ryan (1997) argue that socialization involves an inner adaptation to social demands. An inner adaptation means that the child must experience values, attitudes and behaviors concurrent with social demands perceived as its own, rather than simply obeying them. Maccoby (1992) points to the necessity for parents to use their skills both to adapt to the situation and to the child's cognitive, social and emotional capacities. Grusec et al. (2000) stress that this may involve the parents' knowledge and understanding of the child's agency.
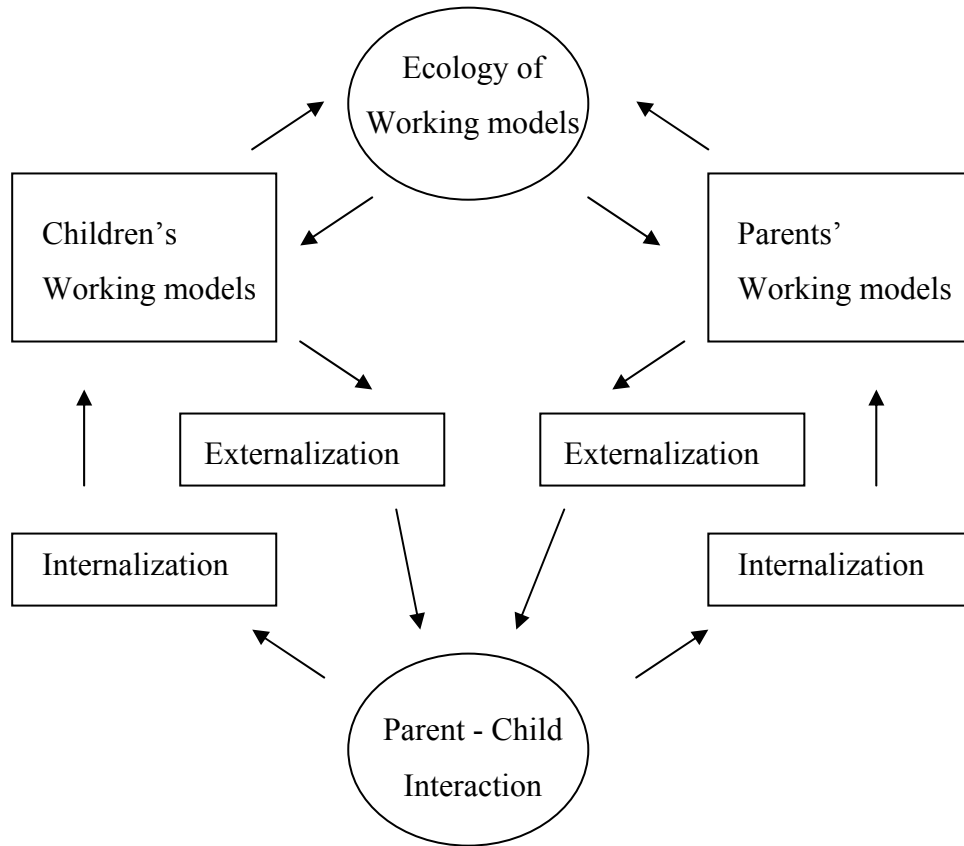
Figure 2:   Bidirectional causality (Kuczynski et al.,1997)

Agency in the parent-child interaction is dependent on both the child and the parent. Viewing the child as an active agent therefore means that the child not only influences the parent-child situation or reacts to the parent's behavior, but that they actively interact in the relationship (Knapp, 1999). Kuczynski et al. (1997) argue that the adoption of a bidirectional perspective helps us to understand the child's active internalization of values. The child as an active agent in the parent–child socialization process could be visualized by perceiving the child in three particular ways. The first of these is the child as an active creator of meaning about what is happening, through transforming, selecting and evaluating information that is transmitted. Children have certain perceptions of what is happening, ideas about how the parent will act in a specific situation and the factors that lie behind these actions and their anticipated effects (e.g. Barnett et al., 1996). The second is the child as an intentional actor in the interaction,

which involves setting a focus on children's strategies, intentions and goal-oriented behavior. The child has ideas about possible actions to get what it wants. The child influences the parent's behavior by regulating its own actions, partly due to the "pay-off" that different parental behavior is expected to give (Patterson, 1997). The third is a view of the child as having specific ideas about the efficacy of its own actions. Children's beliefs about the way their own behavior could influence the situation vary depending on the child's earlier experiences of the efficacy of its own actions in different situations. In the same way as parents, children modify their choice of discipline method depending on the efficacy of the method in previous situations. This means that, over time, bidirectional influences arise (Goodnow and Collins, 1990).

The *power relations* that exist in traditional understandings of child–parent interaction have made it difficult to accept the bidirectional perspective. Kuczynski et al. (1999) argue that, in social interaction, power is multidimensional and dynamic and that it is all too easy to say that parents have a monopoly of power. The variations in power in the parent–child relationship reflect both the parent's and the child's cognitive and physical maturity, as well as their rights. The parent and the child both act in a relationship in which they are simultaneously powerful and vulnerable in relation to each other. Earlier research has focused on the person who had the most power in this relationship, while the bidirectional perspective focuses on the types and forms of power existing both for the child and for the parent. Kuczynski et al. (1999) have identified three sources which underpin the imbalances in power between parent and child in different families. The first of these are individual factors, which can include the child's maturity in, for example, social cognitions (see the following section), as well as deliberate strategies for influencing the situation or relationship. For example, children older than five years of age have more advanced noncompliance strategies, like negotiation, than children younger than five years of age, who mainly make use of passive noncompliance (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990). Children's capacity to exert an influence on parents' values by the use of negotiation has been reported by parents to be greater among 9-14 year old children than 6-8 year old children (Ta et al. 1999). Secondly, in the parent-child relationship, both the child and the parent depend on each other to satisfy needs such as love, self-fulfillment, security and care. Finally, cultural variations allow parents to exercise different kinds of power over children, as well as giving children access to different types of rights. Carlson and Earls (2001) argue that in Sweden, for example, there is a widely-held desire to strive to achieve a more equal society with reference to children's rights. This desire

can be seen at several levels of society (e.g. in the education and legal, systems and in the family). The most recent Swedish National School Curriculum stresses the responsibility of schools not only to enhance democratic values and develop children's abilities to enunciate their opinions, but also to structure the school organization in accordance with the interests and needs of pupils (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). Furthermore, in relation to the family, the legislation that the Swedish Parliament passed in 1979 prohibiting physical chastisement ('*aga*' in Swedish) and other kinds of humiliating behavior against children, has helped to increase equality between children and adults. Swedish parents try to "negotiate" with their children instead of dominating them (Carlson & Earls, 2001). In a recent international study, Swedish parents differed from parents in other countries when it came to the ways and frequency with which they reported placing an emphasis on children's rights in the family and in family life (Harkness et al., 2001). Kristjansson (2005) argues that in Sweden (and in the other Nordic countries) parenting is child-centered and based on the desire to provide as an enjoyable childhood as possible in the pertaining circumstances.

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL COGNITIONS

Several of the child's cognitions and, in particular, its social cognitions, are active in the parent-child interaction. Social cognition includes thinking about people – trying to make sense of people's actions through the thoughts they express, their emotions, behavior, traits, and from the pertaining context, culture and so on. This is a vast area upon which there is a plethora of research and a variety of perspectives. The section below will focus on how children try to make sense of other people's actions, and will provide a presentation of certain aspects of children's argumentation skills at this age. However, beforehand, an initial attempt to generally illustrate the child in the first years of middle childhood (6-9 years old) will be made.

Children in their first years of middle childhood experience changes in their social competence and cognitive abilities. More time is spent in new social settings outside the home, away from parents and often with peers (Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 1998). Parenting takes place more at a distance; by observing, supervising and by learning about the child's activities and experiences from the child herself and via others. Children at this age are expected to handle social situations by exercising self-control and in a more mature fashion than previously. This is facilitated by the fact that, at this age, children's egocentrism declines and their awareness of other people's perspectives increases (McHale, Dariotis & Kauh, 2003). By this age children have a more realistic view of themselves, their abilities and their parents and, from time to time, they compare themselves with their peers. Comparisons with others help children to learn not just about other people, but also about themselves and the social world, although sometimes this learning process can, at times, make the child herself feel incompetent. Children perceive themselves as less competent than they thought they were when they were younger and, due to this more realistic view of themselves, they experience failure to a higher degree than in previous stages of childhood (Shaffer, 1994).

The development of moral reasoning also takes new turns. By the age of 6-7, children make clear distinctions between moral and conventional transgressions and, by the age of 9 or 10, children are able to make such distinctions even for unfamiliar events (Turiel, 1998). Children are developing from having very basic thoughts about moral domains ("you should not hurt other people" – although beyond this the focus is entirely on themselves) to thinking of fairness as strict equity (i.e. not in relation to the individual's needs and circumstances). Conventional domains are defined in accordance with empirical regularities ("you are supposed to stop at a red light because that is what everybody does"). However, with increasing age exceptions from the convention could be taken as evidence that some of these conventions are subjective and changeable ("people cross the street when there is no car around, even if the traffic light is red – thus I only have to stop at the red light when there is a car around"). This means that older children, between 8-10 years of age, believe in fairness based on equity and that rules should be followed only if they are of interest to a particular individual. They lack the knowledge that rules are to be followed in order to maintain a greater order (Nucci, 2004). Grusec and Goodnow (1994) point out that children will evaluate both their own and their parents' actions differently, in different situations, due to their moral maturity (in both moral and conventional domains).

Furthermore, in middle childhood, children are advanced in logical reasoning, problem solving, meta-cognitive skills, and are possessed of the ability to think about abstract representations and integrate many more different channels of information at the same time. They understand and can, to some degree, direct their attention towards different matters and stimuli (Flavell & Miller, 1998; Flavell, Miller & Miller, 1993). These are abilities that affect the way in which children are able to make sense of and evaluate a parent's actions, as well as their own argumentations and conflict management.

MAKING SENSE OF OTHER PEOPLE'S ACTIONS

During the past 10-15 years, research has focused heavily on children's understanding of other people's mental activities as a way of making sense of other people's actions. This area of research is called *theory of mind;* referring to the fact that, in order to make sense of other people's behavior, the child makes references to internal states such as beliefs, desires, intentions and emotions. Young schoolchildren are actually fairly good at imaging other

people's internal states, although they have not, at this age, reached the same level as adults. These cognitive skills have developed steadily during early childhood and will become considerably more sophisticated in the future. According to the theory-theory approach to theory of mind, children develop their understanding of the concepts of desire and beliefs in a way that makes them able to make sense of other people's actions by understanding their mental states (Flavell & Miller, 1998). Wellman and Woolley (1990) argue that, at 1.5–2.5 years of age, the child has developed an understanding that other people have different inner experiences of perception, feeling and desire, but not yet of belief. A year later, around the age of three, the child has come to the understanding that people also have different beliefs and that they are mental representations. However, the child continues to explain the behavior of others by reference to people's desires and feelings and not to their beliefs. A year later, however, around the age of four, the child also begins to use its ideas about other people's beliefs to explain their behaviors. At the same age, the child also begins to understand that a person's beliefs can vary according to that person's perception but, more importantly, that the person will act according to those beliefs, even when those beliefs are wrong. This kind of understanding is known as false beliefs (Wellman, Cross & Watson 2001). At this stage, the child could be said to have an understanding of the mind as a representation of the world and thinks that people will act on the basis of their mental representation of reality, rather than on reality itself (Flavell & Miller, 1998). However, the age-group who are the subject of this thesis, i.e. young school-age children, are even more sophisticated. The child's understanding that a person has a belief, as described above, can be referred to as a first-order belief. Second-order beliefs, which develop around the age of 6-7 years of age, refer to the child's understanding that a person can have a belief about another person's beliefs (Perner & Wimmer, 1985). Furthermore, children at this age recognize that there are several ways that people could interpret an event with various meanings (and sometimes in an incorrect way) due to the person's pre-existing knowledge or expectations (Carpendale & Chandler, 1996; Pillow & Henrichon, 1996).

When it comes to the child's understanding of a person's behavior, the most important thing is the understanding of emotions and their relationship to cognition and behavior. Emotions are mental states that can either cause or be the consequences of certain behaviors and cognitions. Younger school-aged children rapidly develop the capacity to understand and interpret these complex relationships. The child is now able to take account of several sources of information, and to make inferences about emotions from the information at hand about the

individual's group membership (e.g. gender) and sorting out conflicting cues (a person experiences emotion in a particular way but tries to present themselves in a different manner). These abilities are lacking in the pre-school child, but are necessary to enable the older child to interpret emotions (Flavell & Miller, 1998).

It appears that the child makes sense of a person's behavior only via an understanding of that person's mental state at that particular moment. However, over time, the child develops a social understanding based on a general knowledge of the way that familiar sequences of events unfold and of people's ways of thinking, feeling and acting. These are so-called *social schemas* and can be understood as internal correlative networks of mental associations which represent general expectations and knowledge about people, social roles and events; in other words, they are meaning-based representations of knowledge. Schemas function as guidelines for perception, evaluation, behavior, encoding and retrieving social information from memory and, moreover, they function so as to make our cognitive activity more effective (Augoustinos & Walker, 1996). The origins of schemas lie in a person's experience of the social environment and in the tendency to categorize stimuli of all kinds, such as people, events, actions and so on into different groups. Categorizing, simplifying and structuring the social world in this way thus makes it possible for us to make predictions about and create a sense of coherence in our everyday lives. The way in which people perceive and group stimuli into different categories is affected by their experience of the social environment. Experiencing different events, actions, people and so on makes it possible for the individual to acquire general expectations and knowledge about the world that, subsequently, develop into schemas of different kinds (Fiske & Dyer, 1985). Schemas relating to the sequential organization of events in everyday activities (so-called scripts) are found among children as young as 1.5 years of age. They are able to organize memories in relation to scripts and to make use of these scripts (Bauer & Shore, 1987). Scripts are used for making sense of familiar events and, in the same way as for adults, they help the child to reconstruct previously experienced events (Ceci & Bruck, 1993). Scripts develop with age and, once a pre-school child has acquired a script, it is more likely to read from scripts than to recall single episodes. Young school-age children, however, are more flexible in their use of scripts and are able to recall unique events that are not included in a script (Hudson & Nelson, 1986). Furthermore, younger children rely more on schematic knowledge than older children. In a study by Ceci, Leichtman & White (see Ceci & Bruck, 1993), it was shown that 45% of 3- and 4-year-olds, although only 11% of 5- to 6-year-olds, drew upon stereotypic schemas as opposed to recalling the real event.

