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From being ignored to engaging in dialogue: Young boys' narratives of children's participation in child–parent conflicts

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Abstract

This paper examines children's opportunities to participate in everyday child–parent conflicts as revealed in young boys' fictional narratives. The data were collected from 19 boys aged 3–6 years using the Story Magician's Play Time method. Narrative analysis yielded four story types: ignored participation stories, parent-directed participation stories, child-directed participation stories and dialogical participation stories. The study illustrates that when considering children's participation in child–parent conflicts, differences between children in their opportunities to participate in resolving conflicts should be taken into account. The boys' stories draw attention to the importance of children's right to a voice and influence in child–parent conflicts.

KEYWORDS

child–parent conflicts, children's influence, children's participation, narrative, young boy

INTRODUCTION

The Nordic countries have seen a shift away from hierarchical to more democratic child–parent power relations. Children are seen as active participants and rights holders in family life and they are encouraged to have a voice and participate in decision-making in their families (Bjerke, 2011; Malinen, 2020). In Finland, the context of this study, participation is acknowledged as an

important child's right in society (see Council of Europe, 2011; Mansikka & Lundkvist, 2022). Parenting has become increasingly child-oriented and children are seen and heard as individuals in their own right (Council of Europe, 2011; Malinen, 2020).

The few studies on child–parent conflicts conducted in the Nordic countries from the perspective of children (Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009; see also Bjerke, 2011); however, suggest that parental practices, such as exercising quite powerful control over children's behaviour, hinder children's opportunities to participate and influence matters affecting them personally. Thus, despite the shift to more equal child–parent relations, the power dynamic remains asymmetrical in many ways (e.g. Bjerke, 2011; Sevón, 2015). This power asymmetry manifests in daily conflicts caused by incompatibility between the goals of the child and parent (e.g. Sorbring, 2009). The child's resistance, arising as a result of conflicting goals, is in the Western context often perceived by parents as noncompliance and unacceptable behaviour that must be suppressed (see Boeldt et al., 2012; Kuczynski et al., 2018).

Previous research has overlooked young children's voices in child–parent conflicts, especially from a gender perspective. However, studies conducted in Western countries have shown that although boys are expected to take an agentic role and be independent, noisy and dominant actors (see Hourigan, 2021; Koenig, 2018), they are subjected to harsher parental control than girls (Kochanska et al., 2009), especially when they disobey (McFadyen-Ketchum et al., 1996). The Swedish children in Sorbring's (2009) study also expressed similar views of gendered parenting. Thus, even if boys can occupy positions linked to power and participate through autonomous and dominant actions, we suggest that the asymmetrical nature of child–parent relations may create tensions in boys' participatory opportunities in intergenerational conflicts.

This study, which forms part of a larger gender-focused project 'Young children's narratives of everyday child–parent conflicts', aimed at furthering understanding on how young boys narrate, make sense of, and describe children's opportunities to participate in fictional child–parent conflicts (see Lahtinen et al., 2023). The research questions were: (1) What story types can be identified in young, 3- to 6-year-old boys' narratives of child–parent conflicts? and (2) How is the child character's participation described in these story types? A narrative approach was adopted, as storytelling is a typical and non-threatening way for young children to make sense of and construct their perspectives and knowledge, including sensitive and socially challenging topics (Engel, 1995; Koivula et al., 2020; Moran et al., 2021; Nicolopoulou, 2011).

Conceptualising children's participation

In this study, the concept of children's participation is informed by the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) and seen as a continuously evolving process situated within a framework of intergenerational interactions (Bjerke, 2011; Horgan et al., 2020). We were inspired by Lundy (2007), who approaches children's participation from the perspective of the UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989; Articles 12 and 13), according to which children have a right to express their views freely, have them considered, and to seek, receive and impart information. Furthermore, children also have a right to protection (UNCRC, UNICEF, 1989; Article 3), a right frequently seen as conflicting with the right to participation (e.g. Lundy, 2018). These rights should not be considered mutually exclusive; instead, a workable balance should be achieved between them.

Children's participation has been conceptualised using different models. One of the first and most influential typologies of children's participation is the ladder of participation

proposed by Hart (1992; see also Shier, 2019). The model identifies eight rungs, ranging from manipulation to child-initiated, shared decision-making with parents, that describe children's increasing activity and power (Hart, 1992). However, the metaphor of a ladder has been mis-interpreted as a hierarchical continuum (see Lundy, 2018). Hart (2008) makes it clear that the rungs should be seen as representing different forms of children's (non)participation or participatory engagement rather than interpreting the ascending rungs as representing in-creasingly desirable positions.

Lundy (2007) avoids the discussion about hierarchies generated by rungs and instead focuses on rights-based participation. In her model, Lundy posits the four elements mentioned in Article 12 of the UNCRC, that is, 'space', 'voice', 'audience' and 'influence', as critical for children's effec-tive participation. First, children should have opportunities to express their views in a respect-ful space (Lundy, 2007; UNICEF, 1989), safe from insecurity and 'fear of rebuke and reprisal' (Lundy, 2007: 933–934). Voice means that children should be able to express their views freely (Lundy, 2007). The formation and expression of their views must be facilitated by, for exam-ple, providing children with the necessary information about the opportunities available and encouraging them to participate in discussions and dialogue (Correia & Aguiar, 2022; Lundy, 2007, 2018). Audience refers to the responsibility of adults to listen actively and sensitively to children's different ways of expressing their views (Lundy, 2007; UNCRC, UNICEF, 1989). Finally, influ-ence means that children's views should be considered in decision-making (Lundy, 2007; see also Shier, 2019). The right to have one's views considered in matters affecting oneself (UNCRC; UNICEF, 1989) does not grant children either the right to make decisions alone or have power over adults (Correia & Aguiar, 2022; Hart, 1992, 2008; Lundy, 2007). If a child's views do not influ-ence the outcome of the decision, the child should be given reasons why (e.g. Horgan et al., 2020; Lundy, 2007, 2018). In Lundy's model (2007), all the elements are interrelated, with an overlap between space and voice and between audience and influence. Nevertheless, the realisation of children's meaningful participation requires the presence of all four elements.

Although Lundy's model refers to children's participation in the public domain, it offers a valuable holistic framework for understanding children's participation in their families, as in this study (Lundy, 2007). Thus, the aim of this study was to examine if and how the elements of par-ticipation, that is, space, voice, audience and influence, are realised at critical points in children's everyday life, namely in child–parent conflicts.

Children's opportunities to participate in generational conflicts

In families, children's opportunities to realise their right to participation are related to the child–parent power hierarchy (see Kuczynski, 2003; Leonard, 2016). Since young children are positioned as developing actors whose capacity to act depends on the power available to them, they may encounter more difficulty than their parents in realising their own intentions (Leonard, 2016; Moran-Ellis, 2013). Two studies on the participation of 7- to 17-year-old children in families in Ireland (Horgan et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2018) found that parental viewpoints are often prioritised over children's viewpoints in decision-making. However, the children in these studies also described home as a place where parents listen to them and where discussions and joint decision-making can happen. Similarly aged children in Norway (Bjerke, 2011) reported similar experiences and valued being recognised as family members. Apart from valuing getting one's way, the children in these studies also emphasised the importance of knowing their par-ents' decision-making rationale.

Child–parent asymmetry manifests in conflicts (Kuczynski, 2003). In a Swedish interview study with 8-year-olds, Sorbring (2009) found that child–parent conflicts were typically resolved by parents, with minimal influence by the child. Although fictional child–parent conflict narratives produced by Finnish 4- to 7-year-olds showed similar results (Sevón, 2015), the children, despite rather strong parental control, were not powerless but able to influence the course of events. In child–parent conflicts, children may participate not only by resisting parents but also by participating in and negotiating a shared outcome to the conflict (e.g. Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009). Parents also experience negotiation as a more acceptable form of participation, and it is less likely to evoke parental control than resistance (Boeldt et al., 2012; Kuczynski et al., 2018). Controlling parenting, conversely, restricts children's opportunities to participate (Kuczynski et al., 2018).

METHOD

This study aimed at furthering understanding on how young boys narrate, make sense of, and describe children's opportunities to participate in fictional child–parent conflicts. The research questions were: (1) What story types can be identified in young, 3- to 6-year-old boys' narratives about child–parent conflicts and (2) How is the child character's participation described in these story types?

Participants, data collection and ethics

Narrative data for the research project were collected with 45 Finnish children aged 3–6 years. The data of this sub-study were created by 19 similar-aged boys; the findings on 26 girls' narratives are reported elsewhere (Lahtinen et al., 2023). The boys' sample was rather homogeneous: 13 were from families with two tertiary-educated parents, five from families with one tertiary-educated parent, and one from a family with no tertiary-educated parent. Eighteen participants came from nuclear families and one from a divorced family. No children with an immigrant background participated in the study. All the participating children attended early childhood education and care (ECEC). The data were collected in three ECEC centres by the first author.