Furthermore, schemas can relate either to the individual herself, to other people and their traits or to the norms and expected behaviors of specific role positions in society (for example gender, which will be discussed in a later section of the thesis). In a sustained relationship with another person, both children and adults become interested in the long-term aspects of that person's actions, thoughts and wishes. Learning about a person's traits, or dispositions, helps the individual predict and understand that person's actions. Children of around 5 years of age, but not as young as 3 years of age, make use of other people's traits in order to make correct predictions about their behavior (Yuill, 1997).

When people try to explain or to predict another person's actions, this is often done by *attributing* causes to events. With experiences as reference points, people try to decide if a person's response can be distinguished in terms of whether the type of stimuli (situation) are consistent over time and whether there is consensus between players (do other people act in the same way?). Different constellations of positions on these three dimensions lead to different attributions about the causes of events. A person who responds in the same way between situations and over time, but not in line with other people's responses, leads to the attribution that the cause is internal and has nothing to do with elements in the situation (Kelley, 1973). Children at five years of age use all of the three dimensions to predict people's actions. However, they tend to overuse the information about consistency over time and it is only older children above the age of 7-8 years that make proportional use of all the dimensions (consistency over time, distinction between situations and consensus between players) when predicting another person's actions (Ferguson, Olthof, Luiten & Rule 1984). Preschoolers make poorer predictions than elementary school-aged children if the information about the person is conflicting. However, it has been shown that older children might more frequently make false inferences about people's actions that they not have witnessed in reality, but which are part of their social schemas than is the case for younger children. Ceci and Bruck (1993) argue that compared with younger children, older children's more advanced script knowledge could contribute to this kind of false attribution when it comes to ambiguous or unwitnessed actions. For example, telling children that the person they are going to meet is a funny person, will probably result in more laughs from older children than from younger children in those cases where the person whom they eventually meet makes ambiguous comments.

It is obvious that children's perceptions and their sense-making of other people's actions is not exclusively an internal individual cognitive process. Social schemas are constructed and attributions are made in a cultural context where certain ideas, thoughts, images and knowledge exist. The ideas, thoughts, images and knowledge that are held by the members of a society, are called *social representations*, and serve as guidelines for making sense of people's actions. Social representations have much in common with social schemas. They are both internalized social knowledge and serve the function of providing guidance. However, schemas are studied at an individual level whereas social representations relate to collective process. The individual's perceptions, categorization and evaluation of social information are conducted with social representations as reference points (Moscovici, 1988). With increasing age, social communication and interaction, as well as the individual's developing cognitive ability, social representations become more consensual and shared with the other members of society. When social representations become more consensual and shared, it is more likely that individuals will select and organize information about the person, object, event or action in focus in accordance with social expectations (Augoustinos, 1991).

Summarizing the above results, it can be said that in the first years of middle childhood, the age of focus in this thesis, the child is able to explain a parent's action by thinking about what the parent might want (desires) and how the parent believes that it can fulfill those desires, as well as understanding that the parent will act in accordance with those beliefs, irrespective of whether they are correct or not. The child also understands that a parent might perceive the same event in another way than the child itself and that the parent's perception, as well as her behavior, can influence or be influenced by emotions. Furthermore, the child knows that the parent can have beliefs about its mental state, which in turn can affect the parent's actions. From research on social schemas, we can learn that young schoolchildren have developed several schemas and are able to make use of them. Due to fewer experiences, their schemas are not as numerous nor as complex as those of adults, but nevertheless they work in the same way. This means that their own behavior, perception, memory, evaluations and so on are guided by different schemas with more or less the same kind of success or failure as an adult. Children are also able to think of the parent's traits in order to make sense of her/his actions. The young schoolchild makes use of the three dimensions – consistency over time, distinction between situation and consensus between players – when predicting or making inferences about the parent's actions. The child's social schemas and attributions have their reference point in knowledge of social representations. However, with increasing age, the child's social

representations will become even more consensual and shared with other members of society. Consequently, it is thus more likely that the older child will select and organize information about the object in greater accordance with social expectations.

ARGUMENTATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

As discussed earlier in this thesis, parenting, rather than having a unidirectional causality, is bidirectional in nature. The child makes sense of the parent's actions through the cognitive processes and structures known as theory of mind, social schemas, attributions and social representations (see above) and is active in its responses to parents' actions (Kuczynski et al., 1999). When children and parents have conflicting opinions or goals, both parties try to justify their position with for examples arguments. Approximately two of every five parent-child conflicts result in a solution, implying that, most of the time, children and parents are able to leave conflicts with their positions more or less intact (Eisenberg, 1992).

Children observe and take part in family conflicts at an early age. In the context of the family, children learn to argue. It has been found that, by the age of three, children have a complex knowledge of argumentation in conflict situations which, for them, are of personal significance (Stein & Albro, 2001). With increasing age, they learn the principles and components of successful argumentation.

An argument usually contains six different components; a *claim* which is an assertion that the arguer believes to be true, *reasons* which are given to support a claim, *warrants* which are beliefs and assumptions that guide a party's choice of the kind of evidence that must be offered in support of her or his claim, *backing* which provides additional data about the validity of the warrant, a *qualifier* which is a piece of information that limits the conditions under which a claim is valid and, finally, *counterarguments* which provide evidence that challenges the validity of the claim. Some researchers have found that young pre-schoolers use these components in arguing for their opinions, whilst other researchers believe that, for children to use these components, they have to be old enough to recognize that conflicts are about two parties with different goals and that both of their goals cannot be attained at the same time (see Stein & Albro, 2001). Case (1996) suggests that the ability of 6-year-old children to understand both belief status as causal (theory of mind) and events as sequences of

actions (scripts) makes them competent to analyze sequences of behavior in terms of the mental state of the other person. It has been shown that, at about the age of seven, children are able to analyze conflicts in terms of the antagonist's mental state, understanding that a two-person conflict is about the divergence of goals and that a resolution involves a change of mind for at least one of the persons (Jenkins & Buccioni, 2000).

The skills children develop for argumentation include giving more reasons in support of their own position, as well as finding weaknesses with the other person's positions, although their ability to find compromise solutions and adaptive or constructive social relationships is less well advanced. School-age children are more eager to win the argument than their pre-school counterparts (Stein & Albro, 2001). School-age children also use more negotiation and disengagement than pre-school children, who are found to use coercion to a greater degree. School-age children become better at motivating others, acting as advocates for proposals and achieving a consensus to solve problems. This is probably due to their expanding skills to construct situation-specific arguments, adapt their own positions more to the views of others and to utilize politeness strategies (for an overview, see Stafford, 2004). Between the age of 4 and 8, children's language development is very much a question of language socialization, learning, that is, how to use language accurately in different contexts and in relation to their social or cultural group. Examples of such culturally-conditioned socialization include when and how to be polite, the best method of getting one's own way and how to express oneself in different ways and in different contexts (Hoff, 2003).

Gender

Discussions about gender often involve the separation and definition of the related concepts of *sex and gender.* In the following discussion, *sex* will be used when describing the comparisons between the two sexes, as well as the demographic divisions between women and men. Gender will be used in the discussion of the nature and characteristics of what is male and what is female, and in relation to issues such as gender schemas, gender stereotypes, gender roles, etc. (Deaux, 1993). Gender is a variable in the process of social categorization, which is grounded in sex and which permeates and characterizes all of society. As opposed to sex, gender is not only an individual characteristic, but also finds expression in all of the various levels of the social hierarchy (Gothlin, 1999).

In summary, it could be stated that an essential aspect of the individual's socialization is gender socialization. This involves an adaptation to society's demands for ascribed gender roles, but is also necessary for the creation of the individual's identity (Bjerrum Nielsen & Rudberg, 1991). Gender socialization can be seen as a product both of the dominant gender norms within society and of cognitive information processes (Bem, 1983).

Gender socialization

Categorizing by using sex is one way for the individual to create a sense of order in an otherwise complex world. For example, by categorizing objects, attributes, behavior, activities and people as either male or female, the world becomes easier for the individual to understand (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Sex is thus an important variable in the categorization process as a result of the great importance which society attaches to gender (Bem, 1983). When a specific category becomes an important dividing variable it becomes the basis for the formulation of an individual's cognitive schema (Bem, 1983). As discussed

above, every individual has a number of schemas, of which one of the most dominant is the *gender schema*. As with all other schemas, the gender schema functions as a guiding principle for the information process, by structuring experiences, regulating behavior and providing the basis for interpretation and deduction (Martin & Halverson, 1981). The individual's gender schema influences her self-perception, perception, memory, judgment-formation and behavior (Martin & Halverson, 1981; 1983). There are two different types of gender schema: 1) an overall knowledge about how different objects should be classified according to the masculine/feminine dichotomy and 2) a concrete knowledge about how the individual him/herself should behave in a manner that is gender appropriate (Martin & Halverson, 1981).

An extreme form of the gender schema is gender stereotyping (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Gender stereotypes influence the individual in the same way as the gender schema, but are markedly more rigid. Gender stereotypes could be described as a constellation of personality attributes, occupations and activities which, to a very great degree, are associated with either women or men. Stereotypes about personal attributes develop later than stereotypes about occupations and activities (Martin & Halverson, 1981). By the age of three, children are already aware of gender stereotypes and their behavior, for example choice of clothes, is visibly affected by such stereotypes (Huston, 1983). By the age of six an individual's stereotypes are at their most rigid point. They have little understanding for other people's actions or behavior that does not follow gender-typical norms. Thereafter, flexibility increases, despite the fact that thinking in terms of stereotypes increasingly permeates greater numbers of the domains in the individual's mental world (Martin, 1989; Taylor, 1996).

Both gender schemas and gender stereotypes develop, in part, as a result of the child being subject to *influences from its surroundings*, and in part from the child itself, as he/she is selective in her/his perception. It is the individual's propensity to categorize information, together with the importance of gender in society, which forms the basis for gender schemas and gender stereotypes (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Children often use sex as a social category (Maccoby, 1988). Initially the child learns its culture's definition of masculine and feminine, together with their gender-related associations, in order to be able to evaluate and assimilate new information. Thereafter, the child learns to codify and categorize information with reference to masculine and feminine. This means that the child's perception is controlled by both incoming information and the child's pre-existing schema (Bem, 1983).

By observing adults and their peers in their surroundings, children learn what is appropriate for their own gender role and what is not (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Gender appropriate behavior tends to be reinforced within the individual. Behavior which is ignored, however, disappears over time (Mischel, 1996). Parents encourage gender typical behavior more in boys than they do in girls (Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby, 1980). Family patterns, as well as parents' attitudes and family activities within the home, influence the strength and rigidity of the gender schema and of gendered stereotypes (see Ruble & Martin, 1998, for a review). The media, the advertising industry and the manufacturers of products marketed for children, all make use of traditional gender stereotypes in their quest to make their products/messages attractive to girls and boys. In this way the media advertising of child-oriented products works as a model for gender-appropriate behavior, encouraging the formation and reinforcement of gender-stereotypes. In Sweden it is common that the media appeals to girls by using words such as 'magical', 'wonderful', 'soft', 'relationship' and 'caring'. For boys, words such as 'cool', 'fast', 'exciting' and 'independent' are used to a greater degree (Konsumentverket, 1998).

CHILDREN'S THOUGHTS ON GENDER

Gender schemas and gender stereotypes have also been found to exert an influence on both the ***coding and production of memory.*** Children are better able to remember incidents that are related to their own sex and which conform to gender stereotypes. This is particularly the case for boys (Martin & Halverson, 1983). When information is missing, it appears likely that the child fills it in from behavioral patterns that are gender-stereotyped. Research has shown that children have a tendency to modify real situations in accordance with the guiding stereotypes. This is particularly marked between the ages of 5 and 6 (Martin & Halverson, 1981). For children, sex is often an important piece of information that is needed to evaluate other people's personalities and their likely future behavior. The same behavior can be experienced differently depending upon whether the person acting is a man or a woman (Martin & Halverson, 1981). The child will, in part, disregard other information about the person, which means that the judgment that they make, based on gender stereotypes, will very often contain a degree of bias. When children become older they change their ways of thinking. If a child is provided with additional information about a person (other than their sex), children older than the age of six will utilize that information, whereas younger children will rely almost

exclusively on the sex of the person in question. For example, if a child is asked to judge another child's interest in a toy, children younger than the age of six will make the prediction relying on the other child's sex, whereas children older than the age of six will also use their knowledge about the other child's interests when making the prediction (Martin, 1989). This developmental change can, according to Martin (ibid) depend upon the fact that older children are capable of integrating many more different channels of information at the same time and that the nature of the stereotypes has changed over time.

Gender specific behavior differs in its frequency according to sex, and has different values for each gender. The consequences of this behavior differ depending on the sex of the person. For example, girls who fall down and hurt themselves are, to a much greater degree, comforted by their parents than is the case for boys who are encouraged not to make a fuss. Gender differences in social behavior are in reality very few, the greatest variances being found within same-sex groups. It is often the treatment of the other sex, rather than an individual child's actual behavior, where gender differences can be best observed (Lott & Maluso, 1993). Children ascribe to themselves and their personalities the correct, gender-appropriate, behavior which has been learned and schematized. In other words, from a whole variety of different potential attributes, the child will only select from one sub category – namely only from amongst those attributes that pertain to their own gender. Children evaluate their own behavior according to their gender schema. The gender schema is an important guiding determiner which dictates how children should behave. Cultural representations about gender appropriate behavior become the final destination of this self-fulfilling prophecy (Bem, 1983). Children at the age of seven, cite biological factors as being the cause of gender difference, whereas older children, above the age of ten, are aware that society contributes to gender differences between the sexes. Children younger than nine years of age believe that people of the same gender develop similarly, irrespective of the social environment in which they grow up in. At an early age, girls, more so than boys, believe that personality and different preferences are a cause of gender differences (Smith & Russell, 1984; Taylor, 1996).