This study followed the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019) at all stages of the research process. After receiving permission from the municipal early childhood education authority, the staff of the 3 day-care centres were informed about the research and related practical issues. The staff were also asked to distribute research invitations to the parents of children of different ages and backgrounds. The first author was not told to whom the invitations had been distributed. According to the staff, only a few immigrant children were attending the day-care centres at the time of the study. The invitations informed parents about the course of the study, the ethical principles of voluntariness, the right to withdraw and the confidentiality of personal data, that is, participant anonymity and secure data storage (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019). Parents were also invited to meet the researcher in their children's day-care centre before giving their consent.

After obtaining their parents' signed informed consent, the first author met the participating children once in small groups in their day-care centres. The aim of these meetings was twofold: to introduce, with the help of pictures, the nature of the study, its stages and the data collection method and to facilitate the children's feeling of safety in the company of an unknown adult (see Coyne

et al., 2021). In these meetings, the children were informed about the confidentiality and secure storage of their stories and their possibility to refuse or discontinue participation without consequences at any time during the study (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019).

Data were generated using the narrative, vignette-based Story Magician's Play Time method (SMPT; Koivula et al., 2020). The SMPT is a playful and child-oriented method that promotes children's meaningful participation in the research process and supports a balanced child–researcher power relation. The method uses a hand puppet and communication channels typically applied in research with young children, such as pictures, storytelling and play, to access the child's subjective perceptions and thoughts about social interaction situations (Koivula et al., 2020; see also Moran et al., 2021). The purpose of the hand puppet was to create a comfortable atmosphere and to encourage self-expression (Coyne et al., 2021). In order not to predetermine the participating child's gender, the hand puppet pondered the child's gender together with the child. In this substudy, all the participating children self-identified as a boy.

At the beginning of the SMPT session, the child was encouraged to look at seven pictures of child–parent conflict situations and choose one as the basis for creating a story. Drawing on previous findings on everyday conflicts between young children and their parents in the Nordic countries, the pictures illustrated the following conflict situations that can arise in families (e.g. Sevón, 2015; Sorbring, 2009): brushing teeth and bedtime, using a tablet, behaviour in a supermarket and at mealtimes, dressing, putting away toys and going to a day-care centre/preschool (see Appendix). Because the interest was also in the gendered aspect of child–parent conflicts, the characters in the pictures were drawn without hair and not wearing clothes in stereotypical gendered colours (see Hourigan, 2021). In the SMPT sessions, the child was free to narrate what had happened and what the characters might think, feel and say. Six emotion cards (joy, fear, anger, astonishment, sorrow and embarrassment) were used to discuss conflict-related feelings. The researcher could ask questions, such as 'what might the character do next' to progress the child's story. It was important that the researcher focused on listening to the child's narrative and asked additional questions to facilitate but not direct its development. However, the children's narratives were created in dialogue with the researcher and thus should be regarded as co-constructed (Moran et al., 2021; Nicolopoulou, 2011).

The story was then played out by the child and the researcher using the child's chosen story frames and props, such as furniture and dolls, related to the different conflict pictures. As argued by Engel (1995; see also Koivula et al., 2020), play is one additional natural channel of communication through which children can express themselves and make sense of their world. At the end of the session, the hand puppet and the child reflected together on the moral of the story, and the child was asked if he had ever been in a similar situation (Koivula et al., 2020). All the SMPT sessions were audio- and video-recorded.

Before the data collection, the participating children were asked for their verbal consent (see Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2019), including recording and videotaping the SMPT sessions. During sessions, the researcher remained alert to non-verbal signals indicating, for example, the child's possible fatigue or loss of enthusiasm, and hence possible wish to renegotiate or end his participation. More commonly, the child himself verbally expressed his desire to end the session. In a few situations, the researcher sensitively inquired whether the child felt he was finished and wanted to return to his regular ECEC activities.

Each boy attended from one to three SMPT sessions, each lasting from 19 to 86 min. Altogether 43 stories were narrated. The stories most often narrated were about brushing one's teeth and bedtime, using a tablet, and behaviour in a supermarket. No age differences related to the choice of picture were observed. Most of the children participated very enthusiastically, although some

were initially a little nervous. The researcher, though, did her best to make them feel comfortable in this novel situation. Some of the children showed less interest in creating a story than acting it out with props. The researcher respected the children's preferences and implemented the data collection accordingly.

Data analysis

The first author transcribed the SMPT sessions word-for-word in Finnish and pseudonymised the data. Audio-recorded SMPT sessions were mostly used in the analysis. Video material was used if the child's non-verbal communication was needed to confirm interpretations.

The narrative analysis focused on identifying story types and differences between stories (Abbott, 2020; Labov, 1976). Each story began with a description of a child–parent conflict situation in which one party was narrated as wanting (to do) something, while the other party either ignored the first party's wishes or tried to change the first party's mind or yielded to the first party's wishes. First, structural narrative analysis (Labov, 1976; see also Nicolopoulou, 2011) was applied. Story types were identified by focusing on four aspects: (1) orientation, that is, the beginning of the conflict, in which the parties have incompatible goals and initiate the action; (2) complicated action, that is, the following sequence of events and the participants' reactions to each other's responses; (3) evaluation, that is, assessment of the course of events and the two parties' feelings and (4) resolution, that is, who changed or had to change their mind and who was able to influence the conflict resolution process and how. The structural analysis revealed differences between the stories based on their plot and resolution.

Second, to gain deeper insight into children's participation, the boys' stories were examined with respect to the interpreted realisation of the elements of participation proposed in Lundy's (2007) model. *Space* concerned whether the child character was described as offered opportunities to form and express his views in an atmosphere that was open to different views and was not hostile or threatening. *Voice* related to whether the child was facilitated in expressing his views by being given the necessary information and offered possible options when appropriate. We also explored whether the child's character was supported in joining in a discussion and whether he was able to express his views freely and not be reprimanded. *Audience* pertained to whether the parent was narrated as actively and sensitively listening to the child. *Influence* referred to whether the child's views were narrated as influencing the negotiation and resolution of the conflict, and if not, whether he was given a reason for this. We also examined the diverse emotions described in the stories. We interpreted the child character's emotions as an expression of his viewpoint and paid attention to what extent the parent took them into account. The child character's joy and happiness were interpreted as signifying that opportunities to participate had existed for the child, and anger and sorrow as signifying constraints on the child's participation (see Lundy, 2018).

Finally, after comparing the individual stories, scrutinising their differences and similarities, we categorised each story into one of four different types (see Table 1). As Table 1 shows, the four story types differed in both their plots and the child character's realisation of opportunities for participation.

TABLE 1 Child's participation in the boys' stories.

Story type and number of narratives	Plot of narrative	Child's participation in the narrative
Ignored participation stories (15)	The child disagrees but may also negotiate. The child is ignored by the parent and may be punished. The conflict ends in the parent's favour	The child is not given space or facilitated to express his views. The child is not listened to and his views are ignored
Parent-directed participation stories (9)	The child disagrees and the parent pressures or persuades the child to change his mind. The child eventually conforms to his parent's will	The child is given limited space and limited facilitation to express his views. The child is listened to on his parent's terms and his views have some influence on the course of the conflict
Child-directed participation stories (7)	The child disagrees and does not negotiate. The parent tries to change the child's mind by pressuring him or attempting to negotiate but is ignored by the child. The conflict ends in the child's favour	The course of the conflict is child-directed and the child decides the outcome whether or not opportunities are created for his participation
Dialogical participation stories (12)	The child disagrees but also negotiates. A resolution agreeable to both parties is found through dialogue	The child is given space and facilitated to express his views. The child is listened to and his views are considered

FINDINGS

Of the 43 stories, 12 concerned brushing one's teeth and bedtime, 10 using a tablet, 7 behaviour in a supermarket, 6 dressing, 5 putting away toys, 1 behaviour at mealtime, 1 going to a day-care centre/preschool and 1 going on an excursion (one boy's interpretation of the day-care centre/preschool picture). In 6 stories, the conflict was between a boy and his mother and in 37 between a boy and his father. The child character was described as a boy in all stories. Although free to choose who the characters in the pictures were, some boys described the baldness of the characters as leading them to choose a son and father as their characters while others said they chose a boy character because they were boys themselves. Parental gender was unrelated to any specific picture card and none of the stories of the same story type described behavioural differences between mothers and fathers.