Children have a much greater ***preference*** for their own gender and for gender typical behavior. Serbin, Powlishta & Gulko (1993) demonstrated that girls held positive attitudes towards other girls and negative attitudes towards boys, whereas boys had positive attitudes to both other boys and other girls. An overall finding was that boys were perceived to be more unruly than girls, who in turn were perceived as being more kind. Already by the age of 2 – 3 the

child prefers its own sex over the other, which is viewed as being less positive. This form of favoring continues up until the teenage years (Martin & Halverson, 1981; Serbin et al., 1993). The strongest motivation for gender preferences is the child's discovery that he/she belongs to a group. The tendency of children to discriminate according to gender means that, more often than not, they experience behavior that is typical of their own sex. This in turn means that their own gender-appropriate behavior is further reinforced (Martin & Little, 1990).

TOWARDS GENDER-EQUALITY IN SWEDEN

In all societies, children, in different ways, create an understanding about the nature of the masculine and feminine genders, as well as the different opportunities and limitations that are ascribed to each sex. Although gender stereotypes vary between different cultures, they are often connected to different social roles (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Today, the Scandinavian countries are working towards creating a more equal society (Orloff, 1996) in which traditional gender stereotypes do not dictate the individual's choice of occupation or opportunities for development. The aim is to create a society where men and women should have the same rights, obligations and opportunities. Haas (1996) believes that Swedish fathers are those who, in the whole of Western society, are best equipped to be able to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles. Both ***mothers and fathers*** are provided with instruction about child development and how, as parents, they can promote their child's development (Durrant & Olsen, 1997). Furthermore, there is legislation designed to encourage men and women to take an equal share of domestic responsibilities and to take equal responsibility for the family budget (Haas, 1996). Fathers, as well as mothers, have the right to stay at home with the child for 240 days with generous financial reimbursement. However, if both parents agree, one of them can stay home for a maximum of 480 days and the other parent for a minimum of 60 days. Immediately before and after childbirth, the mother and the father have the right to stay home together for 10 days, with generous statutory parental benefits (Försäkringskassan 2005:a). About 75% of Swedish fathers use their right to stay home with their child. When the child is two-years old, 33% of the fathers have taken more than two months parental leave, although only 10% of the fathers take more than five months parental leave. Due to the fact that fathers only use 18.7% of the 480 days, the government has charged the Swedish social insurance administration with the responsibility of ensuring that a more equal amount of parental leave is shared between parents (Försäkringskassan, 2005:a; RFV, 2004).

One of the most important aspects of ***Swedish employment law*** aims to create a gender-equal environment and promotes parental leave to be taken by both mothers and fathers. All companies in Sweden who employ more than ten people are obliged by law to produce an annual gender equality policy statement. This policy should aim at creating a workplace in which women and men receive equal pay for equal work, where sexual harassment does not occur, where the skills and abilities of every employee are fully taken into account, where recruitment is not constricted by traditional assumptions about gender and where employment and responsibility for children and the home can be combined effectively. By law, the employer is obliged to pursue a goal-orientated policy to actively promote gender equality in working life (von Melen, 1998; JämO, 2005:a; Åhnberg, 1999). Every year Swedish employment tribunals handle a multitude of cases concerning gender discrimination, such as not having a goal-orientated policy to actively promote gender equality in the workplace, unequal pay, sexual harassment, biases in recruitment and employment, parental leave, etc (JämO, 2005:b). There is an Equal Opportunities Ombudsman who is responsible for information and education about Swedish employment law and for ensuring that the law is complied with, both in the private and public sectors. A proposal currently under discussion is that the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman also ought to be responsible for pupils in schools (JämO, 2005:c).

The ambition to achieve gender equality is ventilated and discussed at an early stage in ***Swedish schools***. Work is actively undertaken to ensure that, as individuals, boys and girls are provided with equal conditions and opportunities to be able to discover and develop themselves. The ways in which schools have to work towards the aim of attaining an equality of opportunity are stipulated in all of the legislative instruments dealing with school education; the Schools Act, the National Curriculum and all of the various course syllabi. In the National Curriculum (Department of Education, 1998a) – Lpo 94 – it is stated that *"Schools shall actively and consciously promote equal rights and opportunities for women and men. The way in which girls and boys are treated and examined in school and the demands and expectations that are placed upon them contribute to their understanding of what is male and what is female. Schools have a responsibility to work to counter traditional gender patterns. Schools should provide pupils with the opportunity to experiment and develop their capacities and interests irrespective of their gender."* (s6) … *"teachers should work to ensure girls and boys are given an equal opportunity to influence their education and are given equal space and attention."* (s15). In the National Curriculum for pre-schools

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(Department of Education, 1998b) – Lpfö 98 – there is a similar statement of policy; *"Pre-schools should work to challenge traditional gender patterns and gender roles. In pre-schools, girls and boys should be given the same opportunities to test and develop their interests and capacities without any hindrance from stereotypical gender roles."* (s.8)… *" Teaching teams should aim to ensure that girls and boys are provided with an equal opportunity to gain attention and exert influence within the class".* (s15). It is apparent from such formulations of policy that there is a desire for both girls and boys to be afforded the opportunity to "experiment" with those activities that have traditionally been seen to be gender-specific and have thus not been done by both boys and girls. When the barriers between these traditional categories have been erased, hope emerges that what has previously been seen to be exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine might be re-evaluated from a more equal perspective (Öhman, 1999). Recent studies have shown that gender-related boundaries still exist in the early-school years. Teachers were observed either to ignore the need for erasing boundaries (Karlson, 2003) or indeed to encourage gender appropriate behaviors and correct non-appropriate behaviors (Forsberg, 2002). Individuals among those children who tried to cross gender-related boundaries were described by the teachers as being 'a little bit different' or 'having problems with same-sex children' (Karlson, 2003). Children in the early years of schooling report that teachers pay equal attention to girls and boys in the classroom, and that both sexes are able to answer an equal amount of the teacher's questions and to gain an equal amount of help from the teacher. However, girls as well as boys report that teachers give more praise and are nicer to girls than boys. Teachers are also reported to be generally more angry with boys than they are with girls (Barnombudsmannen, 2001).

AIMS AND METHODS

This section is a limited summary of the methods used in each separate study. For a more complete description, please see the articles in the Appendices. Specific aims are set out in the beginning of the summary section for each of the four empirical studies. A method section including sample, procedure, measurements and analyses is then presented. **Studies I and II** are presented together, since they are based on essentially the same sample, whereas **Study III** and **Study IV** are presented separately (see Table 1 for an overvyew, pp. 48-49).

STUDIES I AND II

The aim of **Study I** was to examine children's perceptions of their own parents' discipline methods, as well as their perceptions of how the child's gender may influence the parents' choices of discipline methods. Furthermore, the study assesses the possible role that the presence of a sibling may have on the latter. The following questions were addressed:

1. How do children's perceptions of their parent's choice of discipline methods vary according to the sex of the child and the sex of the parent?

2. How do children's perceptions of gender differences in their parent's choice of discipline method vary according to the sex of the child and the sex of the parent?

3. How do the shifts in children's perceptions between the way that they perceive they are treated by the parent and the way in which the other sex is treated appear? Further, how do these differences vary according to the sex of the child and the sex of the parent?

4. What influences do siblings have on children's perceptions of child gender differences in transgression situations?

In **Study II,** the relationship between discipline methods and the child's conception of the importance of gender in transgression situations was considered. The following hypotheses were tested:

1   Harsher discipline methods will relate to beliefs about gender having a role in transgression situations.

2   The sex of the child, the socioeconomic status of its family, the sex and number of siblings, parental values and degree of shared parental responsibility will all have an impact on the child's beliefs about the role of gender in transgression situations.

Participants and procedure

A sample of 205 eight-year-old children (95 boys, 110 girls) and their parents was randomly drawn from a list of all the children who were about to enter their second year of primary school in three medium-sized towns. Sixty-five percent (*n = 205*) of the families agreed to participate in the study. Among those who refused to participate, no selection effects were found for the child's sex, parents' occupation or whether or not either of the parents was unemployed. In comparison with the Swedish population as a whole, upper-SES families were over-represented and middle-SES families were under-represented in the sample (Hollingshead Four-factor Index: Broberg, 1992). Furthermore, in the sample, 83% of the children lived in two-parent families and more than 97% of the children had siblings living at home. In **Study I,** the sample only consisted of children from two-parent families (78 boys, 92 girls), while, in **Study II,** all families were included.

An interview about parental discipline methods was conducted with each child on its own. The interview took between 15 and 25 minutes and was conducted either in the child's home or at school. The interviewer was the same for all the children and in most cases the interviewer was alone with the child. The child was told that no answer was wrong and that anything that emerged during the interview would be treated as confidential information. Each parent separately filled in a questionnaire regarding background data, childrearing-attitudes and domestic duties. This was done separately from the child interview.

Measurements and analyses

In order to measure the child's perceptions of parental discipline and child gender differences in transgression situations, an interview was conducted with each child. The interview was a modified version of the Parental Discipline Interview (PDI: Pinkerton et al., 1991). In the original instrument, Swedish parents report how they would discipline their children in different situations (Palmérus, 1999; Durrant et al., 1999). Their responses are then categorized into six parental strategies. The same categories were used in this study. In this modified version, the child had the opportunity to answer the question both in words and with the help of pictures (see Figure 3). The child was presented with six pictures illustrating the following categories of discipline method in the following order: (1) *Physical Restraint*– the parent uses physical action to keep the child from committing an act, (2) *Low Use of Authority* – the parent changes the circumstances to suit the child or uses mild requests in order to achieve cooperation, (3) *Coercive Verbal Control* – the parent uses forms of firm verbal discipline to control their child's behavior, (4) *Reasoning/Explanations* – the parent gives an explanation as to why the particular behavior is inappropriate, undesirable or dangerous, (5) *Behavior Modification* includes techniques such as isolation and withdrawal of privileges while in the case of (6) *Physical Punishment* the parent deliberately inflicts physical pain on her/his child.

In the first step of the current study, the children were given general instructions, including descriptions of each picture and information about the procedure. Verbal descriptions of five vignettes were then presented in the following order; *Situation 1* – Imagine that you and your sibling are watching TV and that the two of you are arguing about which program you are going to watch, so you hit your sibling, *Situation 2* – Imagine that your parents have told you not to use the stove, but one day you use it anyway and you forget to turn it off, *Situation 3* – Imagine that one morning you do not want to go to school, so you run into your room, *Situation 4* – Imagine that you do not want to eat dinner, so you tell your parents that you do not like the food, *Situation 5* – Imagine that it is late in the evening and that you should have been in bed a long time ago, but you want something to eat. For each situation, the child was asked to point at one of the pictures and give verbal descriptions of what they thought their mother would do, their father would do, their mother would do if the child was a boy/girl (as appropriate) and their father would do if the child was a boy/girl (as appropriate). At the end

of the interview, the children were asked the following direct open-ended question: "Do you think parents treat boys and girls in the same way or differently?".
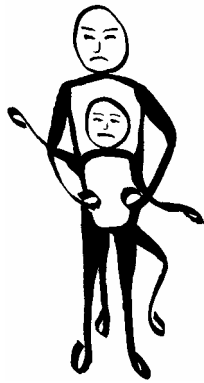
1. Physical Restraint
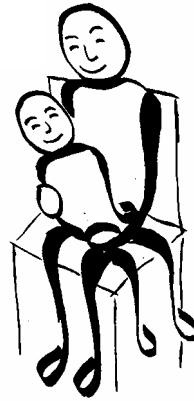
2. Low Use of Authority
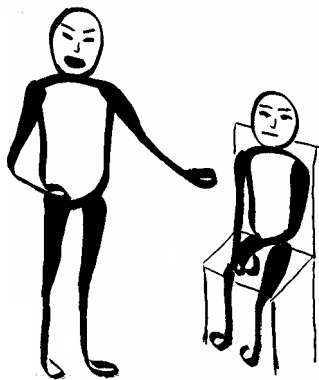
3. Coercive Verbal Control
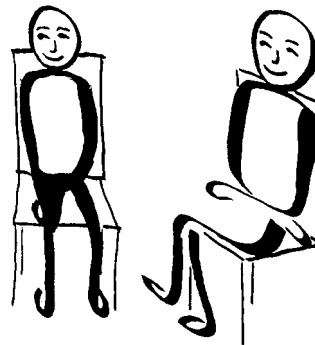
4. Reasoning/Explanations
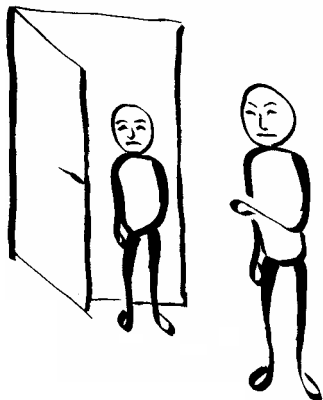
5. Behavior Modification
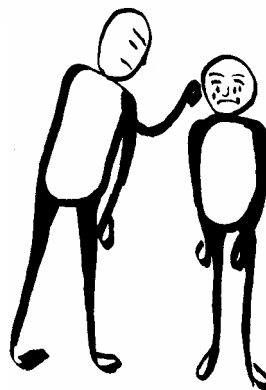
6. Physical Punishment

Figure 3:   Options presented to children when asked what their parents would do in five hypothetical situations involving transgression. Used in **Studies I, II** and **IV.**

In **Study II,** parental values were measured, using the Parental Modernity Scale (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985), completed by each parent. On a 5-point Likert scale, using 29 items, progressive and traditional childrearing-attitudes are measured. Due to low alpha levels on the progressive scale, only the traditional sub-scale (α for mothers = 0.82, α for fathers = 0.85), including 15 items, was used. Shared responsibility was measured with seventeen questions about domestic duties and child care (Cowan & Cowan, 1987). For each question, the parent indicates which member of the household takes primary responsibility for a variety of domestic and childrearing tasks.