We identified four different story types that differed in both plot structure and how the child's participation was described: (1) ignored participation stories, (2) parent-directed participation stories, (3) child-directed participation stories and (4) dialogical participation stories (see Table 1). The different story types are presented below. In each story type, the example story was the one in which the plot and the child's participation were the most comprehensively narrated. To present the extracts in story form, the researcher's questions, such as 'Could you tell me something about this picture?' and 'What might happen next?' have been removed from the child's original narrative.

Ignored participation stories

The commonest story type in the boys' narratives in the SMPT sessions was the ignored participation story (15 stories), which was most often between boy and father characters (11 stories). In the following example story told by Tim, the child does not want to stop watching the tablet.

> The boy doesn't want to stop watching the tablet, although he should. The boy feels bad and surprised because he didn't know his father was going to tell him to stop. The father is angry because the boy doesn't give him the tablet. The boy says: 'I don't want to stop', and the father says: 'You must stop!' Now the boy's getting angry because his father's shouting at him: 'Now turn off that tablet. Otherwise, you'll be punished [angrily]! Then the father punishes the boy. The boy starts crying. Now he must stand in the corner behind the door for one hour and isn't allowed to speak. The father is happy because now the boy is being punished and the tablet has been put away.
>
> (Tim, aged 5)

At the beginning of the ignored participation stories, the child's resistance was narrated as making the parent angry, which often led him to communicate with the child by shouting. The *space* was described as hostile, even threatening and the child was not informed in advance of what was expected of him. As Tim's story shows, the child character felt bad and surprised because he had not known beforehand that his father would come to tell him to stop watching the tablet. Furthermore, the child was not given a reason why he should stop watching the tablet or, for example, told that he could watch the rest of the program first and then turn off the tablet. As a result, the child was

described as getting angry, acting behind his parent's back, or like the child in Tim's story, refusing to obey. In some stories, the child was narrated as attempting to initiate negotiation. Irrespective of how the child expressed his *voice*, it was neither facilitated nor respected but summarily overruled. Thus, the child was eventually silenced, sometimes by the withholding of important privileges, such as Saturday candy, or by being punished, as in Tim's story.

In this story type, the parent showed no interest in listening to the child and consequently, the child had no *audience*. In the example story, the child's dissenting views were not considered, and the child was given no reason by his father for the decision taken. The conflict, which ended in favour of the parent, was narrated as arousing anger and sorrow in the child and joy in the parent. The child's emotions can be interpreted as induced by his powerlessness, as he was unable to *influence* the conflict resolution process and outcome and had to accede to the demands of his controlling parent. Thus, in the ignored participation stories, the child's participation was neglected by his being denied a space, voice and audience, and the child had no influence on the conflict (Lundy, 2007).

Parent-directed participation stories

The boys narrated nine parent-directed participation stories, eight of which were described as between boy and father characters. In the following example story told by Otto, the father commands the child, who is building a tower, to put his toys away.

> The boy is building a tower, but his father says, 'The toys need to be put away'. The boy says, 'I'm too tired to put my toys away'. The boy is feeling sad now. Then his father gets angry and says, 'You're not too tired to put the toys away'. But then his dad says, 'Well, then I guess I'll leave'. Then he comes back [into the room] and the boy starts watching television. Then when his father has left that room again, then the boy puts the toys away. Then he clears away these other toys too. Now the boy and the father are happy.
>
> (Otto, aged 4)

At the beginning of the parent-directed participation stories, the child's resistance was described as making the parent angry, leading him to communicate with the child by pressuring him. Although the *space* was not described as hostile or threatening, as in the ignored participation stories, it was not open to the child's dissenting view either. As the example story shows, the father disregarded the child's dissent and sadness and tried to get the child to change his mind by rejecting his claim that he was too tired to put his toys away. Furthermore, the child was not narrated as being told why he should put his toys away in the middle of building his tower nor was his father narrated as suggesting, for example, that the child could finish the tower first and then put his toys away. Thus, despite the child actively expressing his *voice*, he was not facilitated to present his case or supported to negotiate with his father. However, by leaving the room, then turning back and leaving again and allowing the child to watch television in the middle of the conflict, the father can be interpreted as giving the child time to react to his father's request but only under his father's supervision. Thus, the child was listened to on his parent's terms and he had only limited *audience*.

In this story type, the child always conformed to his parents' will. As Otto's story demonstrates, the child eventually put his toys away, along with others not mentioned by his father, but in his own time. Hence, the child was able to complicate and delay the situation, he did not

have the possibility to *influence* the outcome of the conflict. By eventually acting as expected of him, the child manifested both his desire for conciliation and respect for his parent's request. The end of the conflict aroused joy in both parties, a sign that the resolution pleased both the child and parent. In this sense, the end of the conflict can be interpreted as an unspoken compromise between child and parent. However, in the parent-directed participation stories, the child's space, voice, audience and influence were limited (Lundy, 2007).

Child-directed participation stories

The child-directed participation stories were the rarest story type (seven stories), and only one story was narrated between boy and mother characters. In the following two stories by Miki and Emil, the child refuses to brush his teeth. These stories illustrate the two extremes of this story type, in which while the parents' actions in support of the child's participation varied, the nature of the child's behaviour remained unchanged.

> His father says angrily, 'Come here right now so I can brush your teeth!' The boy says, 'No, I'm not coming, I'm watching television'. The father yells more angrily, 'Now you come here!', but the boy carries on watching television. Then the boy throws the tablet at his father's face. The boy thinks it's great. Now the boy has stolen a toothbrush from his father and put toothpaste on his father's face and on his shirt [speaking very animatedly]. The father is still angry. The boy feels he can do what-ever he wants because his father can't stop him in any way. Then the boy brushes his teeth by himself. This makes his father feels a little better, but he still has those remnants of anger. The boy is happy.
>
> (Miki, aged 5)

> His father says: 'Your teeth should be brushed now', but the child just runs away. He doesn't want to brush his teeth because toothpaste tastes like poo. Then his father says: 'Let's clean your teeth without the toothpaste'. The boy says angrily, 'No!' And now his father gets a bit angry. Then the boy goes to the bathtub and squeezes all the toothpaste into it. His teeth are not going to be cleaned with that bad tasting toothpaste. The father is ashamed that he had bought such bad toothpaste. The child is happy.
>
> (Emil, aged 6)

The child-directed participation stories began with the child openly and uncooperatively express-ing his views and resisting his parent's demands. Irrespective of the parent's actions and behaviour, the child was always narrated as uncompromising and not listening to the parent. As the present two stories show, the child refused to obey his parent, talked back and acted uncooperatively, for example, by throwing the tablet at his father and messing about with the toothpaste. Because the child was described as able to do whatever he wanted, the progress of the conflict was child-directed.

In Miki's story, the child's resistance was narrated as angering his father, who resorted to com-municating with the child by shouting. Hence, the parent's actions closely followed those of the parent described in the ignored participation stories, in which the *space* was hostile and threat-ening, the child's *voice* was not facilitated and the child had no *audience*. In a few stories, such as Emil's, the father was first narrated as having neutral feelings but when the child continued

expressing his dissent, the father became somewhat angry. Nevertheless, he continued communicating with the child, even supportively, and consequently, the *space* of the conflict was also conducive to the child's expression of his differing views. Emil's story also exemplifies how the father tried to facilitate the child's *voice* by offering him the possibility to brush his teeth without using the bad-tasting toothpaste. Thus, the father was sensitive to the way the child expressed himself, offered the child an *audience* who would actively listen to him and tried to contribute to a mutually satisfying compromise.

In this story type, the conflict ended in favour of the child. As described by Miki and Emil, the decision to brush or not brush one's teeth was made by the child himself. The end of the conflict was narrated as arousing happiness in the child and anger or embarrassment in the parent. The child's feelings of joy can be interpreted as the outcome of his ability to *influence* both the course and the outcome of the conflict in his own favour. In the child-directed participation stories, the child always had influence, even if other elements of participation (Lundy, 2007) were not necessarily present. This story type sheds light on the active role of both the child and parent in contributing to the child participation process and brings out behaviours that do not build intergenerational reciprocity and dialogue but increase confrontation.

Dialogical participation stories

Dialogical participation stories (12 stories) formed the second most common story type. All featured a conflict between the boy and father characters. The following example story told by Ali was based on a picture card depicting a child who refuses to go to his day-care centre (or preschool). Ali narrated a story about a child who does not want to go on an excursion.