In **Study I,** non-parametric statistics were used (see Siegel & Castellan, 1988). Wilcoxon's test for comparing two related samples and the Mann-Whitney U-test for two independent samples were used. Chi-square tests were used to analyze observed and expected frequency data. An alpha level of 0.05 (two-tailed) was accepted as significant for all the statistical tests.

In **Study II,** stepwise logistic regressions were used to analyze group membership (dichotomous variable) from a set of variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). The dichotomous variable which was analyzed was "children reporting differential parental treatment of boys and girls in transgression situations" as opposed to "children not reporting differential parental treatment of boys and girls in transgression situations". A three-stage model-building strategy was adopted. The first model controlled for demographic variables such as the socio-economic status of the family, the sex of the child and the type of siblings (the child has; 1-both brothers and sisters, 2-only siblings of the same sex as herself/himself, 3- only siblings of the other sex compared with herself/himself, or 4-no siblings). In the second model, parental values and shared responsibility were added. In the final model, children's reports of parents' choice of discipline methods were included. Each of the three models was tested in separate estimations. Due to related data, mothers and fathers were tested in separate models.

STUDY III

Study III aimed to explore children's perceptions and evaluations of mothers' intentions in using physical punishment or reasoning. Four hypotheses were addressed:

1   The child's perception and evaluation of mothers' intentions in using reasoning or physical punishment will vary across vignettes (child aggression and child noncompliance).

2   Children will be more positive in their perceptions and evaluation of mothers' intentions in using reasoning than using physical punishment.

3   Older children as well as girls will be more positive in their perception and evaluation of mothers' intentions in using reasoning than using physical punishment, compared to younger children as well as boys.

4   Children to mothers with more traditional childrearing-attitudes will be more positive in their perception and evaluation of mothers' intentions in using physical punishment and less positive towards mothers' intentions in using reasoning.

Participants and procedure

The sample consisted of 114 children and their mothers (59 boys, 55 girls). The children ranged in age from 6 to 9 years. Eighty-seven percent of 209 families gave their consent for their children to participate in the study. Sixty-eight mothers did not complete their measurements, leading to a total of 114 child-mother dyads in the study. Among these children, there were no selection effects for child age or sex. The selection effects regarding the mother's demographic data were not available. The sample was representative in terms of level of parental educational attainment, but less representative when it came to occupational status; lower occupational status parents were over-represented whilst intermediate occupational status was under-represented in this sample (SCB, 2003; 2004). In common with the Swedish population as a whole (SCB, 2002), 26% of the children were first- or second-generation immigrants and, in terms of family structure, 76% of the children lived in two-parent families.

The children were recruited from one single school. Parents received information about the study, along with a brief questionnaire concerning family background information to complete and return. An interview was conducted separately with each child at the school. Prior to the start of the interviews, the trained interviewers presented themselves to the class and the interview was explained. The children were told that no answer was wrong and that anything that transpired during the interview would be treated as confidential information.

Each interview took between 20 to 25 minutes. To add information from the mothers, the childrearing-attitudes measurement was completed by mothers during a parents meeting at the school.

Measurements and analyses

Perception and evaluation of mothers' intentions. The children completed a modified version of the Discipline Interview (see Figure 4 for an overview), including a series of hypothetical vignettes (six in all) in which a child misbehaves and the child's mother intervenes. In one of the vignettes, the child hits a peer (child aggression), while in the other the child misbehaves in class and does not obey the teacher (child noncompliance). Both the vignettes continue with the mother's choice of discipline method; use of reasoning and explanation, mild physical punishment (swatting or slapping the child on the arm or the cheek) or harsher physical punishment (spanking the child on the bottom). To control for order effects, the sequence of the vignettes was randomized across interviews. For each vignette the child was then asked three questions about the mother's intention, and had to provide a dichotomous response: (1) "was she trying to help the child versus not helping the child", (2) "was she showing her love versus not showing her love for the child" and (3) "was she trying to prevent the child from misbehaving in the future versus not doing so". The child was asked a fourth question, "was the mother a good parent versus not a good parent" in order to examine the child's evaluation of the mother. After generating these dichotomous responses, the strength of the child's belief was assessed by asking the child whether this was true "a lot", "some", or "just a little". Children's responses were subsequently coded using a 6-point Likert scale. Due to high correlations, an average composite of the mild and harsher physical punishment items was computed to produce a physical punishment score.

Mother's childrearing-attitudes. The mothers completed the Parental Modernity Scale (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). The measurement is the same as that presented in Study II.

Order of stages in the interview

1. To the child: *"I am going to tell you some little stories and then I want you to answer some questions so that I will know what you think about them."*
2. One vignette at a time is read for the child. The order of the vignettes was randomized across interviews. After each vignette the child is asked to tell the interviewer what the story was about: *"Can you tell me what the story was about?"*
3. For each vignette four follow-up questions are taken in turn and the child is asked what he/she thinks.
4. For each follow-up question the child is also asked to rate the extent of her/his answer- a little, a lot or in-between.

Vignettes (boy or girl name is chosen depending on the sex of the child in the interview).

Aggression vignettes:

1. Imagine that a boy/girl called Eric/Erica hits another child. Eric's/Erica's mother sees this and talks to Eric/Erica about it so that he/she understands why it is wrong to hit someone.
2. Imagine that a boy/girl called Eric/Erica hits another child. Eric's/Erica's mother sees this and slaps him/her on the arm or the cheek.
3. Imagine that a boy/girl called Eric/Erica hits another child. Eric's/Erica's mother sees this and spanks him/her on the bottom.

Noncompliance vignettes:

4. Imagine that a boy/girl called Stephen/Sarah is misbehaving in class and doesn't obey the teacher. Stephen's/Sarah's mother sees this and talks to Stephen/Sarah about it so that he/she understands why it is wrong to be disobedient.
5. Imagine that a boy/girl called Stephen/Sarah is misbehaving in class and doesn't obey the teacher. Stephen's/Sarah's mother sees this and slaps him/her on the arm or the cheek.
6. Imagine that a boy/girl called Stephen/Sarah is misbehaving in class and doesn't obey the teacher. Stephen's/Sarah's mother sees this and spanks him/her on the bottom.

Follow-up questions for each vignette

i. Does the mother in the story want to help or harm Eric/Erica/Stephen/Sarah?
   - Does she want to hurt/help the child a little bit, a lot or in-between?
ii. Does the mother in the story want to show her love or not towards Eric/Erica/Stephen/Sarah?
   - Does she want to show her love/not show her love a little bit, a lot or in-between?
iii. Does the mother in the story want to prevent future misbehavior or does she not want to prevent future misbehavior?
   - Does she want to prevent future misbehavior/ does she not want to prevent future misbehavior a little bit, a lot or in-between?
iv. Is the mother in the story a good or a bad parent?
   - Is she a good/bad parent just a little bit, a lot or in-between?

Figure 4:   Interview procedure, vignettes and follow-up questions in the Discipline Interview (adapted from Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1996). Used in **Study III.**

Non-parametric tests have been used in all estimations. Wilcoxon's test was used to compare two related samples. To compare two independent samples, the Mann-Whitney U-test was used. Data from several independent groups were compared with the Kruskal-Wallis test. Significant Kruskal-Wallis tests were further analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U-test. Spearman's rho was used to estimate correlations. An alpha level of 0.05 (two-tailed) was accepted as significant for all the statistical tests.

Study IV

The aim of **Study IV** was to examine the child's active role in conflict situations. The three criteria for the child as an active agent proposed by Kuczynski et al. (1999) underpin the following three objectives:

1. How does the child actively create meaning about what is happening?
2. How does the child participate actively in the situation?
3. Which ideas does the child have about the efficacy of its actions?

Furthermore, the role of gender in the above processes is of specific interest in all three objectives.

McCracken's (1988) four-step method was used as a model for conducting the study and analyzing the data. The four steps, based on analytic and cultural data, as well as processes of reviewing and discovery, are as follows. (1) Review of analytic categories and interview design. (2) Review of cultural categories and interview design. (3) The third step involved the interview procedure and identification of cultural categories. (4) The final step involved the analysis of interview data and the identification of analytic categories.

Participants and procedure

Fourteen eight-year-old children (6 girls, 8 boys) recruited from a youth recreation center participated in the study. Most of the children (8) were from middle socioeconomic background families (SES), while two were higher SES and four were lower SES. All the children lived in two-parent families and they all had siblings. All the children who were approached agreed to participate in the study.

The children were interviewed once their parents' consent had been obtained. During the five weeks the researcher spent at the youth recreation center, each child was interviewed on three occasions. The children had the opportunity to be interviewed either alone or together with a friend. The majority of the children chose to be interviewed together with another child, although there were some who preferred to be interviewed alone, or together with two friends. Each interview lasted for about 15-35 minutes and was tape-recorded.

Measurements and analyses

The three interviews were based on relevant literature and pilot interviews with children of the same age as the participants. An open-ended interview formula was constructed, including themes containing a number of relevant questions that could be used. The child's individual approach had a significant effect on the outcome of each interview. The three interviews focused on special areas in the following sequence: 1) children's and parents' feelings, cognitions and behavior in and around the conflict situation, as well as, negotiation, power and legitimacy, 2) gender differences and 3) the use and evaluation of different discipline methods. In the third interview, the PDI illustrations (Figure 3) were used as a basis for discussion. Three separate interviews were chosen to give the children a chance to reflect on the subject and to avoid tiring them. Furthermore, by introducing different areas in different interviews, the purpose was to prevent the children's answers possibly being affected or influenced by the questions that had been posed immediately before (e.g. gender was not introduced before the second interview). All the interviews dealt with upbringing from a general perspective and not the children's own experiences in their own families. However, several of the children (indeed possibly all) referred by means of example to their own experiences and families in their responses.

The analysis of the interview material was divided into three phases. The first phase was an overview of the material that provided an initial orientation for the researcher. The second phase included working with each interview separately. The third and final phase involved combining all the interviews and conducting an in-depth analysis. Both the study as a whole and the analysis of the interview data have been influenced by McCracken's (1988) analytical model. The division of the process into separate stages was different, but the content of the process was generally the same.

Table 1: Overview of aims and methods in **Studies I, II, III and IV.**

	Aim	Research questions (short version)	Sample specifics	Measurements
Study I	Examines children's perceptions of their own parents' discipline methods, as well as their perceptions of child gender differences in parents' choices of discipline methods. Furthermore, the study assesses the influence of the presence of a sibling on the latter.	1. Children's perception of parents' choice of discipline method (with regard to the sex of the child and the parent). 2. Children's perception of gender differences in parents' choice of discipline method (with regard to the sex of the child and the parent). 3. Shifts in perception between self and other sex (with regard to the sex of the child and the parent). 4. Siblings' influence on children's perceptions of child gender differences in transgression situations.	• n = 170 children (78 boys, 92 girls) • 8-year-old children • All two-parent families • 97% with siblings • SES: L 31%, M 38%, U 31%	• Modified version of the Parental Discipline Interview
Study II	Examines the relationship between discipline methods and the child's conception of the importance of gender in transgression situations.	1. Harsher discipline methods relate to stronger beliefs about the importance of gender in transgression situations. 2. Variables like the sex of the child, socio-economic status, type of siblings, traditional parental values and shared responsibility will have an impact on the child's beliefs about the importance of gender in transgression situations.	• n = 205 families (95 boys, 110 girls) • 8-year-old children • 83% two-parent families • 97% with siblings • SES: L 34%, M 37%, U 29%	• Modified version of the Parental Discipline Interview • Parental Modernity Scale • Domestic duties and child care • Hollingshead Four-factor Index

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Table 1: Continued from previous page

Study III	Explores Swedish children's perception and evaluation of mothers' intentions in using physical punishment or reasoning.	Child's perception and evaluation of mothers' intentions in using reasoning or physical punishment 1. Variation due to vignettes (child aggression and child noncompliance) 2. Variation due to type of discipline 3. Variation due to the child's sex and age 4. Variation due to the child's own mother's childrearing-attitudes (e.g. traditionalism).	• n = 114 children (59 boys, 55 girls) • 6-9 years old • 76% two-parent families • 26% 1st or 2nd generation immigrants • Education: L 56%, M 30%, H 14% • Occupation: L 53%, M 37%, H 10%	• Modified version of the Discipline Interview • Parental Modernity Scale
Study IV	Examines children's active role in conflict situations.	1. Child actively creates meaning about what is happening 2. Child's active participation in the situation. 3. Child's ideas about the efficacy of its actions. Further, the role of gender in the above processes is of specific interest in all three objectives.	• n = 14 children (8 boys, 6 girls) • 8-year-old children • All two-parent families • All with siblings • SES: L 4, M 8, U 2	• Three qualitative interviews with each child, focusing on different aspects in and around the conflict situation.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conducting research includes making a number of choices regarding methodological issues, such as sample, procedure, measurements, analysis, interpretation of the data and so on. These choices, and the relative advantages and disadvantages attached to each, will be discussed below.

One of the first choices that needs to be made in order to proceed with a research project is the approach of the study. Based on the research questions and knowledge of the area, the studies in this thesis are of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, both with regard to the individual studies and the constituent parts of each study (Allwood, 1997; Kuczynski, 1998). In the three first studies, the data production is more of a qualitative-quantitative nature (interviewing children, but using structured techniques), while the analysis is of a quantitative nature (using statistics). The questions of interest in these studies were formulated from the knowledge produced in previous similar studies, thus enabling the current thesis to "borrow" theoretical conceptions, such as different discipline methods. However, to study how children play an active part in and around a conflict situation (the final study), qualitative interviews which used the children's own stories as the starting-point, were deemed to be suitable, in addition to a qualitative analysis of the material. The questions of interest in this study were based on an area which, as yet, has only tentatively been explored compared, that is, to the areas illuminated in the preceding three studies. Although the study was based on three categories of an active child, these categories were only frames and lacked the necessary content upon which to base theoretical conceptions. A multi-method approach, like the one used in this thesis, is valuable in order to bridge the gaps between theory, research and practice (Sells, Smith & Sprenkle, 1995). Reciprocal actions in qualitative and quantitative studies open up new perspectives and help to generate new measurements in a productive way (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The discussion of the methodological considerations that follows

will touch, in different ways, on different aspects of the quantitative and qualitative nature of the studies from which this thesis is comprised.

Interviewing children

In developmental psychology, children's own accounts have not previously been viewed as reliable and there has been a tendency to think of adults' reports as more robust (Hogan et al., 1999). A change, however, has recently taken place and children's subjective perceptions are now viewed as valuable. The "objective truth" has become of less interest and is no longer simply equated with adult perception (e.g. Eckert, 2001). Qvarsell (2003) argues that it is most important to take different perspectives in research, in order to understand the complexity of various phenomena, instead of treating one perspective as more robust than the others. However, validity is of interest in the sense that children (or adults) should describe the phenomena examined, even if their perception is subjective.

In all four empirical studies, interviews, structured to a greater or lesser degree, were chosen as means of generating data. Some of the general principles that guided these interviews include the need to establish good contact with the informant, the need to give the informant time to think, the need for the interviewer to have the "courage" to ask the same question in different ways in order to understand as much as possible and, finally, the need to show interest in the answers without placing any values upon them. Solberg (1991) argues that these general principles are as important in child interviews as they are in adult interviews, although they might be more difficult to accomplish. In order to achieve a high degree of credibility in the interviews, these guiding principles are combined with efforts to get the child to answer as truthfully as possible. This is accomplished more easily if the child feels secure in the situation and if the questions that are posed are easy to understand. Based on a review of the relevant literature with the aim of accessing more in-depth knowledge about the subject of interest, appropriate interview questions were formulated and an interview guide was constructed. Pilot interviews, with children of an appropriate age, were conducted to verify the interview questions.

One issue to consider in research studies is that children in general are in a dependent and subordinate position in relation to adults (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). Children might therefore

perceive the interviewer as an authority and the validity of children's responses in interviews could be reduced in the presence of an adult interviewer (Catron & Masters, 1993; Falkström & Johansson, 1999). To minimize this problem in **Studies I, II and III,** each child was engaged in an informal conversation prior to the interview. In **Study IV,** the researcher spent a longer period of time together with the children in order to establish a good relationship which, in turn, led to a higher level of credibility (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). In this final study, the children had the opportunity to be interviewed either alone or together with a friend. Interviews conducted with children in pairs create a secure yet relaxed conversational climate (Eckert, 2001; Eder & Fingerson, 2001). Furthermore, in all studies, the researcher carefully explained the nature of an interview in general and stressed the value of each child's contribution. All of the interviews were conducted in a familiar environment, i.e. in the child's home, at school or at a youth recreation center, in order to reduce the adult researcher's power (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). The child was told only to answer the question she/he wanted to answer, that no answer was wrong and that anything that emerged during the interview would be treated as confidential information. To make the child feel that she/he was in charge of the situation, the interview started with easier questions and was not too long to avoid tiring or boring the child. Moreover, the final part of the interview was devoted to an area of particular interest for the child that the child would have no difficulties in talking about (Vestby, 1991).

MEASUREMENTS AND ANALYSES

Research exploring children's roles in socialization processes is concerned with issues relating to how information from children can be obtained in developmentally appropriate ways. Hogan et al. (1999) argue that there is a need for creative thinking about ways to talk to children and in involving them in research. Particular interest has been focused on qualitative methods for gathering data, such as interviews and ethnographic methods. Successful ways to conduct interviews include using pictures and/or stories that children are asked to interpret or elaborate upon (ibid). Hypothetical situations are a commonly used method in this research area (e.g. Barnett et al., 1996; Wolfe et al., 1982). All of the empirical studies included in the current thesis are based on interviews that have included different types and combinations of pictures and hypothetical situations. Hypothetical situations are shown to reduce the risk of

children looking for the "right answer", as well as functioning as useful triggers and help for the child when reporting perceptions and beliefs (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

In **Studies I and II,** illustrations were used to describe the different parental strategies that were used. In an initial pilot study, in which no pictures were shown, the children were given the freedom to report how they thought their parents would react in each of the different situations. However, in our opinion, the choice of using pictures provided a number of advantages which had not appeared in the pilot study. The main advantage was that the children remained concentrated and focused throughout the interview and were forced to think through each situation properly. Another advantage with the use of illustrations was that they helped the children to visualize the most frequently-reported discipline methods, as well as enabling the less verbal children to express themselves. However, three problems may be associated with this particular set of pictures. First, letting the children report in a structured manner meant that their choice was limited to the different types of discipline method selected from the beginning. Second, the categories illustrated for the children are based on the original PDI for adults (Pinkerton et al., 1991). Using the same categories may well have been successful but, to some extent, it also implies that it is an adult-perspective that is seen as standard and it might be that a child-perspective is not necessarily based on the same standard (Hogan et al., 1999). The problem of categorization could be viewed in the light of a closely related issue which concerns the language that is currently used to describe parenting. This language includes terms that most frequently describe socialization and parenting as something done *to* children and not something done *with* children (Kuczynski et al., 1999). A third problem connected with the illustrations that were used concerns the facial expression of both the parent and the child in the pictures. This could trigger feelings and, consequently, evaluations of the discipline methods that the images illustrated. As **Studies I and II** were not concerned with feelings and evaluations, but with perceptions of parents' choices of discipline method, the facial expressions might not have affected the reports.

In **Study III,** only two discipline strategies were explained to the child; physical punishment and reasoning. Physical punishment was described as swatting or slapping the child on the arm or the cheek and spanking the child on the bottom. Reasoning was described as reasoning with, or giving explanations to the child. One issue to consider is that the description given to the child could have had an impact on the outcome. For example, there was very little

variation in children's reports of maternal use of reasoning, suggesting the presence of a "ceiling effect", meaning that children generally give high ratings on the instrument (Mitchell & Jolley, 1996). This ceiling effect is probably not indicative of a measurement problem but, instead, reflects a genuine widespread, strong endorsement of parents' use of reasoning, given the above definition. By comparison, there was much more variability in children's ratings of physical punishment. In contrast to this study, Rose-Krasnor, Durrant and Broberg's Swedish study (2001) included milder options such as physical restraint (e.g. grabbing hard). Including milder options could, for example, have elicited higher ratings on this scale (compared with reasoning).

Study IV also included an interview to measure children's perceptions. Contrary to prior interviews, children were able to influence the course of the interview to a greater degree. The child's individual approach had a significant effect on the outcome of each interview. Being flexible as a researcher may contribute to new questions that capture the perception of the child more effectively (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). Each child was interviewed on three separate occasions, both in order to give the child a chance to reflect on the subject and to avoid tiring the children. Furthermore, by introducing different areas in the three interviews, the purpose was to prevent the children's responses possibly being affected or influenced by the questions that had been posed immediately before. Conducting multiple interviews with the same children promotes greater depth (Eder & Fingerson, 2001). To control for reliability in the data analysis, in addition to continuous discussions with appropriate colleagues, McCracken's (1988) analysis model was used as a template.

The data obtained in **Studies I, II & III** were analyzed statistically. In choosing the appropriate statistical test for our data, several considerations had to be taken in account. A good test is a test that has a large probability of rejecting "the null hypothesis" when the "null hypothesis" is false. However, the particular questions to be tested, the sample size, distribution of data and the measurement scale, must all be taken into consideration (Siegel & Castellan, 1988). In **Studies I and III,** non-parametric tests were chosen as a result of some of these considerations (for details, see each individual study). Non-parametric tests are based on a model that specifies only very general conditions and are influenced less by sample distribution, sample size and scaling (ibid).

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The first and perhaps most important consideration that has to be taken into account regarding the sample, is the age of the participants. Six- to nine-year-old children have acquired several social cognitions that enable them to make sense of other people's actions (Flavell & Miller, 1998) and to be able to answers questions about their parents' behavior and parent-child interaction. However, the children's knowledge of and capacity to use traits, and other kind of schemas, in making sense of parents' actions may affect their answers and make them less valid. For example, we might ask about interaction in a specific situation, whereas the children, when giving their response, think about the general parent-child relationship in which all parent-child interactions are embedded (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997).

Eight-year-old children were chosen in three of the four studies because, according to Martin (1989), children of this age are more flexible in their thoughts about gender than younger children. Older children, on the other hand, are more liable to stereotype the sexes into more domains. At this age, children start to understand that there could be different reasons for gender differences (Smith & Russell, 1984; Taylor, 1996). Eight-year-olds also show greater stability in their thoughts about gender and stereotypes (Best & Williams, 1993).

The demographics of the samples have important implications for the results. In all of the samples, girls and boys were equally balanced. Compared with Sweden as a whole, the sample in **Study III** was representative of family structure (two-parent families contra single-parent families), ethnicity (numbers of children with non-Swedish backgrounds) and the numbers of siblings in each family (**Study II**). However, one important caveat that should be made is that the samples were not completely representative in terms of socioeconomic status - SES (**Studies I, II and III**). The implications of this lack of representivity must be taken into account when analyzing the results, since methods of discipline vary according to SES. Among the group of non-participants in **Studies I and II** (demographics were available), SES high is under-represented, while SES middle is slightly over-represented. One reason for this could be that harsher discipline methods are used more frequently in lower SES families (Brembeck, 1995; Maccoby, 1980), which could cause these families to be more apprehensive about external investigation. Further, higher SES families have a better appreciation of the aims of research and therefore do not feel threatened by being studied to the same extent.

One specific caveat for **Study III** was the absence of fathers. In order to ensure that the length of the interview was not too long so to avoid tiring or boring the child, the focus was exclusively on mothers (rather than mothers and fathers). Another reason for only including mothers was that it was mainly mothers who attended the parents meeting at the school - the occasion when the childrearing-attitudes measurement was completed. This is a noteworthy exclusion as mothers are more authoritative than fathers (Russell et al., 1998; Palmérus, 1999; Smetana, 1995), and in their behavior differentiate less between boys and girls (Lytton & Romney, 1991).

RESULTS

The results for each study are presented separately. As no numbers are reported in this summary, the articles in the Appendices should be consulted for more specific information about the results. The presentation strictly follows the questions/hypothesis/objectives in each study. The results are discussed in a separate section after the results section.

STUDY I

Testing the first question that was addressed, namely children's perceptions of their parents' choice of discipline methods, revealed that the modal choice for each situation was Coercive Verbal Control/Firm Command. However, situations in which the child refused to go to school, refused to eat and refused to go to bed elicited milder options. Situations in which the child hits a sibling and played with the stove after being forbidden to do so elicited the selection of harsher discipline methods for boys, but not for girls.

Boys reported more Physical Punishment and more Low Use of Authority than girls, who reported a greater use of Reasoning/Explanation than the boys. Children perceived that their fathers made greater use of Physical Restraint as well as more Physical Punishment than their mothers. In separate estimations for boys and girls, it was shown that boys perceived that their fathers made greater use of Physical Punishment than their mothers.

The second question that was addressed, namely the nature of children's perceptions of child gender differences in their parent's choice of discipline method, revealed almost the same pattern as when they had reported about themselves. When the children were asked about what they thought their parents would do if they themselves were of the other sex, the modal choice of discipline method was Coercive Verbal Control/Firm Command in most situations. Situations in

which the child refused to go to school, refused to eat and refused to go to bed elicited milder options and situations in which the child hit a sibling or played with the stove after being forbidden to do so elicited the selection of harsher parental responses. The pattern was almost the same for boys as for girls.

When asked about their opinions of their parents' choice of discipline method towards the other sex, girls more frequently reported the use of Physical Punishment towards boys than boys reported for girls. Furthermore, boys more frequently reported the use of Low Use of Authority towards girls than girls reported for boys. There were parental gender differences showing that children reported that mothers made greater use of Low Use of Authority and less Physical Punishment than fathers towards children of the other sex. In separate estimations for boys and girls, it was shown that boys perceived that mothers made greater use of Warm Encouragement than fathers towards girls.

Looking at the third question, namely shifts in perception between oneself and others, children were categorized in two groups; children reporting gender differences and children not reporting gender differences. In order to minimize the risk of categorizing children in the wrong group, the children's reports of discipline methods in the hypothetical situations, together with the information from the direct question, were used in the process of categorization. Thirty-eight percent of the children reported both in responses to the direct question and in two of the hypothetical scenarios, that their parent would have treated them differently. In the two situations in which the child hits a sibling and the child uses the stove, children reported the greatest difference (40-50%) concerning parents' choice of discipline method. About 20% of the children reported a shift in the other three situations (the child refuses to go to school, to eat and to go to bed). In all the situations described above, girls reported fewer differences than boys.

However, this does not tell us anything about the direction of differences when they occur. This question thus leads to a further step in the analysis. Each of the 36 possible changes in response was initially given a code. To simplify the presentation of data, these changes were grouped in terms of whether the shift was in the direction of a "milder" or a "harsher" discipline method (this coding is treated as scale data). Low Use of Authority was treated as the mildest option and coded as one, while Physical Punishment was treated as the most harsh

option and coded as six (e.g. a shift from Low Use of Authority to any other method is coded as a shift in a negative direction, while a shift from Physical Punishment to any other method is coded as a shift in a positive direction). The scale was based on how threatening the situation might appear to the child (Low Use of Authority, Reasoning/Explanations, Coercive Verbal Control/Firm Command, Behavior Modification, Physical Restraint and Physical Punishment). The order of the methods was based on a pilot study in which children were asked to rank the methods in order from less threatening to more threatening. It was shown that, in four of five situations, girls perceived that boys were treated with harsher methods than they themselves. Similarly, boys perceived that girls were treated with milder methods than they were themselves. The four situations were hitting a sibling, using the stove, refusing to go to school and refusing to go to bed. The pattern was the same for both mothers and fathers.

In the <u>final question,</u> namely examining the influence of siblings on children's perceptions of child gender differences in transgression situations, children with siblings of the same sex as themselves were compared with children with a sibling of the other sex. In total 38% of the children reported child gender differences, both in response to the direct question and in two or more of the situations. The results showed that children with siblings of the same sex as themselves were significantly more disposed to report gender differences. There were no differences between boys' and girls' reports. Neither did the respective ages of the siblings have any effect.