> The boy would like to stay at home and play, but his father thinks they should go on an excursion. His father says, 'Let's go out', and the boy says, 'I'd like to stay home and play'. The boy is a little saddened and the father is also saddened because the boy is saddened. Then the boy asks, 'Could we first play for a moment?' His father says, 'Well, okay'. After the boy has played for a while, they go out because they had agreed to. Now they are happy.
>
> (Ali, aged 4)

At the beginning of the dialogical participation stories, the child was narrated as resisting his parent in a cooperative or uncooperative way. The parent, instead, was described as communicating neutrally with the child, as in Ali's story, in which the child was offered a *space* in which to form and express his views freely, including dissent. Ali's story also depicted a father who was sensitive to the child's expression of views, as the child's grief was narrated as also saddening his parent. Furthermore, the example story shows how the father was open to being influenced by the child's views when the child proposed that they go on the excursion after he has played for a while, a compromise to which his father agreed. In this story type, regardless of how the child expressed his views or reacted to his parent's requests, he was encouraged to discuss the situation and negotiate. Moreover, the parent was narrated as facilitating the child's *voice* by either offering options when appropriate or by explaining, for example, why brushing one's teeth is important or why (for safety reasons) the child cannot be left alone by the toy shelves in the store.

In this story type, the child always had an *audience* who listened to him and respected his viewpoint. This was also the case in Ali's story, in which the child and the father achieved agreement

through dialogue; thus, the child was able to *influence* both the course and the outcome of the conflict. The ending was narrated as pleasing both parties, even if the child's original wishes were not always met. The child character's happiness can be attributed to the child's views being listened to and taken seriously and the parent explaining the rationale for asking the child to do or refrain from doing or getting something. In the dialogical participation stories, the child had a space, voice and an audience, as well as influence, since his views were considered (Lundy, 2007).

DISCUSSION

This study examined young, 3- to 6-year-old boys' narratives about everyday child–parent conflicts and how the fictional child's opportunities to participate were constructed in their narratives. We analysed participation by applying the four elements of Lundy's model (Lundy, 2007). The results yielded four distinct story types: ignored participation stories, parent-directed participation stories, child-directed participation stories and dialogical participation stories. The different story types illustrate young boys' diverse ways of interpreting, constructing and narrating their perspectives and knowledge of children's opportunities to participate in intergenerational conflicts (e.g. Abbott, 2020; Engel, 1995; Nicolopoulou, 2011).

In the ignored participation stories, the child's behaviour was powerfully controlled, his views were ignored, and ultimately, his voice was silenced. Thus, this story type suggests that in intergenerational conflicts a child's resistance is easily interpreted as problematic and hence to be suppressed (e.g. Boeldt et al., 2012), leaving the child with no choice but to confirm the existing hierarchical power relation. Although in the parent-directed participation stories the child finally agreed to his parent's demands, he was able to express dissent, resist his parent (cf. Kuczynski et al., 2018) and has some influence on the course of the conflict. This story type proposes that children are willing to do things that clash with their own goals when they feel that they are not totally ignored but have some role in the participation process (see Bjerke, 2011). Although children may want to protect their autonomy in conflicts, they also value doing what is expected of them.

Sometimes the child characters were uncooperative and took charge regardless of their parent's reactions, as revealed in the child-directed participation stories. These children were narrated as exercising power over the parent and even reversing the traditional child–parent power relation (see Lahtinen et al., 2023). It can be argued that rebelling was a way for these children to distance themselves from the position of a developing actor and/or an incompetent child (see Moran-Ellis, 2013) and influence decisions concerning them. In the dialogical participation stories, the child–parent conflicts were premised on the child's participation. Such conflict situations were described as taking place in a negotiable relationship based on mutuality and reciprocity that aimed at finding a solution through two-way dialogue (Lundy, 2007, 2018; see also Hart, 1992). This story type found here supports previous findings suggesting that open two-way communication, being listened to, and understanding the process of decision-making without being manipulated and controlled are among the most significant key enablers of children's participation (e.g. Horgan et al., 2020).

Children's right to express their views and have them considered should also be realised in child–parent conflicts (see UNCRC, UNICEF, 1989). However, applying Lundy's (2007) rights-based model to the present boys' child–parent conflict stories revealed that although the child was an active agent in his efforts to express his views and make his voice heard, parental support of the child's participation varied greatly. In the most common conflict situations, the child–parent relation was hierarchical, and the parent took no measures to value, safeguard or fulfil any

of the four elements of children's participation (Lundy, 2007). The boys also narrated conflicts which offered the child more leeway in expressing his agency and influencing the course of the conflict. Nevertheless, these findings indicate that despite the strong emphasis on democratic child–parent relations and children's rights in the Nordic countries, authoritarian parenting, at least in conflicts, has not been wholly replaced by democratic relations prioritising the realisation of children's rights (cf. Malinen, 2020).