STUDY II

Study II was conducted to further examine factors that differ between children who believed that gender differences could be found in their parents' choice of discipline methods and those children who did not believe that there were any significant gender differences. Using the same method of categorizing as in was used in Study I, it was found that thirty-six percent of children reported child gender differences in transgression situations.

The <u>first hypothesis,</u> that harsher discipline methods would be related to beliefs about the role of gender in transgression situations, was found to be true both for fathers and for mothers. The greater use of Behavior Modification and Physical Punishment that children reported for

fathers, the more likely they were to report gender differences in parenting. In the case of mothers, it was more likely that children who reported a greater use of Behavior Modification, Physical Restraint and Physical Punishment would report gender differences in parenting.

The second hypothesis, which predicted that the sex of the child, the socioeconomic status of the child's family, type of siblings (the child has; 1- both brothers and sisters, 2-only siblings of the same sex as herself/himself, 3- only siblings of the other sex compared with herself/himself, or 4-no siblings), parental values and shared responsibility would each exert an impact on the child's beliefs about the role of gender in transgression situations, was partly confirmed. In children's reports about fathers, it was more likely that a child with a sibling of the same sex as themselves would report gender differences in parenting. Reports for mothers showed that children with a sibling of the same sex as themselves, as well those from a family with a lower SES, were more likely to report gender differences in parenting.

In overall terms, when it came to children's reports about fathers, the best predictive model for whether or not children would report gender differences in parenting (explaining 37.4% of the variance) included the presence of a same-sex sibling, the father's use of Behavior Modification and Physical Punishment. For children's reports about mothers, the best predictive model for whether or not children would report gender differences in parenting (explaining 21.6% of the variance) included the mother's use of Behavior Modification, Physical Restraint and Physical Punishment

STUDY III

The first hypothesis which stated that children's perceptions would vary as a function of the vignettes, revealed that children perceived mothers' intentions of using physical punishment less positively in the aggression vignette than in the noncompliance vignette. This pattern was consistent across all three intention items, namely the mother's intention to help the child, intention to show love and intention to prevent future misbehavior. Children were less positive in their evaluation of mothers' uses of physical punishment in the aggression vignette compared with the noncompliance vignette. By comparison, there was no significant vignette effect on children's evaluations of the use of reasoning.

When analyzing the second hypothesis, which anticipated that children would hold more favorable perceptions toward the use of reasoning than toward physical punishment, the signs were that, in general, children were fairly positive in their perceptions and evaluations of mother's intentions in using reasoning as well as physical punishment. However, the mothers' uses of reasoning were perceived more positively than the use of physical punishment, with respect to both intention and the evaluation of the mother (in both vignettes) as regards helping the child, showing love, preventing future misbehavior and being a better parent.

Testing the third hypothesis, namely that older children as well as girls would hold more favorable perceptions towards the use of reasoning than physical punishment, no significant effects were revealed for the child's sex. A comparison of girls' and boys' perceptions of mothers' uses of reasoning versus physical punishment (see the above question) revealed the same pattern as for the whole sample. The result for both vignettes showed that girls and boys rated the mother's intention to help the child, to show love and to prevent future misbehavior as being more prevalent for reasoning than for physical punishment. Across both of the vignettes, both boys and girls also perceived the mother as being a better parent when she used reasoning compared to those occasions when she used physical punishment.

There was evidence of certain age group differences, showing that older children rated the mothers' intentions to help the child by using reasoning in the noncompliance vignette more positively than younger children. Analyzing this result further, it was revealed that sub-group differences were found between 9- and 6-year-olds, as well as 9- and 7-year-old children. A comparison of 6-, 7-, 8- and 9-year-old children's perceptions of the mothers' intentions in using reasoning as opposed to physical punishment across both vignettes revealed more or less the same pattern as for the whole sample. The result for both vignettes showed that both younger and older children alike ascribe more positive intention (i.e. helping, preventing misbehavior, showing love) to the mother's use of reasoning than to her use of physical punishment. However, there was one contrary result – six-year-old children rated physical punishment and reasoning similarly in the aggression vignette for the item regarding the mother's intention to prevent future misbehavior.

Children in all age groups perceived the mother as a better parent when using reasoning rather than physical punishment in both vignettes. However, older children, when compared with younger children, tended to view the mother as a good parent when she used both physical

punishment (in the noncompliance vignette) as well as reasoning (in the aggression vignette). Analyzing this result further, it was revealed that significant differences existed between 8- and 6-year-old children in terms of physical punishment, and between 6- and 7-, 6- and 8- and 6- and 9-year-old children when it came to reasoning.

Our <u>final hypothesis</u> stated that children with mothers who held more traditional childrearing values would hold more favorable perceptions toward the use of physical punishment, and less favorable perceptions towards the use of reasoning. The results were consistent with this hypothesis. Children with more traditional mothers were less likely to perceive an intention to show love through reasoning in the child aggression vignette and were more likely to evaluate the mother as being a good parent for using physical punishment in both the child aggression and the child noncompliance vignettes. No other significant associations with maternal traditionalism were found.

STUDY IV

The <u>first objective</u> focused on how the child actively creates meaning about what happens during conflict situations. According to the children's perceptions, which are comprehensively described in the interviews, parents were the ones who made decisions in most cases and, moreover, there were several factors, both short term and long term, that underpinned these decisions. Children believed that parents had a legitimacy to decide in most situations, due to their greater knowledge and their responsibility for their children. Some boys felt that their parents were overly confident about their own capacity to decide, thereby leading to inappropriate decisions. In situations in which parents and children had different opinions, different courses of events could occur. 1) From a starting-point dominated by aroused feelings, subsequent reasoning and punishment, a quarrel between the parents without the child being present could follow. 2) When they had different opinions, children and parents very often initiated a discussion, without any initial heightened emotions. Quarreling and being on bad terms with each other was associated with feelings of discomfort, as far as the children were concerned. They also believed that parents reacted similarly in these situations. Children believed parents were sad, even if they gave the impression of being angry.

The <u>second objective</u>, which related to how the child acts intentionally during interaction with the parent, revealed three different strategies. First, children could chose to actively confront the parent with argumentation, to imitate parents' behavior, or to attempt to initiate other types of behavior. Second, children could utilize more goal-oriented behavior, with the aim of achieving a 'pay-off'. Following an argument the child could say "I'm sorry", thus showing goodwill or displaying its feelings. Finally, it also happened that the child deliberately chose not to confront the parent but instead withdrew, stepped aside for a while and did as the parent wanted or, alternatively, approached the other parent instead.

The <u>final objective</u> investigated the child's ideas about the efficacy of her/his actions. Generally, children believed they had little influence in decision situations. Despite this, children described different strategies which successfully influence the outcome of a conflict. Children got their own way either through reasoning, or by playing the two parents off against one another. The most effective way for the child to end a conflict was either to say "I'm sorry", or to show her/his feelings. When a strategy did not procure the desired effect, children believed that parents might find the strategy unacceptable in these situations. When children did not succeed in influencing the situation and parents chose to make use of some kind of punishment, the boys said there was no alternative other than to make the best of the situation.

In overall terms, the boys' and girls' responses provided evidence of equally active roles in conflict situations. The sex of the child was not important for the children's descriptions of intentional action and with regard to their ideas about the efficacy of their actions in the conflict situation. However, both boys and girls believed boys were treated more firmly by parents and when parents and children were involved in a conflict, parents were harsher with boys than they were with girls. They also agreed that boys disobeyed their parents or forgot to ask for permission more frequently than girls. Furthermore, more so than girls, boys ascribed greater power to the child. This was shown both in their reports of a parent's legitimacy to decide and in their reports of not accepting a punishment. There were no gender differences in children's descriptions of their own and parents' feelings in the conflict situation, or their evaluation of discipline methods.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of the results from the four empirical studies will be presented in accordance with the general aim of the thesis. The overall aim was to examine 6- to 9-year-old children's perceptions, beliefs and agency in transgression and conflict situations with the specific goal of examining the importance of gender in their perceptions. In this discussion special consideration will be taken of the Swedish sample, in relation to the national aim to achieve a more equal society, both in terms of children's rights and general gender equality. Finally, some contributions to the research area, as well as ideas about future directions, will be addressed.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS, BELIEFS AND AGENCY

In line with Kuczynski's idea about the active child (Kuczynski et al., 1999), children in the present studies reported various perceptions and beliefs about what happens in conflict situations, as well as about their own agency in parent-child interaction. In the interviews, children described how they actively chose whether or not to interact with the parent in the conflict situation and, if they did, which strategies they used to influence the situation and to steer its outcome in their preferred direction. The results provide support for and stress the importance of viewing the child as active in the process of influencing parents' acquisition of values (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). In the externalization process, children reported taking into account the mood of parents, the situation and previous experiences before manifesting their own values in parent-child interaction. They used strategies such as reasoning, arguing, posing repeated questions, calming the parent or initiating other types of behavior. Sometimes, the child's desire to achieve some tangible advantage or pay-off (Patterson, 1997) was transformed into specifically goal-oriented types of behavior, where the child regulated her/his behavior in order to attain desired goals, including, for example, apologizing,

revealing feelings or displaying goodwill. On other occasions, however, children chose not to confront the parent, which must also be viewed as an active strategy, as there was an active decision underpinning the action (Kuczynski et al., 1999). Children perceived their own actions, such as using reasoning and saying "I'm sorry", to be most effective in getting their own way or ending a conflict. At this age children have developed an understanding that a resolution must include a change of mind for at least one of the persons (Jenkins & Buccioni, 2000), as well as the ability to give additional reasons in support their own position and finding additional weaknesses in the other person's positions (Stein & Albro, 2001).

The externalization process is not the only process in the parent-child interaction in transgression and conflict situations. Both children and parents are also active in the internalization process, that is to say in their perception of the incoming message (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Children in the studies perceived their parent's modal choice of discipline method to be coercive verbal control. In line with previous studies (e.g. Kuczynski et al., 1999; Smetana, 1994), children reported that parents' choices of method were influenced by the situation and, furthermore, that different courses of events could occur depending on the nature of the situation at the outset of the conflict. Children believed that parents would choose harsher discipline methods, which is something they find appropriate, in situations where the child physically causes harm to others (or harms itself). However, the results from the children's perceptions of mothers' uses of reasoning or physical punishment in similar situations showed that children were less accepting of physical punishment in situations involving physical harm to others than they were in situations involving disobeying a teacher's request. This result contradicts the results discussed above, although it may be explained by the fact that children believe reasoning is a more appropriate parental response to child aggression. Smetana (1994) has found that child misbehavior involving psychological or physical harm to others (or indeed self-harm) tends to elicit more reasoning in situations which involve the disruptive or inappropriate violation of social norms (such as disobedience of a teacher). This might lead children to expect the use of reasoning rather than physical punishment in the case of child aggression. Children will evaluate their own and their parents' actions differently in different situations depending on their moral maturity (Grusec and Goodnow, 1994). At a young age, children believe in not hurting other people and, as age increases, fairness is regarded as a question of strict equity. Conventional transgressions are not thought of as conducive for maintaining better order (Nucci, 2004).

As in other studies (Dadds et al., 1987; Paikoff et al., 1988; Siegal & Barclay, 1985; Siegal & Rablin, 1982), children were most accepting and most positive towards the discipline method of reasoning. Transgression and conflict situations in which reasoning was used were evaluated far more positively with regard to parental intention and the outcome of the conflict. Further, in these situations, the mother was evaluated as a better parent. Coercive verbal control or any type of punishment, were reported as less positive and less effective. In those cases in which the child felt excluded, treated unfairly, or experienced any other negative feelings, methods which included the parents being permissive, comforting the child and saying they were sorry were evaluated as the most appropriate. Children of mothers with more traditional childrearing-attitudes had a tendency not to endorse reasoning to the same degree as other children and evaluated the mother as a good parent even when using physical punishment. Studies have shown that parenting style is transmitted across generations (Graziano et al., 1992; Kelder et al., 1991; Wolfe et al., 1982). It may well be that these children's social cognitions regarding the appropriateness of physical punishment reflected their more traditional home environments, in which parenting was more likely to emphasize compliance and where use was made of punitive discipline methods to enforce norms and standards (Palacios et al., 1992).

Both younger and older children perceived mothers' intentions in using reasoning as more positive than the use of physical punishment, although older children discriminated more between the two methods, as well as rating mothers' intentions in using reasoning more positively than was the case for younger children. These results are similar to the findings of studies which show that older children rate reasoning more positively and physical punishment more negatively than younger children (Barnet et al., 1996; Paikoff et al., 1988; Siegal & Cowen, 1984). However, other previous studies (Deater-Deckard et al., 2005; Eimer, 1983) have shown that older children in general are more positive towards their parents' discipline methods, perhaps as a result of their capacity to better understand parents' intentions. This corresponds with the results of the current study which show that older children rated mothers as being better parents, when using both reasoning and physical punishment, than younger children did. One suggestion is that it is not the discipline methods that older children display stronger approval of, but their parents in general. In a sustained relationship with another person, children and adults alike become more interested in the long-term aspects of the other person's actions, thoughts and wishes. Learning about a person's traits or dispositions helps the individual to predict and understand that person's

actions. Even young children have an understanding of traits, but, with age, children get better at explaining other people's behavior (Yuill, 1997), and thus older children are able to look past an occasional troublesome incident and instead base their judgments on a more complex knowledge of their parent.

Children's descriptions of their sometimes strong feelings about conflict situations suggest that they have a deeper understanding of their parents' actions and that these are acquired not only in specific situations, but over time. Children reported that, even if it appeared as though parents were very angry, parents' true feelings were more those of sadness due to the actual misbehavior of the child. Yelling made the child feel unloved, although she/he knew that her/his parents were yelling because they cared for and loved her/him. Research has shown that the future development of children is dependent on their perception of their parent's motives for their actions, irrespective of whether they were signs of care or of rejection (Rohner & Bourque, 1996; Rohner et al., 1991). From the child's angle, it could be important that the parent was adequately able to show the depth of her/his feelings and affection (Deater-Deckard et al., 2005).

THE ROLE OF GENDER

In this thesis, as in previous studies, the results were mixed regarding gender differences in parenting. Girls' and boys' reports about parental discipline methods were similar to each other in many respects. In the first two studies, boys reported that parents use more physical punishment and low use of authority than girls. Girls reported greater use of reasoning/explanation than boys. Consistent with traditional gender stereotypes, boys reported higher frequencies of parents' use of harsh discipline methods compared with girls (Barnett et al., 1996; Crase et al., 1981; Herzberger et al., 1981; Siegal & Barclay, 1985). However, in the final two studies, no gender effect concerning reports of parents' discipline methods was found. This is in line with a study by Deater-Deckard et al. (2005) that found no gender differences. Furthermore, there were no gender differences in children's evaluations of discipline methods, evaluations of mothers as a good parents or descriptions of mothers' intentions in using reasoning and physical punishment. Girls and boys also described the conflict situation and their agency in the conflict situation in more or less the same way. With regard to parent-gender differences, both girls and boys perceived fathers as using harsher

discipline methods and mothers as using milder discipline methods. Previous studies have shown that, in general, fathers use harsher discipline methods compared with mothers (Palmérus, 1999; Pinkerton, 1996).

Turning to boys' and girls' perceptions of gender differences in transgression and conflict situations, some interesting results are revealed. In line with traditional gender stereotypes, both girls and boys believed that, in a conflict situation, parents would treat boys more severely than girls. In transgression situations, especially those in which the child causes physical harm to others or to itself, girls believed that boys would more frequently be treated with physical punishment than themselves, while boys believed that girls would more frequently be treated with the low use of authority than themselves. Although, few studies have been conducted in this area, the results partly correspond with those of previous studies, showing that children generally believed that physical punishment is more effective with boys than with girls (Barnett et al., 1996; Siegal & Barclay, 1985). One explanation could be that children respond stereotypically. This suggestion is supported by the result showing that children who had a sibling of the other sex did not believe that their parent's choice of discipline method varied according to the sex of the child. It could be that children respond according to gender stereotypes in the absence of any evidence to the contrary. This result corresponds with research that has found that continuous contact with the other group results in fewer stereotypes among the members of the own group (Brown, 1996).

Further examination of children's perceptions of gender differences in transgression situations revealed that harsher discipline methods were related to beliefs about parental differences between boys and girls. It is difficult to comment on cause and effect, and in this case there might be no direct causal relationship. It is most probably the case that, in those families where harsher discipline methods are found, more gender stereotypical parental behavior exists. This result corresponds with the research of Palacios et al. (1992) and Pinkerton (1996; Pinkerton, Palmérus & Scarr, 1996), showing that parents who use harsher discipline methods are more likely, compared with other parents, to have gender stereotypical attitudes and more likely to encourage gender-typed behavior in their children. In line with these findings, children from lower-SES families reported that gender was important in transgression situations. This was true for mothers, but not for fathers. In a previous study, Palmérus (1999) has shown that mothers from lower-SES families used different discipline methods for boys

and girls. Furthermore, harsher discipline methods occur more frequently in lower SES families (Brembeck, 1995; Maccoby, 1980). This gives us reason to believe that harsher, as well as more gender stereotypical, discipline methods are to be found in the lower-SES families and that this environment impacts on children's beliefs about parental differences between boys and girls

SWEDEN AS A PARTICULAR SETTING

It is mainly research conducted in the US, the UK and Australia that has investigated children's perceptions, beliefs and agency in parenting situations (Barnett et al., 1996; Carlson, 1986; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998a; Deater-Deckard et al., 1998b; Siegal & Cowen, 1984). In many ways these societies differ from Sweden, in both cultural and social respects. During the last century, Sweden has developed progressive family, gender and educational policies and has worked actively to increase girls' and boys' rights. It is likely that these circumstances have had an influence on the children's reports that are presented and discussed in the current thesis. It is therefore important to discuss some of these results in the light of the social climate in Sweden.

One important aspect of the parent-child interaction in transgression and conflict situations is the relative degree of power enjoyed by both parties. One source that influences the variable degree of power children have is cultural variation (Kuczynski et al., 1999). Different aspects of Swedish society contribute to increasing the child's power in these relationships. The children in these studies were of the opinion that they should be able to have a greater say in decision-making in the family. Swedish parents' ways of stressing children's rights in the family (Harkness et al., 2001) could most probably be transmitted to the child and thus become subsumed with the child's own opinions about how to think and act. Furthermore, children reported that they would be pleased if they could decide as much at home as they were able to do at school. This result contradicts those of studies carried out on American children which suggest that children's active interaction increased when they had a closer relationship with an adult who, in most cases, was a parent (Kuczynski et al., 1999). One explanation of why the same results were not found in the current study could be that Sweden has a school curriculum that stresses that children should play an active role in planning their own education (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001).

One result that could be important to comment upon is the reported use of physical punishment. Moderate physical punishment was mentioned in the children's responses, although its use appeared to be infrequent. Physical punishment was forbidden by Swedish law in 1979 and is the least frequently used discipline method in Sweden (Palmérus, 1999). Physical punishment is used considerably less frequently and in milder forms in Sweden than in other western countries (Deley, 1988; Durrant et al., 2003). With this background, the reports of physical punishment of up to 14% in some of the hypothetical situations in the current study appear to be high. On the other hand, these rates are well below those found in other western countries, such as 71% in the Canada (Durrant et al., 2003), and in the USA where the majority of undergraduates reported experience of physical punishment as children (Deley, 1988). It is important to note that children express feelings of sadness and of feeling afraid when parents make use of physical punishment. According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, United Nations, 1989), the child has the right to feel secure in an environment that promotes her physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual development. These rights are supported by Swedish legislation which outlaws physical punishment and other forms of insulting treatment towards children. For the child's welfare it is most important to continue the work of supporting children's rights at a number of different levels in society; in their families, in schools and within different professional groups. The statistics from previous years showing a decline in positive attitudes to, and the use of physical punishment, as well as an increasing willingness to report child abuse, indicate that this kind of work has a valuable contribution to make (Durrant et al., 2003; Edfeldt, 1985; Fäldt, 2000; Nilsson, 2004; Stattin et al., 1998; SCB, 1996; Ziegert, 1983).

Sweden is striving to create a more equal society (Orloff, 1996), in which traditional gender stereotypes do not dictate the individual's life. In the present studies, some gender differences were found, but the overarching impression gained from all four studies was that girls and boys have more or less the same perception. Given the small number of studies conducted, both nationally and internationally, it is not possible to determine whether robust gender differences in children's perceptions of parental discipline are pervasive and consistent, or whether this Swedish sample stands out in any respect. One important gender difference that relates to children's acceptance of a parent's legitimacy was found. In general, children believed that parents had the legitimacy to decide in different situations, due to their superior experience, knowledge and responsibility. In line with Halldén's (1994) Swedish study, girls

ascribed more legitimacy to parents whilst boys ascribed more legitimacy to children in the right to decide different matters.

Children's beliefs about the role of gender for parents' choices of discipline method were somewhat surprising. One contributory factor that might explain why traditional gender patterns were also found in the current Swedish study, could be the child's gender schema. The gender schema is a product of the human being's basic need, through categorization, to simplify a complex world and the meaning that the surrounding culture places on gender (Bem, 1983). Although gender-equality work is currently taking place in society, girls and boys, women and men, are, from time to time, treated differently and sometimes in a discriminatory manner. Since children learn what is appropriate for their sex by observing both adults and peers in their surroundings, these occasions might be important for maintaining gender-stereotypes (Martin & Halverson, 1981). The underlying traditional norms that exist in part in Swedish society, and the differences that exist in the behavior of women and men, mothers and fathers, girls and boys, are "absorbed" by the child and influence her/his gender schema, which in turn exert an influence on perception, memory, judgment, behavior, self-perception, beliefs and so on (Martin & Halverson, 1981; 1983). In other words, the individual "chooses" to categorize the world using gender because gender is an important social variable in society (Bem, 1983). Gender schemas could therefore influence the child's report of discipline methods, both when talking about herself, but even more so when talking about the opposite sex. This spiral keeps rotating, indicating that the work being undertaken in Swedish schools to promote gender equality is even more important. Both Swedish researchers (e.g. Öhman, 1999) and international researchers (e.g. Lowe, 1998) emphasize the necessity for pre-schools and schools to make the child aware of its own approach to gender at an early age, as well as acting in ways that are not pre-determined by traditional gender patterns.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The current studies add to research in the field of parenting by considering the child's perception, beliefs and agency as well as contributing additional knowledge about the great mystery of gender in our society. It was already known that children are not passive in conflict and transgression situations. However, the current set of studies have added valuable

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knowledge and understanding of the nature and expression of children's perceptions, beliefs and agency in these situations, with a special emphasis being placed on gender. Children are active in both the externalization process, in which values are manifested, and in the internalization process, in which values are interpreted. The current studies illuminate several factors important for the child's behavior and perception of the conflict and transgression situation, such as the child's experiences, expectations, perceptions of the parent-child relationship, the nature of the situation, feelings and moods, trait knowledge about the parent, ideas about agency, her/his own ambitions, gender-stereotyped knowledge and, in addition, concrete knowledge about children's rights.

Turning to future research, there are several areas regarding children's perception of parenting that have to be considered more carefully. Five of them, mostly methodological issues, relate strongly to the results of this thesis and will therefore be mentioned separately below. (1) To obtain greater knowledge about the complexity and reality of children's active roles in their upbringing, it is necessary to examine the relationship between children's ideas about the efficacy of their actions and the variable degrees of power with which they are endowed in different families. The sources of variation in children's power e.g. child factors (abilities, strategies, maturity), parent-child relationships (dependency, climate) and cultural variations (family, school, society in general) all suggest that several dimensions influence children's agency and their perception of their agency. (2) The second area that future research should address, using a more systematic approach, is the role of gender in parenting. The area requiring illumination is not so much gender differences in parenting itself, but whether boys and girls, as a result of the influence of social discourses, perceive parenting differently and whether they are influenced differently. (3) Thirdly, although specific situations must be studied to obtain a knowledge of children as active agents in socialization, it is important to find ways to take account of the fact that these situations are connected over time by the relationship history. Thus, when discipline episodes occur, parents and children therefore respond not only to the current situation, but also to many other aspects of the parent-child relationship, including experiences and expectations that have been created previously in a multiplicity of different contexts and situations. (4) The fourth area relates to the second and third future research areas mentioned above, but is more general. Developmental psychology has started to consider the plethora of methods that exist in related disciplines (Hogan et al., 1999). It would be a significant achievement if future research could develop more flexible and dynamic ways of observing the great complexity that contemporary research has shown

to exist. (5) Finally, in line with the conclusions of other researchers (Kuczynski et al., 1999), one of the most important tasks that has to be performed in the area is to construct a more appropriate vocabulary. Several of the terms used today, such as for example 'compliance', 'noncompliance' and 'parenting', reflect a unidirectional transmission from parents to children and obscure the bidirectionality inherent in parent-child relationships. A more suitable vocabulary might assist in understanding the agency of children.

Finally, it is of great importance both in research and other areas in society that, whether directly or indirectly, have an impact upon children's lives, that a child-perspective is adopted (CRC, United Nations,1989). It is the responsibility of adults to ensure that opportunities are created for children to be able to participate in, and to have an influence on society and democracy (Engwall, 1998).

SAMMANFATTNING PÅ SVENSKA

(Summary in Swedish)

Avhandlingens fokus, pojkars och flickors perceptioner, föreställningar och handlings-
möjligheter i uppfostraingssituationer, har sin grund i ett antal nutida forsknings- och
samhällsförändringar. Under det senaste decenniet har utvecklingspsykologisk forskning
utvecklats från att ha ett enkelriktat perspektiv på socialisation till ett dubbelriktat (SRCD,
1998). Uppfostringssituationen ses som en dynamisk process mellan två individer, påverkad
av dessa personers perceptioner, kognitioner, föreställningar, känslor, erfarenheter och
förväntningar angående den aktuella situationen och den andra individen (Kuczynski,
Marshall & Shell, 1997). Barn och föräldrar är aktiva agenter i interaktionen, vilka modifierar
sina beteenden för att passa varandra, samt tolkar de värderingar vilka förmedlas och
förhandlas (Kuczynski, Harach, & Bernardini, 1999).

FNs deklaration om Barns Rättigheter (CRC, United Nations, 1989) är det första
internationella (med ett par undantag) dokument som behandlar mer eller mindre samtliga
domäner av barnets liv (Verma, Chen & Miller, 2001). Bland annat deklareras barns rätt att
bli konsulterade i de ärenden som berör dem, en rättighet som lett till en ökad medvetenhet
om behovet av att inta ett barnsperspektiv i en rad varijerande frågor. I linje med FNs
deklaration hävdar flera forskare barns rätt att bli hörda och själva få förmedla sina
upplevelser till forskaren. Qvortrup (2001) pekar på att barnens subjektiva upplevelser skiljer
sig från de vuxnas och behöver specifikt fokuseras i forskningen. Det finns behov av
forskning som ger en insyn i barns vardagsliv utifrån deras upplevelse och den subjektiva
mening de själva tillskriver sitt familjeliv (Hogan, Etz & Tudge, 1999). Det är viktigt att inte
enbart studera barn och barndom, utan även att fånga barns röster. Flera forskare hävdar att
barns perspektiv handlar om hur världen ter sig för barnet självt och är därmed svårt

undersöka och skapa en förståelse för av forskaren (Johansson, 2003; Sommer, 2003). Det är emellertid möjligt att med hjälp av olika forskningsmetoder fånga barns röster och engagera dem i forskningen (Qvarsell, 2003). Forskaren har fortfarande tolkningsföreträde, men utifrån ambitionen att ha ett barnperspektiv på undersökningen. Ett barnperspektiv innebär då att fånga barns röster och tolka dessa som uttryck för det subjektiva sammanhanget, samt att uppmärksamma barns handlingsmöjligheter (Halldén, 2003).