Whereas children's rights to participation and protection are often seen as contradictory (e.g. Lundy, 2018), the present findings indicate that these rights are intertwined even in intergenerational conflicts. Restrictions, denoting protection, on children's actions were in some stories negotiated with the child and did not exclude participation. Sometimes the child character's opportunities to participate were not wholly determined by the parent; instead, the children were able to participate and influence matters in line with their own preferences. However, according to the child participation models (e.g. Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007), having an influence does not mean that children should get their way or that they have a right to make decisions independently, especially if such decisions harm or wholly omit the other party's views.

From a gender perspective, one possible interpretation of the boys' child-directed participation stories is that the boy narrators used humour and carnivalisation to introduce a storyline in which social norms are tested and a new understanding of the child–parent power relation is constructed (see Bahtin, 1965/1995). The boys may have also imagined a desired pattern of conflict solution from the child character's perspective, that is, one in which the child is able to take charge. It may also be that the complexity, disharmony and social disorder described in the present stories reflect the typical non-coherent structure of storytelling by boys (see Nicolopoulou, 2011). It is noteworthy that none of the boys' child characters differed in gender from their own. It may be that adopting a different gender position, even if only fictionally, is problematic for boys, as it challenges the rules of gender conformity prescribed for them (see Koenig, 2018).

When interpreting the findings of this study, it is important to take its limitations into account. First, the seven pictures used in the SMPT sessions might have constrained the child's storytelling, leading, for example, to a low proportion of child–mother conflicts. The baldness of the characters in the pictures might have led the children to automatically imagine the characters as son and father. Thus, research on narratives of boy-mother conflicts would also be needed. The kinds of parenting styles reflected in children's conflict narratives could also be examined. For example, the parental practices in the dialogical participation stories closely resemble those found in authoritative parenting styles (see Kuczynski, 2003). Moreover, because the SMPT is a strongly narrative-based method, it may have excluded potential participants with whom there is no common language or who do not communicate verbally. Second, this study mainly captures the voices of non-immigrant Finnish children with little variety in socioeconomic status. In the future, it would be important to study other groups of children, such as those from families with different socioeconomic statuses, from immigrant and/or ethnic minority backgrounds, and children with disabilities. Studying such child–parent conflicts from the perspective of diverse groups of children could widen our understanding of the multidimensionality of children's participation. Furthermore, any transferability of the findings to other societal contexts should be done with caution. Because child–parent power relations are understood differently in different cultural contexts (see Kuczynski et al., 2018; Leonard, 2016), future research should also explore children's opportunities to participate in child–parent conflicts in non-Nordic societies. Finally, the boys' stories cannot be considered as directly representing their real-life experiences (see Moran et al., 2021). Instead, they provide a key to understanding the challenges and opportunities for children's participation as narrated from young boys' perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Although the participation model (Lundy, 2007) applied in this study was not expressly designed for investigating children's participation in the family, it was a useful tool for analysing the young boys' stories. Indeed, the family is a sphere where children's participation should be rooted in their everyday life and thereby also contribute to preparing them for future participation in civil society. When studying children's participation in child–parent conflicts, differences between children in how they participate in resolving conflicts and influence their course and outcomes, and in the emotions that are inseparable from conflicts and the process of participation, should also be taken into account. As children are able to resist and modify their relations in many ways (e.g. Leonard, 2016; Moran-Ellis, 2013), it would be important when seeking to conceptualise and gain a more comprehensive picture of children's participation to consider the multiple, overlapping, intergenerational and gendered processes that are involved. Although boys sometimes may act in accordance with the narrow, gendered connotations of boys by embracing positions linked to power and participate through dominant and independent actions (see Hourigan, 2021; Koenig, 2018), they may also engage in dialogue and negotiate a resolution to the conflict with their fathers. Therefore, boys' participation in child–parent conflicts needs to be considered outside of traditional gender stereotypes. To conclude, the meaningful and efficient implementation of a child's right to participate requires the fulfilment of all four interrelated elements, namely space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy, 2007).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT
The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Research data are not shared.

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APPENDIX

THE PICTURES USED IN STORY MAGICIAN'S PLAY TIME