Att inta ett barnperspektiv ökar vår förståelse för såväl barns socialisation som andra delar av utvecklingen. Utifrån dessa antaganden är avhandlingens syfte att undersöka barns perceptioner, föreställningar och handlingsmöjligheter i samband med gränsöverskridande och konfliktsituationer i uppfostran. Ett övergripande mål är att undersöka barnens syn på betydelsen av kön. Fyra empiriska studier med barn mellan 6 och 9 år har genomförts, vilka tillsammans bidrar till att uppnå avhandlingens syfte.

Sammanfattning av delstudierna

De fyra empiriska delstudierna kommer kortfattat att beskrivas med avseende på syfte, metod och resultat.

Delstudie I

Syftet med första delstudien var att undersöka barns perception av sina föräldrars uppfostringsmetoder, samt deras perception av könsskillnader i föräldrarnas val av uppfostringsmetoder. Vidare, undersöktes syskonens påverkan på det sistnämnda. En modifierad version av Parental Discipline Interview (PDI: Pinkerton, Scarr & Eisenberg, 1991) användes vid intervjuer med 170 (78 pojkar, 92 flickor) 8-åringar. Först presenterades och förklarades sex bilder, som illustrerade olika uppfostringsmetoder. Fem olika korta berättelser, som beskrev gränsöverskridande situationer, lästes upp för barnet och för varje berättelse tillfrågades barnet om vilka uppfostringsmetoder hon/han trodde att dennes mamma respektive pappa skulle välja, om barnet var flicka respektive pojke. Barnet svarade dels muntligt och dels genom att peka på en av de sex illustrationerna. Avslutningsvis, som en kontrollfråga, tillfrågades barnet om hon/han trodde att föräldrar använde sig av olika uppfostringsmetoder för pojkar och flickor.

Resultatet visade stora likheter i pojkars och flickors svar. Stränga verbala tillrättavisningar var den metod som barn rapporterade mest att deras föräldrar använde. Pojkarna svarade oftare Låg auktoritet och Fysisk bestraffning än flickorna, som oftare svarade Resonemang. Barnen ansåg att deras fäder använde sig av mer Fysiskt tillbakahållande och Fysisk bestraffning än deras mödrar. Såväl pojkar som flickor trodde att föräldrarna skulle använda sig av strängare metoder gentemot pojkar och mildare gentemot flickor. Barn som hade ett eller flera syskon av annat kön än dem själva, jämfördes med barn som enbart hade syskon av samma kön som dem själva. Samband erhölls mellan att ha syskon av annat kön och att inte rapportera om könsskillnader i uppfostran.

Delstudie II

I den andra delstudien undersöktes eventuellt samband mellan barns uppfattning om könsskillnader i uppfostran och använda uppfostringsmetoder, barnets kön, förekomst av syskon, socioekonomisk status, föräldrars uppfostringsattityder samt delat ansvar i hemmet. I undersökningen deltog 205 (95 pojkar, 110 flickor) 8-åringar och deras föräldrar. Utöver de PDI-intervjuer (se delstudie I) som genomfördes med barnet, fyllde en eller båda föräldrarna i Parental Modernity Scale (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985), som mäter uppfostringsattityder samt en enkät som omfattar ansvarfördelningen i hemmet (Cowan & Cowan, 1987).

Logistisk regression användes för att ta fram modeller, vilka visade på sambandet mellan variablerna ovan och om barnet ansåg att det fanns könsskillnader i uppfostran eller ej (dikotom variabel). Separata modeller beräknades för barns rapporter om fäder respektive mödrar. Samband erhölls mellan barns rapporter om könsskillnader och att ha syskon av lika kön, fäders ökade användning av Beteendemodifikation samt Fysisk bestraffning. Samband erhölls även mellan barns rapporter om könsskillnader och mödrars ökade användning av Beteendemodifikation, Fysisk tillbakahållande samt Fysisk bestraffning. Om mödrar hade lägre socioekonomisk status samvarierade detta med barns rapporter om könsskillnader, men detta samband var inte starkt nog för att nå signifikans när uppfostringsmetoder infördes i modellen.

Delstudie III

Syftet med den tredje delstudien var att utforska barns perception av mödrars avsikter med att använda fysisk bestraffning och resonemang, samt deras värdering av mamman som en bra förälder. Utöver detta undersöktes om barnets perception och värdering varierade i relation till situation, uppfostringsmetod, barnets kön och ålder, samt mammans uppfostringsattityder. Intervjuer genomfördes med 114 barn (59 pojkar, 55 flickor) i åldrarna 6-9 år. Barnet besvarade en modifierad version av Discipline Interview (DI: Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1996) som innehöll sex tänkbara korta berättelser, i vilka ett barn missköter sig och en mamma agerar genom att antingen använda sig av fysisk bestraffning eller av resonemang med barnet. Därefter fortsatte intervjuen med att barnet tillfrågades om hon/han ansåg att mamman genom sitt beteende försökte hjälpa barnet, visa sin kärlek, förhindra framtida olydnad samt om de ansåg att mamman i berättelsen var en bra förälder. Utöver detta besvarade barnens mödrar Parental Modernity Scale (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985), som mäter uppfostringsattityder.

Resultaten visade att barnens perception av mödrars avsikt att använda fysisk bestraffning respektive resonemang varierade beroende på vilken situation som avsågs. Moderns avsikt att hjälpa barnet, visa sin kärlek, samt förhindra framtida olydnad ansågs starkare när modern använde resonemang och inte fysisk bestraffning. Mödrar som resonerade i konfliktsituationer ansågs vara en bättre förälder än de mödrar som bestraffade fysiskt. Barn vars mödrar hade mer av traditionella attityder var mindre benägna att uppfatta att modern avsåg visa sin kärlek då hon använde resonemang, samt mer benägna att uppfatta modern som en bra förälder då hon använde fysisk bestraffning. Vidare visade resultatet att yngre barn skattade användandet av fysisk bestraffning samt resonemang mer lika, än vad äldre barn gjorde. Oberoende av använd uppfostringsmetod värderades modern som en bra förälder i högre utsträckning av äldre barn än av yngre barn. Inga könsskillnader visade sig i materialet, utan pojkars och flickors perception av mödrars avsikt med val av uppfostransmetod, samt deras värdering av modern som en bra förälder skilde sig ej åt.

Delstudie IV

Barns aktiva roll i konfliktsituationer undersöktes utifrån Kuczynskis m.fl. (1999) tre kriterier för barnet som en aktiv agent; (1) barnet som meningsskapande, (2) barnet som aktivt

agerande, samt (3) barnets idéer om att kunna påverka. Ett övergripande mål var att undersöka könets betydelse i barnets perception. McCrackens (1988) fyrastegsmodell användes både för att genomföra undersökningen och analysera erhållna data. Kvalitativa parintervjuer genomfördes med fjorton barn i 8-årsåldern. Varje barn deltog i tre intervjuer som tillsammans behandlade: barn och föräldrars tankar, känslor och beteenden i och omkring konfliktsituationen, förhandling, makt, legitimitet, könsskillnader, samt användning och värdering av uppfostringsmetoder.

I intervjuerna beskrev barnen att det oftast är föräldrarna som bestämmer, men att de har legitimitet att göra detta beroende av sin ålder, sina erfarenheter och sitt ansvar för barnet. Bakom föräldrarnas val ligger såväl långsiktiga som kortsiktiga mål, samt barn- respektive föräldraorienterade mål. När barn och föräldrar är av olika åsikt kan en konflikt uppstå. En konflikt som initialt domineras av upprörda känslor beskrevs fortlöpa genom att en diskussion tar form, gräl uppstår mellan föräldrarna eller genom att barnet bestraffas. En konflikt behöver inte innebära upprörda känslor, utan kan bestå av en diskussion. Detta ansåg barnet vara mest positivt och även bästa lösningen både för barn och för föräldrar. Att vara ovänner ansåg barnet vara kopplat till negativa känslor, vilket de trodde också gäller föräldern. I konflikten agerar barnet genom att konfrontera förälder med resonemang, argument, visa sina känslor, imitera föräldern eller genom att initiera ett annat beteende hos föräldern. Målorienterade beteenden som att säga förlåt eller visa sin välmening i syfte att få sin vilja igenom är andra sätt att konfrontera föräldern. Det händer även att barnet väljer att dra sig undan och avvakta en stund eller vänder sig till den andra föräldern, alternativt gör som föräldern önskar. På en direkt fråga beskrev barnen att de i allmänhet har lite inflytande på situationen. Trots detta rapporterade barnen dels flera strategier för att påverka, dels en medvetenhet om denna påverkan. Att resonera eller att ställa föräldrarna mot varandra beskrevs som effektiva sätt att få sin vilja igenom. Att avsluta en konflikt görs effektivast genom att säga förlåt eller att visa sina känslor. I de fall strategin inte lyckas trodde barnen detta beror på att föräldern uppfattar strategin som olämplig vid det aktuella tillfället. Pojkar och flickor beskrev konflikt-situationen och det egna agerandet på likvärdiga sätt. Dock tillskrev flickorna föräldrarna större legitimitet att bestämma, än vad pojkarna gjorde. Pojkarna beskrev även hur man kan försöka göra det bästa av situationen vid till exempel time-out, genom att leka eller tänka på något roligt. Såväl pojkarna som flickorna ansåg att pojkar behandlas strängar än flickor av sina föräldrar.

DISKUSSION

Resultaten både stödjer och betonar barnets aktiva roll i att ta till sig, samt påverka föräldrars tillägnande av olika värderingar (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Barnen rapporterade att de tar hänsyn till förälderns humör, den specifika situationen och tidigare erfarenheter innan de manifesterar sina värderingar i föräldra-barnsamspelet. Ett antal faktorer påverkade även barnets perception av det som händer i detta samspel. I likhet med föräldrar (tex. Kuczynski m. fl., 1999; Smetana, 1994) rapporterade barnen att föräldrarnas beteenden tolkas och hanteras olika beroende på situationen. Överlag var dock barnen mest positivt inställda till resonemang, en metod som barnen upplevde givande och som gav bra resultat. Stränga verbala tillrättavisningar, samt olika typer av beteende- eller fysiska bestraffningar sågs som minst positiva och minst effektiva. I de fall barnet känner sig utanför, orättvist behandlat, känner sig dåligt eller på något annat sätt är ledset ansåg barnet dock att föräldrarna bör vara mer tillåtande, tröstande och förlåtande.

Likt tidigare undersökningar (Barnett, Quackenbuch & Sinisi, 1996; Paikoff, Collins & Laursen, 1988; Siegal & Cowen, 1984), visas i avhandlingen att äldre barn var mer positiva till resonemang än vad yngre barn var. Det finns dock studier som visar att äldre barn överlag är mer positivt inställda till föräldrars uppfostringsmetoder (Deater-Deckard, Dodge & Sorbring, i tryck; Eimer, 1983). Detta är i linje med det resultat i undersökningen som visade att äldre barn värderade modern som en bra förälder i högre utsträckning än vad yngre barn gjorde, oberoende av uppfostringsmetod. En förklaring till detta kan vara att det inte är metoderna i sig som de äldre barnen accepterar i högre utsträckning, utan föräldern generellt. I en nära relation, likt föräldra-barnrelationen, finns ett intresse för långsiktiga aspekter av individens beteenden, tankar och önskningar. Kunskap om andras personliga egenskaper hjälper individen att tolka och förstå dennes beteenden. Även om yngre barn har kunskap om förälderns personliga egenskaper, är äldre barn duktigare på att använda dessa kunskaper för att bättre förstå förälderns beteende (Yuill, 1997). Detta innebär att de kan ha överseende med enstaka oroväckande händelser och istället basera sitt omdöme utifrån en mer komplex kunskap om föräldern. Att barn har en djupare förståelse för sina föräldrars agerande, som inte är baserade enbart på den specifika händelsen, bekräftas av att barnen tillskrev föräldrars till synes arga beteenden känslor likt omsorg och engagemang.

Studierna pekade på ett par könsskillnader, men i stora drag liknade pojkars och flickors rapporter varandra. Pojkar och flickor redovisade en samstämmig värdering av uppfostringsmetoder, av mamman som en bra förälder, liksom deras beskrivningar av konfliktsituationen. Tidigare undersökningar uppvisar även de en oklar bild av könsskillnader. Vissa undersökningar visar avsaknad av skillnader (tex. Deater-Deckard m. fl., i tryck) andra pekar på att traditionella könsmönster följs (tex. Barnett m.fl., 1996). Både pojkarna och flickorna ansåg dock att pojkar uppfostras med strängare metoder och flickor med mildare metoder. En förklaring till detta resultat kan vara att barn svarar i enlighet med rådande könsstereotyper. Denna förklaring understöds av att barn med syskon av annat kön än de själva, jämfört med de barn som enbart har syskon av samma kön som de själva, inte lika ofta rapporterade att det förekom könsskillnader i uppfostran. Forskning har visat att kontinuerlig kontakt med den andra gruppen resulterar i färre steretyper i den egna gruppen (Brown, 1996), vilket kan vara fallet bland de barn som har syskon av annat kön än det egna.

Att barnet inte är passivt redovisas i litteraturen (Kuczynski m. fl., 1999). Avhandlingen bidrar emellertid med värdefull kunskap och förståelse om innebörden av och uttrycken för barns perception, föreställningar och egna handlingsmönster i uppfostringssituationen, med speciellt fokus på könet betydelse. Framtida forskning inom området bör beakta föräldrars respektive barns makt i dessa situationer. Vidare är det av stor vikt att utveckla såväl adekvata metoder för att studera barns perceptioner, erfarenheter och upplevelser inom dessa områden, som en lämplig vokabulär som beaktar såväl förälderns som barnets aktiva medverkan. Det är av stor vikt att såväl forskning som andra delar av samhället, vilka direkt eller indirekt har en påverkan på barns liv, intar ett barnperspektiv (CRC, United Nations,1989). Det är den vuxnes ansvar att ge möjligheter för barn att vara delaktiga och att påverka i samhället (Engwall, 1998).

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